

## Hot Air Balloon Scam grounds GTA residents in costly hoax

What was supposed to be a dreamy sky-high adventure turned into a disappointing lesson for dozens of GTA residents who were tricked into purchasing fake hot air balloon ride tickets promoted on social media.

York Regional Police say they've received reports from numerous victims who were scammed by a company advertising itself as 'The Candle Experience 2025.'

The company promoted low-cost tickets through online ads offering hot air balloon reservations for just \$45.

One victim responded to a social media ad on July 4 and paid online to reserve a ride for July 5. But when they showed up at a park near 14th Avenue and Donald Cousens Parkway in Markham, they found a crowd of confused people none of whom ever left the ground.

When the victim attended a park in the area of 14th Avenue and Donald Cousens Parkway in the City of Markham for the scheduled ride, they were met by a large number of people who also showed up for a hot air balloon ride, York Regional Police said in a news release. It was soon discovered the victims had fallen victim to a scam as there were no hot air balloons or staff from 'The Candle Experience' present at the park.

A similar scene played out just one week later on July 12, when several people and vehicles again arrived at the same location, expecting a promised hot air balloon ride that never materialized.

In light of the scam, police are urging the public to be cautious when booking online experiences. To avoid becoming a victim of this kind of crime, police are urging people to look up customer reviews on multiple platforms, obtain a physical address and contact information for the company to help verify their authenticity, and be wary of deals that seem too good to be true.

They also reminded residents that hot air balloon rides usually cost a few hundred dollars.

Their advice:

Confirm your booking by calling or emailing the operator directly. A reputable company will respond to your query promptly, Police said.

This investigation is ongoing. Anyone with information is asked to contact the #5 District Criminal Investigations Bureau at 1-866-876-5423 ext. 7541, or call Crime Stoppers anonymously.

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