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Travel Insurance: Scam or Savior?

If you've ever booked a plane ticket or hotel stay online, you've probably been offered an opportunity to "protect" your purchase for an additional fee. Since you're spending big dollars on your trip, you may have hovered over the option, wondering if it's a wise investment or a quick money-making scheme.

Before you buy, you should know that trip protection and travel insurance are different. When you book directly through the airline or hotel or on a travel website like Travelocity or Expedia, they offer you trip protection. These plans often provide nothing more than a voucher you can use to reschedule in the event of a cancellation — something you won't need if you book refundable accommodations.

But you can also purchase travel insurance through a reputable third party, and these policies offer cash refunds if your trip is canceled or interrupted. They also typically cover lost or damaged bags, and high-quality policies will cover medical emergencies that occur at your destination. But there



may be restrictions, so always make sure you understand the terms and buy coverage that offers the protection you want.

It can be hard to swallow the idea of paying more to insure yourself against an event that probably won't happen. So, can you skip it? The risk you're willing to take is up to you, but remember the amount of money you're spending on travel and consider whether it's worth protecting your investment. While you may decide against travel insurance for your weekend trip two states away, experts recommend always purchasing it for international travel or cruises due to the higher cost and potential for things to go wrong. The price, they say, is usually worth the peace of mind.

If you're going to purchase travel insurance, you should take the time to shop around, just like you did with your accommodations. Not all plans are created equal, so read the fine print and make sure you understand what is covered — and what is not. The last thing you want is to spend your hard-earned money on a policy that leaves you holding the bag.

Trapped in a Timeshare Nightmare?

5 Ways to Escape Those Pesky Fees

We've all been there: snagged by the timeshare sales pitch like a fish with a hook in its mouth.

Maybe you were invited to stay at a fancy resort free of charge or at a substantial discount. Or you were on vacation and you saw a sign in the hotel lobby that offered free food, free excursions, or an additional free night's stay. All you had to do was schedule a 90-minute meeting to learn about a "very exciting vacation opportunity."

I don't know about you, but I am a sucker for free anything. It is not difficult to set the hook!

Step back to that moment. You schedule the timeshare meeting and set aside 90 minutes. As soon as the meeting begins, you start to feel guilty. Questions like "Why don't you take your family on more vacations?" "Don't you love your family?" "Do you really want to spend the rest of your life behind a desk?" are lobbed at your head. Every question makes you feel smaller and smaller. You look around the room to see if anyone else is listening to those questions — you don't want everyone to know what a jerk you are!

When you explain that this is a lot to digest and ask if you can take some time to think about it, you learn that this wonderful package is only available today. At this point, you feel a little uncomfortable, kind of like you're sitting in a barrel full of piranhas. Several sets of eyes are staring at you waiting for your answer. You try not to sweat, but it just happens. Now, not only are you a selfish jerk that doesn't love your family, but it's obvious that you also have a sweating problem!

So, you succumb and buy this wonderful timeshare package. You're certain that you will live happily ever after (at least that's what the brochure says). It's too bad you have to cut your vacation short to get back to work so you can afford to pay for the wonderful timeshare you just purchased.



That is not the worst part, though! The worst part is that you have to pay this pesky thing called a "maintenance fee" that keeps coming every single year. Just when you get used to that annual maintenance fee, it's adjusted, adjusted again, and ... you get the picture.

Eventually, you start to wonder whether this timeshare is really for you. So, you call the wonderful people that sold it to you and ask if they would like to buy it back. You are shocked when they tell you, "No." Then you're even more shocked when you discover that no one else wants your timeshare, either. It seemed like such a good idea at the time. Of course, if you decide to simply stop paying the annual membership fee, your account goes into collection, your credit rating drops, and the harassing phone calls begin.

Please forgive this extended narration and perhaps exaggeration, but I needed to set the stage for the advice I'm about to give. Many of our Preston Estate Planning clients are in this exact situation with their timeshares and are desperate for a way out. If you have purchased timeshares, you love them, and they work for you, wonderful. No offense meant. But not everyone is so lucky.

As some of you already know (and others will find out), getting rid of a timeshare is not easy. There are several companies that will promise to get you out of your timeshare obligations only to take more of your hard-earned money and disappear — leaving you without your money but still with the timeshare and the annual maintenance fee. Fortunately, there are five other alternatives.

Continued on Pg. 3 ...

Breaking the Habit

How to Cut Your Kids' Screen Time



there. Keep these devices out of sight during no-use time, and put them away once your kids have met their daily limits. In the end, it will make things easier.

Spend more time together. Giving your children your undivided attention is incredibly valuable, even if it's only for short periods. Figure out how you can create more face time (not FaceTime). Start conversations and play games to spend time together as a family. Even better, get outside! If you're willing to spend time with them and act a little silly, your kids will have more fun kicking a ball around rather than playing Roblox. Better yet, you'll both get some exercise.

