

Mahakumbh mela 2025: How to save yourself from scams during online bookings, transactions

The Cyber Crime Police Station in Pimpri Chinchwad has recently issued an advisory alerting residents to be cautious of deceptive websites that are scamming individuals through fake online bookings for accommodations and passes, as well as soliciting donations for events.



Business Today Desk

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Mahakumbh Mela 2025: In today's digital era, online scams have become a prevalent threat, emphasizing the importance of vigilance during internet transactions. The upcoming Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, scheduled to be held from January 13 to February 26, is anticipated to attract numerous devotees from various regions, including overseas.

As the 45-day spiritual event approaches, unscrupulous individuals are exploiting the influx of visitors by offering fraudulent bookings for accommodations such as hotels, dharamshalas, guest houses, and tent city cottages.

An elderly man aged 75 residing in Andheri West was recently swindled out of Rs 1 lakh while attempting to secure tickets and accommodation for the upcoming Mahakumbh event in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. The victim, who hails from the Seven Bungalows area, reported the incident to the authorities, stating that he had found the fraudulent agents through a contact number listed online. He had intended to participate in the religious gathering, which occurs once every 12 years, with his wife and daughter.

According to the police investigation, the man had searched for accommodation options online and came across a website offering tent bookings. He contacted the provided number and was quoted ₹14,000 for a tent that could accommodate three people. Subsequently, he transferred the specified amount via RTGS upon receiving the booking details.

The scammers later inquired about his travel plans, to which the victim mentioned that he required three round-trip tickets from Mumbai to Prayagraj. The accused initially requested Rs 89,000 for the tickets, which was paid by the complainant's son. A receipt was issued for the booking, but when the complainant inquired about the physical tickets, the accused started avoiding contact. They claimed that it would take 72 hours for the tickets to be generated, but soon after, their phone numbers were deactivated. This prompted the elderly man to seek assistance from the police. An investigation has been initiated, and it is advised that the public thoroughly verify online bookings and transactions to prevent falling prey to similar fraudulent schemes.

Awareness Campaign

In order to address this issue, the UP Police has launched a public awareness video starring Bollywood actor Sanjay Mishra. Mishra offers crucial advice to pilgrims, urging them to only make accommodation bookings through the official website, kumbh.gov.in, and to remain vigilant against any dubious offers. Additionally, the police have provided a list of authorized hotels and guest houses for secure and safe bookings.

The Cyber Crime Police Station in Pimpri Chinchwad has recently issued an advisory alerting residents to be cautious of deceptive websites that are scamming individuals through fake online bookings for accommodations and passes, as well as soliciting donations for events. The advisory highlighted the prevalence of fraudulent websites, links, and social media platforms that are preying on the trust of those planning to visit the Mahakumbh. This matter has been brought to the attention of the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The police have advised followers against clicking on any suspicious websites or links. For accurate and official information regarding the Mahakumbh event, please visit the official website at kumbh.gov.in.

How to stay alert during online bookings, transactions

"During large events like the Maha Kumbh, scammers dupe visitors by creating convincing fake websites and advertisements promoting accommodations and services. When the devotees visit these websites, they are redirected to make payments for bookings that don't exist.

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. 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," said Dhiraj Gupta, Co-founder and CTO, mFilterIT.

"Staying protected from these concerns, individuals must take proactive steps to safeguard their devices and personal data. Quick Heal's recently launched AntiFraud.AI solution is designed to protect users from digital frauds, including rogue applications, unauthorized camera or microphone access, and fraudulent OTPs. To extend our support during the Maha Kumbh Mela, we are also offering a free three-month trial of the AntiFraud app, which can help users stay vigilant and prevent falling prey to cyber scams," Salvi added, emphasizing the importance of being cautious while using public networks for digital payments or accessing unverified

services," said Vishal Salvi, Chief Executive Officer of Quick Heal Technologies Limited.