



U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Russia

Internet Dating Scams

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The U.S. Embassy receives reports almost every day of fraud committed against U.S. citizens by Internet correspondents professing love and romantic interest. Typically, the Russian correspondent asks the U.S. citizen to send money or credit card information for living expenses, travel expenses, or “visa costs.” The anonymity of the Internet means that the U.S. citizen cannot be sure of the real name, age, marital status, nationality, or even gender of the correspondent. The U.S. Embassy has received many reports of citizens losing thousands of dollars through such scams. American citizens are advised never to send money to anyone they have not met in person.

The internet dating scams include some common elements:

- Misrepresentation about the costs and requirements of a U.S. visa,
- Claims that they must buy airline tickets only in Russia,
- Use of professional models’ photos gleaned from internet web sites,
- Sudden financial hurdles to leaving Russia,
- Requests to send money only through a specific company,
- A scan of a (usually fraudulent) U.S. visa to prove intent to travel.

Please keep in mind that, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow does not have the authorization to initiate investigations of these scams. Complete and authoritative information on applying for a U.S. visa is available on the Department of State’s webpage on [Visa Information for Temporary Visitors](#).

FAQs about Internet Dating Scams

Based upon previous inquiries, the Embassy has created a list of Frequently-Asked-Questions (FAQs) with answers. Click on the questions below to be taken to the answer.

I’ve heard a lot about Internet dating scams. I would like to know whether this person I have met is for real, but all I have is his/her name and photo. Is this enough to find out if she exists?



Unfortunately, the U.S. Embassy cannot verify the identity of this individual, because Russia has strict laws protecting the distribution of information about Russian citizens. The embassy has information on foreign citizens only if a person has actually applied for services from the U.S. government.

I've heard there are blacklists of known Internet dating scammers. Does the U.S. Embassy have a blacklist? Where do I find a blacklist? ▼

Although the U.S. Embassy does not maintain such a list, there are many Internet "blacklist" websites, where victims of scams have placed information and identities of people who have defrauded them. It may be helpful to perform an Internet search for such sites.

I think I have been scammed. I have sent this individual \$2,000.00 and now I find out his/her visa is a fake. How do I get my money back? ▼

We regret that the U.S. Embassy has no way of obtaining your money for you. We suggest contacting the money transfer agency or your credit card company to ascertain their policies in such cases.

I want to lodge a complaint with the Russian government and the U.S. authorities about being scammed. Can the U.S. Embassy help me? Who do I contact? ▼

Because the U.S. Embassy is a diplomatic mission and not a law enforcement agency, you will need to go through the appropriate law enforcement channels, should you believe you are a victim of fraud. You may contact law enforcement authorities in your area. You may also visit the Internet Fraud Complaint Center hosted by the FBI at <http://www.ic3.gov> in order to file a complaint. For information on contacting law enforcement officials in Russia, you may try contacting the Russian Embassy in the United States at: www.russianembassy.org.

My foreign friend wants to come visit me but says that s/he must purchase insurance and have \$300.00 in cash to show s/he can afford to travel. How much money are visitors required to show? ▼

To receive a U.S. non-immigrant visa, applicants are not required to show cash or proof of insurance for travel.

For information on the current processing fee and how to apply for a visa, please visit the [Non-Immigrant Visas Section](#) of our website.

The individual I'm writing to says that s/he needs \$1,000.00 to show for "pocket" money" or the airline won't let him/her board the plane. Is this true? ▼

There are no Russian or American customs or airline regulations requiring travelers show proof of income or "pocket money" to travel to the United States.

I would like to bring my foreign friend to the United States to visit and s/he says I must wire money for a ticket, but I don't want to send it directly. If I send the money to the Embassy, can you buy the ticket for him/her? Can you recommend a travel agency I can send the money and have them buy the ticket? ▼

The Embassy cannot suggest or verify the validity of private companies or organizations within Russia, nor can the embassy purchase tickets. Tickets can easily be purchased in the United States directly from the air carriers for Russian citizens. In addition, applicants are NOT required to have a ticket prior to the visa interview. In fact, applicants are counseled NOT to buy tickets or make arrangements until they have the visa in hand. Scammers will cite fictitious American or Russian regulations requiring that the tickets be purchased in Russia with cash in order to get the cash sent overseas.

My foreign friend says that s/he must go to a tour agency and pay \$500 for a visa application and visa, and that it will take 2 months. Is this right? What is the procedure for Russians to get a tourist visa? ▼

All visa applications are submitted to a Russian courier service – Pony Express – for delivery to the Embassy. The U.S. government charges a processing fee for each application. The courier service charges a delivery/handling fee. However, there are no additional fees, nor any requirements to show traveling money.

For information on the current processing fee and how to apply for a visa, please visit the [Non-Immigrant Visas Section](#) of our website.

Once an applicant submits their application, they are immediately scheduled for an appointment to appear for an interview within the following 10 days (or within 21 days during peak travel seasons). At the appointment at the Embassy, the applicant is interviewed by an American Consular officer and is immediately told whether he or she is eligible for the visa. If the decision is positive, the visa is sent to the applicant within 72 hours through Pony Express.

More information about “romance” and other Internet scams can be found at: <http://www.lookstoogoodtobetrue.com/fraudtypes/romance.aspx>.

U.S. EMBASSY & CONSULATES IN RUSSIA

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