Finally, consider the example you're setting. It's hard to blame kids for their screen addiction when adults also have trouble prying themselves away from laptops, tablets, and phones. Think about how you can reduce your own screen time and consider installing an app that tracks your usage like StayFree or Social Fever. You might be surprised at how much time you spend staring at a little screen — and be inspired to cut back.

The science is clear: Too much screen time can lead to kids experiencing developmental delays, poor sleep, and weight gain. And yet, kids love those small glowing devices. To keep your children healthy, you need to find a way to set limits. But how can you create rules around their favorite pastimes without causing a lot of drama?

Create realistic rules. You know your family best. Review the American Academy of Pediatrics' best practices for screen time online, and then consider what's both healthy and doable. Maybe the ultimate screen time spent will be more than the experts suggest, but an improvement is better than no change. Determine usage limits and establish device-free times. Then create clear expectations and consequences, and don't back down from enforcing them.

Take the devices away. It is not a punishment, though it might feel like one to your kids at first. But it's actually helping them by removing the temptation. Your elementary school child will be less likely to get sucked into a YouTube hole, and your teen won't send "just one" text at dinner if the device isn't right



... continued from cover

I hate to say it, but the first and easiest way to get rid of a timeshare is by doing so after you die. When you pass away, your children or beneficiaries do not have to accept your timeshare. They have the right to exercise what is called a "disclaimer." A disclaimer is a legal way of saying, "I don't want this asset." There are two things to keep in mind with this option: First, the disclaimer must be filed within nine months of the date of death of the current owner (you). If your beneficiaries would like help with filing the necessary paperwork, we'd be happy to work with them. Second, your children cannot use the timeshare first, then decide to disclaim it. Using the timeshare is considered acceptance. Please make your children aware of this if you decide to take this route.

Now for the hard part: the four ways to dispose of a timeshare while you are still living.

You can try and sell it. While writing this, I went to eBay to see what was available. I was amazed by how many people are trying to sell their timeshares there. The prices ranged from \$1 (that is not a typo — one dollar) to tens of thousands of dollars. However, when you read the details of the particular timeshare, many of the maintenance fees are literally thousands of dollars every year (that was not a typo, either).

What appears to be the most obvious and easy way to get rid of the timeshare is to simply give it to someone else. The challenge is finding that someone. It's not that easy. One person in the industry that I spoke to suggested giving your timeshare to a person you never, ever want to speak to again. The reason, as you already know, is not the cost of the timeshare — it's the maintenance fee. In most of these programs, the amount of the maintenance fee is not locked in and continues to increase every year.

Another option is to call the company that issued the timeshare and ask them to take it back. This is a long shot. Rarely does it work. But occasionally, the company will take it back. They won't pay you for it, but at least the maintenance fee stops.

If none of these options work, unfortunately, you'll need to hire a company to represent you, and that will cost you some money. Typically, the fee will be in the thousands of dollars. However, paying that fee doesn't necessarily guarantee that they will be successful in getting you out of your obligations.

When I called and spoke to a representative from one of these companies, I was told that there is a screening process before they will work with anyone. Basically, to screen me, they asked, "Were you pressured or misled, or do you feel that unethical sales practices were used to persuade you to purchase?" I thought that was an interesting standard for deciding whether they would take your case. Doesn't that describe the whole process?

Some of these companies are more reputable than others, as I referenced above. I spoke to two of them: Wesley Financial Group (800-425-4081) and The Newton Group (855-648-4462). This is certainly not an exhaustive list; I am sure there are others.

Hopefully, this will give you some helpful insight into the process of escaping your timeshare. Again, let me repeat, if you have a timeshare, it works for you, and you're happy with it, please don't take this article the wrong way! I'm not hoping to put the world off timeshares for good — I simply want to show our clients who have expressed frustration a way out.

-John Preston

Sudoku

			4	6			5	
			1		8		4	
	6	4	9					
4								2
							9	
2	1	9			6			
5	8		6			9		7
6	2				1	4		

Solution on Pg. 4

Mini No-Bake Key Lime Pies

Inspired by FoodNetwork.com



Ingredients

- 1 cup lime juice
- 2 1/3 cups sugar, divided
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, softened
- 14 eggs
- 12 whole graham crackers
- 1/3 cup unsalted butter, melted
- 1 1/2 cups whipping cream
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- Lime zest, for garnish

Directions

1. In a medium saucepan over low heat, combine lime juice, 2 cups of sugar, and 2 sticks of butter. Cook until the butter melts.
2. In a large bowl, beat the eggs with a mixer and stir into lime juice mixture until combined.
3. Bring to a simmer. Stir constantly for 5–7 minutes until thick and creamy. Pour through a mesh strainer.
4. Chill lime curd for 2 hours in the refrigerator.
5. In a food processor, add graham crackers, 1/3 cup melted butter, and 1/3 cup sugar. Pulse to combine crumb mixture.
6. In a bowl, whip the cream with powdered sugar until stiff for topping.
7. In 12 small dishes or ramekins, add the crumb mixture, followed by the lime curd. Add whipped topping and garnish with lime zest.