“Free” Vacation or Gifts for Watching a Timeshare Presentation? BBB Warns Travelers to Watch for Hidden Costs and High-Pressure Sales!

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S“free” vacation may sound like the perfect escape, but it’s important to slow down before saying yes to offers that seem too good to be true.

Vacation promotions promising complimentary hotel stays, airfare, cruises, or resort packages often come with conditions hidden in the fine print. In many cases, consumers discover the offer requires attending a lengthy timeshare presentation or paying unexpected fees that quickly add up.

These offers may arrive by phone, email, social media, text message, or even while travelers are already on vacation. While some promotions are legitimate, others rely on misleading advertising or aggressive sales tactics designed to pressure consumers into making costly decisions.

Your Better Business Bureau (BBB) recommends researching any travel company before providing payment or personal information. Consumers can check a business’s reputation and read customer reviews at BBB.org.

Travelers should also ask questions upfront about any “free” vacation package. Resort fees, taxes, transportation costs, or processing charges are often not included in promotional offers. Understanding the total cost before agreeing to the trip can help avoid unpleasant surprises later.

Tourists who are invited to a timeshare presentation during a vacation should be especially cautious about high-pressure sales tactics. Sales representatives may encourage travelers to sign contracts immediately or claim the deal is only available “today.” It’s important to take time to review all documents carefully and avoid making major financial commitments on the spot.

Before agreeing to attend a presentation, ask how long it will last, whether participation is mandatory to receive promotional perks, and whether there are penalties for leaving early. If promises are made about investment potential or rental income, consumers should independently verify those claims before signing any agreement.

Purchasing a timeshare is a long-term financial obligation that may include annual maintenance fees, assessments, and difficult resale conditions. Consumers should carefully evaluate whether the commitment fits their budget and lifestyle.

Here are more tips from your BBB regarding attending timeshare presentations:

- **Recognize the High-Pressure Tactics:** Sales pitches can be intense and last for hours. Salespeople often claim a steep discount or "today-only" offer is vanishing. Remember that a legitimate deal should still be available after you take time to think it over and discuss it privately.
- **Understand the True Cost:** Timeshares are generally not financial investments. Consider the ongoing annual **maintenance fees** and **special assessments**, which often increase yearly and are legally binding for decades.
- **Demand Everything in Writing:** Do not rely on verbal promises. Ask the salesperson to provide a copy of the contract, all fee structures, and rules on booking availability in writing before you even consider committing. We encourage you to ask for the ability to take the proposed contract with you for a full review. If the company requires you to make an immediate decision, consider that a significant red flag.
- **Look Into the "Right of Rescission":** If you decide to buy and later experience buyer's remorse, know your state or country's cancellation rights, also known as a "cooling-off period". This gives you a specific window of days to legally cancel the contract without penalty. When traveling abroad, there’s a good chance there won’t be any cooling off period, so you don’t want to rely on an assumption that you can cancel an agreement later.

- **Vet the Company First:** If you are unfamiliar with the resort or developer, check the BBB Business Directory to read reviews and confirm if there are past complaints or legal issues.

If you encounter a suspicious vacation offer or misleading sales tactics, we hope you'll report it to BBB Scam Tracker to help protect other travelers from similar experiences.

For more information on travel planning, please visit BBB's Travel HQ page at https://www.bbb.org/all/travel.

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Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia, and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB). The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB at Phone: 1-800-763-4222, Web site: BBB.org or E-mail: info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org.