

31 October 2025

FEATURE ARTICLE

**Feature Article; Understanding Fake and Misleading Holiday Travel Deals This
Holiday Season**

As the Holiday season approaches, many of us begin to dream of a well-earned break. The year has been long, and the idea of stepping away from routine perhaps to stroll along the beaches of Bali, catch the Christmas lights in Sydney, or explore the café-lined streets of Melbourne, feels refreshing and exciting. For families, couples and even solo travellers, the holiday period is often the best window of opportunity to relax, reconnect and celebrate life.

It is during this same season that social media becomes filled with colourful holiday advertisements. Beautiful resort photos, sunset views, sparkling hotels, and bold text offering “exclusive holiday packages” at “unbeatable prices” frequently catch the eye. Many of these offers appear simple: one payment, and everything is taken care of. Flights. Hotel. Meals. Tours. The dream holiday packaged neatly, ready to go.

However, beneath the excitement and glossy images, there is a growing trend that consumers need to approach with awareness: fake and misleading travel package advertisements.

In recent months, there has been an increase in advertisements circulating online, particularly on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and messaging apps promoting holiday deals to popular destinations like Bali, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore. While some of these promotions are legitimate, others are incomplete, unclear, or intentionally structured to mislead consumers into paying without fully understanding what they are purchasing.

This feature article aims to help consumers understand why this happens, what to watch for, and how to protect themselves before money is transferred and holiday plans are locked in.

The Attraction of the “Cheap Travel Package”

Holiday travel packages often begin with one single, appealing number: the price. When people see a price such as “\$4,587 for flights + hotel + tours”, the mind quickly compares it to what it might cost to book everything separately. If the package sounds cheaper, the deal quickly feels like a “must take” opportunity.

The emotional appeal is strong. Holidays are tied to joy, family togetherness, self-care and celebration. The thought of saving money while creating memories makes the deal even more enticing.

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But the price alone does **not** tell the full story. A travel package that appears inexpensive at first glance may come with several hidden compromises. The hotel might be located far from main tourist attractions, meals and airport transfers may not be included, and flights could be “economy basic” options without checked baggage. The deal may also apply only to off-season travel dates, and many key experiences, such as tours or local transport, could be optional extras rather than part of the package itself.

A holiday deal can be perfectly legitimate yet still unsuitable if the details aren’t clearly explained. This highlights the importance of understanding what a travel package actually includes rather than focusing solely on the advertised price. Consumers are often enticed by an appealing destination photo, a hotel name, a single total price, and an urgent “Book now” prompt, without realizing how little this reveals about the true value or suitability of the offer.

But what is missing?

- Which hotel room category is included?
- Is breakfast included?
- Are airport transfers included?
- How many kilos of baggage are allowed?
- Are taxes included or added later?
- Are tours included or just suggested?
- Is the deposit refundable?

When these answers are unclear, the consumer is not dealing with a complete offer, only a teaser.

A credible travel package is one that:

- Lists all inclusions in writing
- States all exclusions clearly
- Provides clear terms for cancellations and refunds
- Allows questions
- Provides receipts

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- Has accountable contact points

If a seller avoids explaining details, rushes payment, or provides vague answers like “*Don’t worry, everything is included*” that is a sign to pause.

The Importance of Written Confirmation

A holiday might be planned with excitement, but it should be protected with clarity. Before paying **any amount**, a consumer should receive a *written quote* that includes:

- Total price with all taxes
- Full list of what is included
- Full list of what is not included
- Refund and cancellation policies
- Dates of travel
- Baggage allowance
- Hotel and room type
- Whether airport transfers are included
- Whether meals are included

A legitimate travel agency will never refuse to provide this.

If an advertiser says:

- “We will confirm later”
- “Pay now to lock in the price”
- “Details will come after deposit”

Stop immediately. Holiday plans should never begin with uncertainty.

Verifying the Travel Agent

There is often a fine line between what is a legitimate agency and what is potentially a scammer or an unscrupulous business trying to make a quick buck off unsuspecting consumers. When

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dealing with agents who have brick-and-mortar stores, try to see if they have a valid business license. But realistically, not everyone can do this, and most offers today are booked online. When dealing with online travel agencies, the key is to verify their digital footprint: check whether they have a registered business name that appears on government or trade-association sites, look for a professional website with verifiable contact details, and search for consistent reviews on trusted travel platforms.

Genuine agencies issue invoices and formal booking confirmations, not screenshots or handwritten messages. If an agent refuses to provide clear documentation, only communicates through personal messaging apps, or pressures you to pay immediately without transparency, treat it as a warning sign. In the digital travel space, legitimacy leaves a trail, and if you cannot trace it, it is wiser not to proceed.

A Holiday Should Start with Confidence — Not Worry

When you understand exactly what you are paying for, when the cost is clear, and the agency is transparent, your holiday begins with excitement, not uncertainty. As we enter this holiday season of joy, family gatherings and celebration, the Consumer Council of Fiji encourages consumers to:

- Take time to ask questions
- Request all details in writing
- Think before transferring money
- Choose registered, accountable travel providers

Your holiday should be remembered for the sunsets, the laughter and the shared meals, not unexpected expenses or regret. If you experience unfair treatment, don't stay silent. Call us on 155 or email at complaints@consumersfiji.org.

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