

Mahakumbh 2025: Fake QR codes, online booking scams may disrupt holy dip

Prayagraj is preparing for the Maha Kumbh 2025, which attracts many pilgrims. Authorities warn of fraudsters using fake websites and QR codes to deceive visitors. Pilgrims are advised to verify QR codes and use trusted booking websites. Public networks for digital payments should be used cautiously to avoid risks during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025.

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The holy city of Uttar Pradesh, Prayagraj, is all set to host one of the world's largest spiritual gatherings – the Mahakumbh. Maha Kumbh 2025 begin on Monday January 13, a holy day occurring after every 12 years, bringing together countless people in a sacred confluence of faith, devotion and culture.

Despite the cold weather and the possibility of rain, thousands of pilgrims arrived, and camped in tents along the banks of the river Ganga and took ritual dips in the river. As the nation has geared up for the auspicious day of Mahakumbh at Prayagraj, the fraudsters have sniffed the possibilities of fraud and come up with duping activities like fraud website for booking slot for the holy dip among other services.

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) of the Ministry of Home Affairs has taken the cognizance of these activities and an advisory has also been issued in this regards. "A large number of fake websites, links and other platforms have been created on internet and social media to exploit the faith of the devotees who wish to visit the Mahakumbh," it read.

"The victim can be potentially cheated in different ways. Fraudulent websites, links and other platforms can cheat people on the pretext of collecting donations from devotees. Devotees can also be cheated on the pretext of bookings for hotels, tents and other types of accommodations at the event." Beware of fake QR codes Mahakumbh 2025 Experts have come up with some key suggestions for the users to protect themselves from the potential fraudulent activities.

Amit Kumar, CTO of Easebuzz highlighted that the scammers use fake QR codes, fraudulent donation links, and bogus booking websites for flights, hotels, and tents to trick people. "Visitors need to be aware and stay cautious—always verify QR codes before paying, avoid unsolicited offers, use only trusted booking websites recommended by the Govt. of Uttar Pradesh, enable two-factor authentication on mobile payment apps, and report suspicious activity."

"Awareness is the first step to security. By staying alert, devotees can ensure safe and secure digital transactions during Maha Kumbh Mela," the CTO said. Use of WhatsApp to dupe devotees Fraudsters also use other communication channels like WhatsApp or email, providing payment details and a confirmation message of the booking once the payment is made, said Dhiraj Gupta, Co-founder and CTO, mFilterIT.

He highlighted that once the victims make the payments, the fraudsters don't respond. "To combat the misuse of brand assets during these mega-events, the brands need AI-powered solutions to help them stay updated with these instances and take proactive measures against cyber risks," he suggested.

Be cautious while using public networks for digital payments Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 Vishal Salvi, Chief Executive Officer of Quick Heal Technologies Limited highlighted that the surveillance cameras, especially the intelligent ones installed for public safety, are connected to the internet through default IP addresses, making them vulnerable to misuse, such as snooping. "Even though hacking of

public wi-fi is not very common, someone with reasonable motivation and technical knowledge can still do that," he said. He emphasized the importance of being cautious while using public networks for digital payments or accessing unverified services.

Use verified platforms, check URL legitimacy Animesh Jha, VP fraud and risk management, Wibmo suggested some of the key tips to stay safe from scams during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025. He suggested some precautionary measures to the attendees like Use Verified Platforms: Always book accommodations or services through official government websites or trusted travel platforms like IRCTC. Check URL Legitimacy: Look for secure payment gateways (indicated by "https://") and double-check URLs to avoid fraudulent websites. Beware of Unrealistic Offers: Deals that seem excessively discounted may be scams—verify before making payments. Use official sources like the Maha Kumbh Police App for updates on potential scams or fake news.