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Fraudsters target bed and breakfast

Auckland bed and breakfast operators Anthony and Marlene **McAnulty** want to alert other businesses to an internet scam that would have implicated them in an elaborate fraud.

The couple, who run the **Eden Park** Bed and Breakfast in central Auckland, appear to have been the target of a scam that recently prompted a warning from America's leading crime-fighting agency.

The fraud involves a person or organisation requesting a reservation and providing credit card details to pay a deposit.

In addition, they ask the business to debit an extra amount of money for airfares and wire the cash to an overseas travel agency.

They explain their travel agent has no credit card facility and the bed and breakfast would be helping them out by charging the extra amount to the credit card and then wiring the money to the agent's bank account.

Mr and Mrs **McAnulty** said they might have fallen for the scam if they had not received two similar emails within days of each other.

The first booking came from a man who said he wanted four rooms for a group from the Ivory Coast.

Once the booking had been organised, he asked for an extra \$3000 to be wired to a travel agency in the African country.

The second booking came from "Miguel Ruiz", seeking accommodation for pastors visiting New Zealand on an "evangelical/pastoral mission" in June and July this year.

Ruiz asked the couple to charge a credit card with an extra \$4750 and wire the money through to a travel agent in London.

The credit card number provided was checked and cleared for use but Mr **McAnulty** said it might have been recently stolen and not reported.

"The first time it sounded a bit strange but obviously you're talking [a reservation] and it's all good. That was when the second email arrived with the same type of story but a different tack. That's when the alarm bells started to ring."

He expects the next step would have been for the fraudsters to ask for their "deposit" back.

"You would lose everything but possibly have the fraud squad knocking on your door," said Mr **McAnulty**.

The FBI last month issued a warning about a "rash of e-mails" sent to bed and breakfast establishments throughout the United States.

The emails requested reservations and sending cashiers' cheques in excess of the amount due.