



## Protect Yourself from Migration Fraud

Protect yourself from migration fraud and keep yourself safe online by being aware of the ways people may try to take advantage of you or your situation.

### Be informed about migration fraud

People may give you false or misleading information in order to take advantage of your desire to visit or migrate to Australia. Becoming a victim of fraudulent activity could mean you:

- dreams of coming to Australia are shattered
- visa is cancelled and you are sent home
- identity is stolen
- life savings are lost
- computer is corrupted with viruses.

Fraudulent activity is designed to trick you out of your money or personal details. Read the stories of people who became victims of fraud so the same thing does not happen to you.

**See:** [www.immi.gov.au/migration-fraud/victim-stories.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/migration-fraud/victim-stories.htm)

Anyone can become the victim of fraud—watch the department's video 'Don't Get Caught Out' to see how easily it can happen. Remember, if an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

**See:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RacpuZ3NQ0>

### Help fight against illegal operators posing as migration professionals

Migration agents who operate in Australia must be registered with the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (MARA). If they operate without being registered they are breaking the law and a penalty of up to 10 years jail can apply. If you know someone who is providing migration advice and is not a registered migration agent, you should report them in writing using the department's feedback form.

**See:** <http://www.immi.gov.au/contacts/forms/services/services-form.htm>

## Be aware of the following misleading information, or 'myths'

Myth	Fact
<p>I can guarantee that you will get a visa to Australia</p>	<p>Only authorised officers from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship can issue you with a visa.</p> <p>No-one can guarantee you will get a visa. Avoid internet sites and advertisements by anyone who claims they can 'guarantee' a visa.</p> <p>A visa is only issued if your circumstances meet all the visa requirements.</p>
<p>Register and pay now for the migration program or to express your interest</p>	<p>The department does not ask you to 'register' or 'express your interest' in a visa.</p> <p>The department charges a visa application charge for most visa applications to enter Australia. This charge only needs to be paid once at the time you lodge your application. At some locations overseas, a service charge may also apply when you lodge an application through a Service Delivery Partner.</p>
<p>This is a 'once in a lifetime opportunity', or your 'only' chance to travel or migrate to Australia</p>	<p>Australian visa officers do not telephone or email people offering 'deals'.</p> <p>There may be a number of visa options for coming to Australia.</p> <p>The department will only contact you in relation to a visa application you have already lodged.</p>
<p>Only I can pay the department's fees. Give me the money and I will pay the department's fees for you.</p>	<p>Take responsibility for paying your own visa application charge. You can pay the charge directly to the department. In some locations overseas, the department has arrangements for visa applications to be lodged through service delivery partners. Details on the arrangements and the payment process for each country are available.  <b>See:</b> <a href="http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/990i/how-to-pay.htm">http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/990i/how-to-pay.htm</a></p> <p>Make sure you know how much the visa application charge is. A list of applicable charges is on the department's website.  <b>See:</b> <a href="http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/pdf/990i.pdf">http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/pdf/990i.pdf</a></p> <p>Australian visa officers will never ask you to deposit money into an individual's personal bank account or transfer money through a specific private money transfer company.</p> <p>Make sure you get a receipt for any money you pay. Check that the receipt says what the money was paid for.</p>

<p>I have a special relationship with the department</p>	<p>No-one has a special or privileged relationship with the department.</p> <p>Statements such as 'skilled migration service provider', 'Australian Government registered' or 'department registered' imply a relationship with the department and should be treated with caution. You will know whether someone is a registered migration agent as they will have the words 'Migration Agent Registration Number' or 'MARN' on their advertising.</p> <p>The department treats all applications in the same fair and reasonable way.</p>
<p>Don't worry—the department is still processing the visa</p>	<p>Ask for a copy of the confirmation letter issued by the department.</p> <p>If your agent cannot provide evidence of your application, you can contact the department direct to see how your application is progressing. <b>See:</b> <a href="http://www.immi.gov.au/contacts/visa-enquiries/">http://www.immi.gov.au/contacts/visa-enquiries/</a></p> <p>After an application is lodged online, you will be issued a Transaction Reference Number (TRN). Use this number to go online and check the progress of your application. This is a free service. <b>See:</b> <a href="http://www.immi.gov.au/e-visa/check-progress.htm">http://www.immi.gov.au/e-visa/check-progress.htm</a></p> <p>Know what documents you need to submit with your application and make sure they are submitted.</p> <p>If a visa officer requests further documentation, make sure it is submitted on time.</p> <p>Stay fully informed about your application. You are responsible for your application and you should know what information it includes.</p>
<p>I need to keep your original documents (that is, passport, birth certificate or marriage certificate) to give to the department</p>	<p>Generally, the department requires certified copies of documents, not the originals. Registered migration agents can certify documents.</p> <p>Service Delivery Partners will forward original documents to the department if they are lodged with them.</p> <p>If original documents are required, a visa officer from the department will ask for them.</p> <p>If you are lodging a student visa online, then your migration agent may need to see your original documents. If so, ask your agent to make a copy and return your original documents immediately.</p> <p>Prevent identity fraud—do not leave your important documents with other people.</p>

