



**COMESA Competition Commission**

Kang'ombe House, 5th Floor  
P.O. Box 30742  
Lilongwe 3, Malawi  
Tel: +265(0)1 772466  
+265 (0) 999 970 269  
Email- compcom@comesa.int

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**Common Market for Eastern  
and Southern Africa**

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## **CONSUMER ALERT ON DIGITAL HOLIDAY SCAMS**

The COMESA Competition Commission (“the Commission”), wishes to alert consumers to be on the lookout for online scams targeting to exploit consumers in the festive season. These include scammers posing as suppliers or service providers with fake offers relating to holiday packages, accommodation offers, supply of cheap goods, cheap airline tickets and shipping services, cheap visas to popular holiday destinations or charities seeking contributions for a charitable cause, among others. The Commission has observed that while most retailers are introducing holiday deals as the festive season draws closer, fraudsters are also rolling out tactics to exploit consumers through: hacking into websites and social media platforms of service providers and targeting unsuspecting consumers who are then asked to pay directly to the scammers; impersonating websites of major brands by creating almost similar sites which could mislead consumers to procure services from the fake sites; creating their own impressive websites and social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram through which they entice consumers with photos of dream holidays in order to get them to sign up for non-existent services or packages; or contacting consumers directly through their phones or emails with malicious links and/or soliciting for personal details, including bank account information which enable the fraudsters to hack consumer details.

Consumers should be suspicious of a likely scam if they are requested to give personal bank account information, pin, or passwords of accounts, are pressurised to transfer money immediately, asked to make payments to an individual’s bank account as opposed to a company account, offered a deal that is too good or way cheaper to be true, or are required to make payments through transfer services like money gram or western union.

The Commission wishes to advise consumers conducting online transactions to exercise caution this festive season by being alert and:

- i. Doing due diligence on websites or social media platforms of the service providers to establish that the Company details are genuine. If the company is an intermediary, please cross check first with the actual service provider.
- ii. Checking through the reviews by other consumers on the packages, goods and services being offered on the same platform. Some platforms may hide negative reviews and therefore consumers should be careful if the reviews are all glaringly positive.
- iii. In the case of holiday travels, booking should be done through accredited travel agents.
- iv. Rather than clicking on a link from an email or text to a hot deal, go to your web browser and type in the web address of the company purportedly offering said great deals.
- v. Avoid conducting any business online (making a purchase, donating, accessing password-protected sites) while using a public Wi-Fi network.
- vi. Avoid unsolicited emails that ask you to click on a link or download an app to access a deal.
- vii. Avoid sharing or giving personal information like pin and passwords.

The Commission further wishes to request any person who has been affected by the above conduct, or established that the above scammers are operating in the Common Market<sup>1</sup> to report the matter to us on +265 (0) 1 772466, or contact the undersigned on [mdisasa@comesa.int](mailto:mdisasa@comesa.int); or Mr. Steven Kamukama, Manager Consumer Welfare and Advocacy Division on [skamukama@comesa.int](mailto:skamukama@comesa.int).

Consumers may also contact their national consumer institutions or any other body with the mandate on consumer protection in their countries.



**Meti Demissie Disasa**  
**Registrar**  
**COMESA Competition Commission**  
**5th Floor, Kang'ombe House**  
**P.O. Box 30742, Lilongwe 3, Malawi**  
**Office Phone: +265 (0) 1 772466**  
**Email: [compcom@comesa.int](mailto:compcom@comesa.int)**

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<sup>1</sup> The Common Market consists of the following 21 Member States: Burundi, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Libya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.