

Why you need a Realtor, and other tips so you don't get scammed.

Once upon a time, "Mary" wanted to take her family on a beach vacation. Thanks to some internet research, she located a lovely beach home that was available for a week. She spoke with the owner by phone, signed a lease, and wired the lease fee as directed. The owner agreed to meet her and her family at the property upon arrival. Mary and her family drove many hours to the beach and were very excited when they pulled up to a beautiful, beach-front residence. Unfortunately, the family in residence at the house was not so excited to see them. Turns out, Mary had been scammed. The woman Mary had communicated with was not the owner of the property. The lease was bogus. Mary's money was gone. Vacation a bust.

This story is not so fictional, although the names and facts have been significantly changed to protect the innocent. But trust me, this sort of thing does in fact happen all the time, all over the world. Does it happen in Florida with seasonal rental properties? Including farms? Absolutely.

Don't let yourself fall victim to some scam artist. If you are looking to rent a home or equestrian property for the winter months, here are some important tips:

1. Unless the person you are dealing with is someone you know **WELL AND PERSONALLY**, only send money to a licensed Realtor/real estate agency or a licensed attorney/law firm.
2. Do not give anyone money for anything until a contract has been entered into and fully executed.
3. If the contract does not look like a standard rental agreement – as in a form that came from a Realtor's office – then have an attorney review the agreement for you **BEFORE** you sign it.
4. Security deposits should be held in an escrow account. The agreement you sign should provide for that.
5. If you cannot personally inspect the property before signing any rental agreement (or sending any money), then have someone go inspect the property for you! This is where working with a Realtor comes in handy.
6. If an offering looks too good to be true for the price, then it probably is....particularly if the person who is offering the property for rent is not working with a reputable Realtor or real estate agency.

In summary, I encourage everyone to work with a Realtor. You will not save any money in the long run if you put yourself in a position where you get scammed. And remember, scammers are usually pretty good at what they do, so it is easier than you think to get scammed. Whatever commission you may end up paying a Realtor will be chump change compared to the cost of losing your money or hiring an attorney to go after the crook that scammed you.



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