

Holiday clubs

How to avoid the pitfalls when joining a holiday club



Your rights explained

Beware the bogus holiday clubs

Blue skies, golden sands, warm breezes and the scent of acacia blossom... dream holidays come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes you're even told you have won a free one.

But, to get the 'free' holiday you have been told you have won you may have to:

- go to a six-hour presentation
- pay for extras, such as flights and other add-ons, that make it more expensive than if you had booked it yourself
- go somewhere you don't want to go at a time that doesn't suit you and at very short notice.

Some holiday clubs are reputable but there are a lot of bogus ones out there. In this leaflet we tell you what to watch out for.

The dream – how they hook you in

- You're contacted at home and told that you've won a free holiday or are a lucky prize winner in a competition.
- You're enjoying a holiday abroad when a scratch card is thrust into your hand offering you the chance to win a fantastic prize or loads of money.

Whatever the approach, before you can collect your prize, free holiday or cheque you will be asked to go to a presentation.

“

Some holiday clubs are reputable but there are a lot of bogus ones out there. ”

The sell

At the presentation

You are likely to be invited to a plush hotel or office. The presentation will be about joining a holiday club. It will be very slick. The brochures you are shown will look glossy and convincing.

Are they targeting you?

Holiday clubs are happy to sign up anyone. But they often target people who have built up some savings. It might be people who have taken early retirement or couples whose children have grown up, leaving them with more free income. The clubs often offer you activities you enjoy, such as golf or tennis, as a way of hooking you in.

You will be made to feel as if you are joining an exclusive club that only opens its membership list to the chosen few. They'll promise you exciting and great value holidays all over the world in top class accommodation.

The reality is often very different.

The contract

Don't be pressurised

You will be asked to sign on the spot – but don't let yourself be pressurised – ask for time to think it over and get independent advice.

Watch out for techniques such as...

- The presentation has lasted so long you are tempted to sign just because you're desperate to leave.
- They've made you a special discounted offer valid for that day only.
- You are not left alone to discuss anything with your partner. You may also be kept separate from other couples and even discouraged from taking notes.



Take time to
think things
through

The three-point checklist

To avoid being caught by a holiday club that is bogus always use this checklist and take your time to think things through.

- 1 Ask to take the contract away with you and take a few days to research the company and review the contract before making any decision.
 - Does what is on offer represent good value for money? (add in flight, food and maintenance costs)
 - Have you checked other suppliers and compared prices?
 - Beware of money back guarantees as these could be difficult to claim in practice.
- 2 Make sure everything that was promised to you at the presentation is confirmed in writing in clear language that you understand.
- 3 Don't sign ANYTHING, no matter how much you're pressured, unless you are sure it's exactly what you want and don't pay anything in advance.

How does the law protect you?

If you join a holiday club anywhere in the European Economic Area (EEA) you have certain minimum rights to help protect you from falling victim to holiday scams.

Your rights include:

- Access to key information before you sign the contract. For example, your right to cancel.
- Receiving pre-contract information in writing and a contract in any European language of your choice from the seller.
- A 14 day 'cooling off' period that allows you to cancel the contract without a penalty. During this time the seller cannot ask you for a deposit.
- Any linked credit agreement is cancelled when you cancel the contract.
- The right to be given a payment schedule and 14 days written notice of any payments due.
- All contracts should contain basic minimum information such as: an accurate description of the product, including when it can be accessed, the purchase price and all other charges, the identity, place of residence and signature of each party, and the date and place of conclusion of the contract.

Where to go for help

If you have already been caught by a holiday club and would like advice on your consumer rights, contact Consumer Direct. Consumer Direct is a consumer advice service funded by government and managed by the Office of Fair Trading. It operates in partnership with local authority trading standards services to offer customers clear, practical and impartial advice and information.



You can also contact the Office of Fair Trading. Although we can't help you reclaim your money, we might be able to stop this company from using the same tactics in the future.

Please put your complaint in writing to:
ERC, Office of Fair Trading, Fleetbank House,
2-6 Salisbury Square, London EC4Y 8JX

Email: enquiries@oft.gov.uk

Call 0800 389 3158 for more free copies of this publication or to request a different format.

Published by the Office of Fair Trading
Printed in the UK on at least 50% recycled paper
Product code OFT642
Edition 01/11
© Crown copyright 2011

www.oft.gov.uk