

## **Common Rental Scams and Tips for Avoiding Them**

- Always make sure to see the inside of the property
- Read documents carefully, and don't transfer any money until you're confident in the landlord or broker
- Make sure to report any suspicious activity so others don't get scammed

You've scoured rental listings in your area and found your dream property. It has the perfect number of bedrooms, is in a prime location and the price point meets your budget. How do you know if it's a legitimate rental or a rental scam?

While the Internet has made finding a rental much easier, it also has become ridden with scams. To help you avoid these tricksters, we've created a list of common rental scams and tips for avoiding them.

6 rental scams to look out for

If a listing feels too good to be true, it probably is. Make sure to do your due diligence when contacting landlords and viewing properties.

### **1. Listings are copied**

Many rental scammers will copy a legitimate listing and just change the contact information. Before letting those interested view the home, they request a deposit or first month's rent. Look out for multiple listings on the same site that look identical.

### **2. Property is too cheap**

Everyone loves a good deal, but if a property is well below market value, there must be something wrong with it. Rental scammers will often list a property at a low price to get prospective renters interested. Then they will pressure the renters to pay a deposit and first months' rent to secure the property.

### **3. Person showing you the home is not the owner**

In this scenario, an individual claims to be helping someone else rent the property. The property is usually a vacation rental, foreclosed home or has owners that are out of town.

This individual probably won't have access to all the parts of the home and won't know the specifics about details like who pays for utilities. In this scam, they collect the deposit along with rent for the first and last month and disappear. The renters soon find out that the property was not actually for rent, it was just a con.

### **4. Charging extra for a background check**

Landlords usually ask for a fee to perform background checks on tenants. This cost ranges from \$35-\$75 per applicant. If a landlord is asking you to pay more than this, it's probably a scam.

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[How to Write a Notice to Vacate Letter + Template](#)

[Estimating How Much Apartment Utilities Will Cost](#)

[The Ultimate First Apartment Checklist](#)

## **5. Nigerian rental scam**

In this common scam, you may be contacted by someone after posting that you are looking for a place to rent. They will send you home details and say you can go look at the exterior of the home, but no one is available to show you the interior.

After you view the home, they will then request money for the application fee and deposit to be wired to a foreign destination. Once the money is wired, they will disappear without a trace.

## **6. Lease isn't available**

In this rental scam, the agent will not have an official lease or will not make it available to you. A lease is required when renting any property, even if it's short term. If there is no signed lease available to you, then you're probably being scammed.

How to avoid rental scams

Avoiding rental scams will save you time, energy and money. Here are a few tips for how to avoid these deceptive listings.

### **Search the company online**

Rental properties can be owned by companies or individuals. When you find a listing, research the owner to see what the online reviews say. If there aren't any or if they have a bad reputation, you'll want to steer clear.

### **Verify the address listed on rental sites**

All listings should have an address associated with them. Copy and paste this address into your preferred search engine to see what the street view of the home looks like. If there isn't one or it looks different than the photos listed, the posting is probably fraudulent.

In addition, it's not a good sign if the landlord is withholding the address. Don't give away any personal information in exchange for a property address.

### **Be sure the listing is complete**

Rental scams often have missing information. This may include typos throughout the post, a lack of property photos or no address. If the listing looks incomplete and sketchy, it probably is.

## **Is the price reasonable?**

While we all like to find a deal, rentals don't come half off. The property is likely to be a rental scam if the rent is well below the average in the area. Be sure to do research on what rentals in the area are going for so you can have that in mind when looking at properties.

## **Tour the property**

Many scammers will refuse to show you the property until you pay a deposit. This is because they don't have a legitimate property to show you in the first place.

Some excuses for why they can't show you the property include being out of town or dealing with a family emergency. Regardless of what their scenario is, you should never put down a deposit without first having a real or virtual tour of the property.

## **Meet the landlord**

If the landlord isn't the one showing the property, inquire about who they are and how they can be contacted. If the person doesn't have these details, it's likely they are involved in a renting-for-the-owner scam.

## **Don't feel pressured**

A scammer may try to put you in a time crunch. They will tell you the property has had a lot of interest and that you need to put down a deposit immediately to claim the property. While properties do move fast, don't let this pressure keep you from making rational decisions.

## **Take a thorough look at the lease**

Once you've viewed the property and your application is accepted, you'll be asked to sign a lease. It's important to look over all the components of the lease to ensure it includes everything that you've agreed on. If you have any concerns, be sure to bring these to the attention of your landlord before signing.

## **Never pay cash**

Whether you are paying for an application fee, deposit or rent, be sure you don't pay in cash. There needs to be a way to track the money you've sent and get it back if needed. Also, if you are wiring money or disclosing bank information, be sure that you've verified it as a legitimate company.

## **What to do if you identify a scam?**

If you do come across rental scams while looking for a new apartment, be sure that you properly report them. This ensures that others in your community won't be scammed by the individual.

## **Contact local authorities**

If you've been scammed, be sure to report it to local law enforcement. They will take down a report of what happened and work to track down the scammer. You may not be the only one who is a victim and your additional information can help them solve the case.

### **Notify the listing website**

If you spot a scam, report it to the website where you found the listing. The website owner does not want its viewers to be scammed and will investigate. If the listing is not legitimate, it will be removed so that more people don't fall victim to it.

### **Report it to the FTC**

Victims of rental scams should report them to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). This agency helps prevent fraudulent, deceptive or unfair business practices. You can [report your scam online](#) or by phone.

Following these guidelines will ensure you find the perfect home without the worry of being scammed. Be sure you are searching for rentals with a [truste online rental platform](#) to further reduce the risk of being scammed.