

KXAN Consumer Investigates

And the Better Business Bureau of Austin

APARTMENT RENTAL TIPS

What is something simple consumers can do to make sure they find the apartment?

- Visit each complex in person before putting down a deposit.
- Tour all on-site amenities to be sure they will meet your needs (swimming pool, on-site work out centers, parking, etc.)
- Certain deposits or application fees may be non-refundable.
- Websites often use pictures taken from the best locations on the property or promotional units

What are some tips for avoiding potential problems in an apartment rental?

- **Start your search early.** Sometimes it can take quite a bit of time to locate the right place. A good guideline is to start looking at least a month in advance to be on the safe side.
- **Don't believe the description you read or hear.** Listen and pay attention to what people are telling you and what you read online to translate what it means. "Cozy" might mean warm and comfortable, but it can also mean small. "Unique" makes you think "one of a kind," but might just stand for "weird."
- **Don't give in to high pressure sales.** Many apartment companies offer "look and lease" discounts, but don't feel you have to take an apartment right away. Examples: "Other people are interested" or "It's in a hot area."
- **Listen to your instincts.** Does something about the landlord bother you? Do you feel like the apartment has all the things you wanted, but just aren't sold on calling it home? Are you bothered by the weird smell in the hallway but dismiss it as no big deal? Trust your gut feeling because often times there may be a reason for it.

How can consumers increase their chances of getting the apartment they want?

- **Be proactive.** Ask for a rental application ahead of time and fill it out completely before you meet the landlord.
- **Get references from previous landlords.** Have them put in writing your good habits of paying rent on time, taking good care of the apartment and not breaking any property rules.

What should a lease generally cover?

- 1) Length of time from move in to move out
- 2) What utilities are paid for by the consumer and by the apartment company
- 3) The cost of rent per month including when late fees occur and how much
- 4) The cost of the security deposit and a timeframe for receiving it back after you move out
- 5) A pet policy
- 6) Information on subleasing and breaking the lease
- 7) The repair policy in case items break
- 8) Any discounts promised by the property manager or sales staff that would affect the usual price of rent or utilities
- 9) If renter's insurance is required. If the apartment company has its own policy, make sure to know what you are getting. Does the policy cover replacement cost of new items or the actual cash value?

Remember, a lease is considered a contract between the landlord and tenant, so make sure you read through the document carefully before signing. If there are any areas that you have questions on or disagree with, talk to the landlord about them to see if there is room for negotiation. Signing the lease means that you agree to all the terms set in the document.

How can consumers make sure they get their security deposit back?

BBB commonly receives complaints from consumers who feel their previous apartment company withheld too much of their security deposit.

If the landlord is keeping money from the deposit, they must let you know why and how much.

Ask for an itemized list of deductions to make sure you were not overcharged for simple repairs or cleaning.