## Email and Internet Scams

Scams can occur in many forms—by post, email, telephone or on the internet. Some scams are easy to identify, while others may appear to be the real thing.

It is easy for criminals to create websites that look professional and generate emails that appear to be from legitimate sources. These websites and emails may try to get you to provide private information that could be used to steal your identity, or trick you into paying them money.

Ways you can protect yourself against email and internet scams include:

- checking the web address—even if one character is different, it can mean it's a different website—all Australian Government websites end in gov.au  
**Examples:**  
[www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)  
<http://www.eta.immi.gov.au/>
- visa applications that are processed through the department's website can be tracked by our systems. The department recommends you use the official website for future applications so appropriate support can be provided
- never enter private information unless it is a secure site and you know who you are dealing with. Secure sites are locked with a padlock in the browser window or secure URL at the beginning of the address (that is, https://)
- if you are concerned about a website, do a web search to see if anyone has reported any problems with that site. Visit the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission's website for details on the latest known scams.  
**See:** <http://www.scamwatch.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/694239>

Some things to watch for:

- emails sent from free web mail addresses, such as a Yahoo, Hotmail or Gmail account
- unsolicited emails from strangers who are advertising a website—do not click on web links in these emails
- unexpected emails requesting personal information or emails with generic greetings like 'Dear Customer' instead of your name.

## Internet sites designed to look like official Australian Government websites

Some websites offering visa services have been designed to look like official Australian Government websites. These websites may not be scams, however may require clients to pay a service fee over and above normal visa application charges.

Websites like these do not represent the department or the Australian Government and do not have any influence on the application or visa decision process.

The department is unable to provide any comment or support regarding the services advertised by these providers, and may not be able update you on an application that has been submitted by one of these providers.

There is **only** one official Australian Immigration website providing visa services.

**See:** [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)

## Getting Help to Apply for a Visa

Avoid fraudulent activities and scams by using the many departmental resources available to help you apply for a visa. These include application forms, booklets, the Visa Wizard, translation and interpreting services and the department's Service Delivery Partners. Immigration assistance can also be provided by community organisations and registered migration agents.

**See:** <http://www.immi.gov.au/migration-fraud/getting-help-to-apply.htm>

## Victims stories

### Tricked by a non-genuine website

Mei was looking at a social networking website and noticed an advertisement for studying in Australia. She clicked on the link and was directed to an official looking website that referred to the Australian Government, had beautiful pictures of Australia and the Australian flag and linked to government websites.

The contact details listed on the site were Australian, which made Mei think the site was legitimate. She proceeded to fill in the registration details, however, when asked for her credit card details, she hesitated and exited the site.

The next day, Mei received a call from the company listed on the website. The caller advised Mei she had been assessed eligible for a visa and all she needed to do was pay a fee. The caller was very convincing and Mei paid a \$600 fee. Unfortunately, Mei never heard from the company again. When she tried to follow up on her visa application and get her money back, she discovered the address and phone numbers listed on the website were false.

### No help from unregistered agent

Abdul employed an education agent, who is not a registered migration agent, to help him obtain a student visa. The education agent made false financial documents, forged Abdul's signature on documents and did not advise Abdul that the department had asked for further documents. Investigation into the education agent is continuing. Given the circumstances, Abdul may have lost the opportunity to study in Australia.

### Don't listen to bad advice

To increase her chances to obtain permanent residency, Amy, on the advice of a friend, submitted documents that she knew were false. Amy's visa officer discovered that the documents Amy submitted were false and her visa was cancelled. As a result, Amy had to leave Australia immediately and she will not be able to return for at least three years.

### An expensive lesson, learnt the hard way

Jill handed over \$28 500 to a migration agent to lodge her visa application and to enrol her at an Australian university. Jill's migration agent was not registered and has since disappeared with her money. No visa application was lodged, nor was Jill enrolled at university. The Australian Federal Police and the department are currently investigating Jill's migration agent.