



## TRAVEL SMART

As Memorial Day weekend approaches, so does the summer travel season. According to Travel Industry Association projections, more than \$788 billion will be spent by U.S. residents for travel expenditures in 2014. With such an astounding figure, it's no wonder that scam artists are increasingly targeting travelers. Travel scams cost consumers more than \$10 billion each year. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) cautions consumers planning summer vacations to be prudent when making travel arrangements.

While travel fraud can take many forms, consumers are typically targeted through mail, telephone, faxes, email or the Internet. The following tips are designed to help you avoid becoming a victim and ensure a positive travel experience:

### ■ **KNOW WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH**

Find out if the seller of travel is registered with FDACS and if any complaints have been filed against them. FDACS regulates sellers of travel and requires all non-exempt sellers to register each year and include their registration number in all advertisements and contracts. Some are also required to provide financial security.

### ■ **USE A CREDIT CARD**

If a consumer doesn't receive the agreed upon purchase, the purchaser may be able to dispute the charges with the credit card company.

### ■ **READ THE FINE PRINT**

A signature on a contract indicates acknowledgement and acceptance of the terms and conditions. Read the entire contract thoroughly, ask questions, and do not sign it if there are any doubts.

### ■ **BE CAUTIOUS OF FREE TRAVEL OFFERS**

Consumers should be skeptical of mailings or telephone calls announcing that they have been selected to receive a free vacation. Airlines and other well-known companies sometimes operate contests for travel prizes. However, there are also companies that offer "free" trips to try to entice people into buying their products or services.

For additional information, contact the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at [www.800helpfla.com](http://www.800helpfla.com) or by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) en Español.



### THE FRAUDULENT FRONT DESK CALL



A call is received at the front desk of a hotel. The caller asks to be connected to a specific room, which happens to be occupied. The hotel guest answers the phone and the caller claims to be a hotel employee calling from the front desk. The caller indicates that there is a computer issue and that the guest's credit card information needs to be verified. Unaware that this is a scam, the guest may give the credit card information. The best protection against this type of scam is to handle all hotel financial transactions at the front desk.

### THE PIZZA SCAM



Bogus pizza delivery menus are sometimes slipped under hotel room doors. The menu may contain a telephone number that is not associated with a legitimate pizza establishment. Guests call the number to place an order, only to later find out that they provided their credit card information to identity thieves. The best protection against this type of scam is to ask for restaurant recommendations from the front desk hotel representative.