



How to avoid scammers

Dear student,

We must emphasize that this is not binding advice, but experienced guidance on how to avoid scammers.

We evaluate room offers on the basis of some fixed standards and with our many years of experience. We have summarized our approach for you in this handout.

Of course, we can also be wrong. There are no claims for damages against us. Neither in connection with this handout, nor the personal consultation.

In the following, we would like to give you some help on how to spot scammers and fraudulent housing ads when looking for a room or flat online. These tips do not only apply to ads posted online, but also to offers you get via your search profile/requests on websites like wg-gesucht.

- Has the ad been posted by a **local** real estate company? If the company usually only offers accommodations in for example northern Germany, an ad for a very cheap room in Tübingen is likely a scam. Is the contact information/phone number correct? If you are unsure, give them a polite (!) call and ask for information on the ad.
- Look at the **pictures**: do they align with the description in the ad? If they look like they could be fit for a real estate catalogue, the ad might be scam. Also, take a closer look at details like power outlets, do they look like the standard models in Germany? If in doubt, use a reverse image search service (for example tineye.com) to check if the pictures have been used for other ads or have already been exposed as scam by the police. You can find some example pictures that have been used by scammers before in this article (and also pictures of the scammer's fake IDs: <https://www.polizei-praevention.de/aktuelles/betrug-bei-wohnungssuche-vorsicht-vor-falschen-vermietern.html>)
- There are some **classic scam narratives** to look out for: the landlord or landlady is abroad and is not available for a viewing of the room/flat; they want you to transfer the deposit or rent before the viewing; they expect you to pay money to be considered a potential candidate for the room/flat and to book a spot for a viewing; links in the ad (to the website of the landlord/landlady or company, etc.) do not work at all or lead to unrelated content.

- Ads for rooms and flats in Germany usually **differentiate between “Kaltmiete”** (basically only the rent for the room) **and “Warmmiete”** (Kaltmiete + “Nebenkosten”, often abbreviated by “NK”, meaning additional costs for heating, hot water, garbage fees etc.). If the ad only states the “Warmmiete”, does not provide information on the energy certificate of the building (if it is the landlord/landlady themselves posting the ad or a real estate company, most people looking for a roommate on wg-gesucht and such will not have detailed information on this) or does not provide sufficient contact information (last name/company, phone number/e-mail address, imprint on the website), it might be a scam.
- If someone is offering you a room via **Airbnb**, always check the website and account of your potential landlord/landlady: can you find their account only via the link they provided or also on the regular website? If yes, how did other tenants and guests rate the room/flat? In general, it is highly unusual for long term accommodation to be rented via Airbnb (or on Ebay Kleinanzeigen, for that matter), so be extra careful with these offers
- If the **landlord/landlady contacts you via e-mail** and sends you ID documents as “proof” that they aren’t scammers, check via reverse image search if the documents are valid (e.g., to find out if they have been used for scam before). **Caution:** Never send any scans of your ID documents to potential landlords/landladies, especially before you met them or have seen the room/flat.
- **One last important note:** these scammers sometimes do not want your money but your data. Never send any of your ID documents via e-mail to potential landlords/landladies you have never met. Do not log in to your account via links that have been sent to you by alleged real estate companies and websites concerning housing ads and offers or issues with your account, always type in the website address yourself and log in there. Do not open any attachments you do not recognize, especially if it is a .exe file!

If you are unsure, we will be happy to help you!

Our **help desk**, which is offered online and offline, also advises you on the subject of finding a room. There you can have your standard application email checked, have suspicious offers checked for scam and get general advice on finding a room.

Just book an appointment here:

<https://help-desk-int.wi90.uni-tuebingen.de/index.php>

Alternatively, you can also contact housing@zv.uni-tuebingen.de directly with your question.

We wish you success in your search for a room!

Best regards
The Housing Team