

Beware of Christmas scams

Christmas is a time to celebrate, but don't forget to stay scam aware. Fraudsters will take advantage of the fact you're busy and looking for a good deal, and will be out to steal your money and personal information.

Some scams that may be prevalent at this time include:

- Fake online shops. These are bogus websites run by scammers that tempt bargain hunters with heavily discounted products. However, these items may never materialise, or be counterfeits, not worth the money you spent or different from the description.
- Bogus shop vouchers. These are fake vouchers that look like they are from reputable well-known shops and are shared on social media. They tempt people by claiming to offer vouchers but in reality are simply a way for criminals to gain someone's personal or financial details to commit fraud or sell on.
- Holiday fraud. Many of us book trips at this time of year, and fraudsters capitalise on this by advertising fake holidays online. They are often marketed as too-good-to-miss, last-minute deals but are just a sham.

How to protect yourself from Christmas scams:

- Be suspicious about seemingly unbeatable deals. If something looks too good to be true, it usually is.
- Only buy from reputable shops and websites. Ensure the website is genuine, as scammers can set up convincing but fake online shops and pay to place them high in search engine listings.
- Don't pay by bank transfer as you won't get any protection if you're the victim of fraud. Credit card is the best way to pay.

If you are worried you have been scammed:

- Get advice from Citizens Advice on 03454 040506
- Report it to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040

This article has been written by Devon, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards Service
<https://www.devonsomersettradingstandards.gov.uk/>