Watch out for phony offers at online auctions

Q: We've seen many ads and websites offering resorts, cruises and other travel deals at auction. We're not gamblers nor experienced auction attendees, and have always booked our trips the regular way. However, now that we're retired and can go anywhere at any time almost on a moment's notice, we'd like to take a shot at an online vacation auction. How do we go about it?

A: Internet auctions can be fun, whether you win or not. Some can be very deceptive song-and-dance routines, and are touted with much phony fanfare and wild promises. Make sure you stay away from those. Stick with the legitimate websites that may offer honest auctions for vacations that will interest you. Auction deals involve vacations that have already been advertised as discounted, but are not selling well. Anxious officials of hotels, cruise ships and resorts then put them up to bids for a limited number of days or hours, hoping they'll be sold for at least some profit.

For instance, a recent email from news@e.luxurylink-mail.com, offered a potential deal at the very plush Signature Hotel of the Las Vegas MGM Grand Resort. It included two weekend nights in a junior suite, listing the original retail price at $388. The minimum starting bid was $200, and bids closed in 48 hours.

Another was at the beachfront, oceanview Andronis Luxury Suites in Santorini, Greece, with four nights in a Premiere suite, including daily breakfast. The retail listing price was $3,358, with starting bids at half price of $1,679, and was offered with just 48 hours of accepting bids.

Now that you're free to have all the vacation options available to you, and can pack and go quickly, do some serious homework to learn the good and bad of internet vacation auctions.

Who knows, if you play it right, for just a few bucks, you may get a week in that super cool suite with the mirror in the ceiling at the top of the most luxurious resort in Las Vegas, Hong Kong, London or Venice. Well, at least you can bid on it.