



How first-time renters can avoid apartment scams

REAL ESTATE, CRIME, MONEY

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As a college student, it doesn't take long to get tired of living in the dorms. However, the world of apartment-renting has some serious drawbacks, too. Tenant protections are [growing](#), but student renters need to be on the look-out for [scams](#). A little research can help even these [first-time renters](#) navigate the process like pros.

Avoiding apartment scams

Tip 1: Seeing is believing

After years of living in small spaces, you may very quickly find what seems like a dream living space. But make sure that dream apartment is real.

One of the most common rental scams is listing a property that does not exist or posing as the owner of a real property that is not for rent. Researchers at New York University surveyed about 2 million Craigslist apartment ads in 2016 and found 29,000 fakes.

Refuse to pay anything before seeing the apartment in person. Similarly, if you are looking for an apartment in a city where rental brokers are the norm, do your research to be sure the person you're dealing with is actually a broker before paying any fees.

Tip 2: False impressions

Like online dating, flattering photo angles are to be expected (apartments always look bigger in photos), but extensive photoshopping or outdated images intentionally misrepresent the property. Scammers may even include photos of different properties than the one offered. Photos are never a substitute for an onsite visit.

Tip 3: Shady leases

Even if you've seen the apartment, search your city's online property records to make sure the name on your lease matches the name of the property owner. Read through your lease and other documents before signing to make sure you understand and agree to the terms. Even if the apartment is the real deal, the lease may be a bad one.

Tip 4: Faulty memory

Not all rip-offs happen before you move in. Once you've signed a lease, thoroughly document the condition of your apartment with dated photos. That way, if your landlord tries to pin the damage on you, you'll have proof that you're not to blame.

Read your lease again before you move out. Landlords may try to double dip by recharging fees when you leave. Others will try to keep your deposit, but a security deposit should not be used for routine maintenance.

| [Read more](#) about what your security deposit is intended to cover.

More ways to protect yourself

- Find your state's Tenants' Union to learn about your rights under local law.
- Never pay by wire transfer or cash. Use a credit card or write a check.

- Always get a receipt for payment.
- Never pay rent before receiving the keys.
- Protect your stuff with renter's insurance.

Getting scammed is embarrassing, but if it does happen to you, report it to the police and the Better Business Bureau's Scam Tracker, and don't be afraid to go after the guilty party.

Tagged fraud, Landlord Tenant Law

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