

Press Release

Two Cousins Plead Guilty to Federal Crimes in Connection with Nationwide Online Short-Term Rental Booking Scam

Tuesday, April 14, 2026

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Central District of California

LOS ANGELES – Two cousins – one from Southern California, the other from Colorado – pleaded guilty today to federal crimes related to a double-booking, bait-and-switch scam run nationwide through online short-term property rental platforms.

Shray Goel, 37, of Calabasas, pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud. Shaunik Raheja, 36, of Denver, pleaded guilty to one count of obstruction of justice.

According to their plea agreements, in 2013, Goel and Raheja started an online business, listing properties for short-term rental through online platforms. They operated the business under various legal entities and business names, including Abbot Pacific LLC and Jet Set Work LLC.

The defendants rented properties nationwide, including in Marina del Rey, the Venice neighborhood of Los Angeles, and Malibu as well as San Diego; Chicago; Cleveland; Dallas; Denver; Milwaukee; Bloomington, Indiana; South Bend, Indiana; Savannah, Georgia; Nashville, Tennessee; and Austin, Texas.

From October 2017 to November 2019, Goel and Raheja used fake host names and, in certain instances, other people's identities to list properties. They used these fake host accounts to conceal their own identities, to double-book properties, and to post fabricated positive reviews of their properties. They also used the fake host accounts to continue to list properties after one online platform banned them in 2015 because of repeated host cancellations and guest complaints.

In some cases, Goel and Raheja listed fake addresses, addresses that did not have any rental housing, were unaffiliated with the schemers, or did not exist at all – using these fake addresses to create duplicate listings for a single purported property. The fake addresses also allowed them to evade local rules and regulations governing short-term rentals, and to control who had access to properties.

The crux of the scheme was a double-booking-bait-and-switch practice. To carry out the scheme, Goel and Raheja posted multiple listings of the same property, listing the same property multiple times on a single platform and cross listing the property on multiple

platforms. This was done, in part, to maximize the price they could charge for their rentals – by listing different daily rates for the same property and renting to the guest that booked at the highest price. The defendants also did not block calendars of competing listings after a property had been booked and continued to list the booked property as being available for rental on the booked dates.

After a listing had been booked the defendants chose which – if any – guest to host. For an overbooked guest – or a guest they did not want to host – the defendants lied to the guest about why a booked property was unavailable. These false excuses included that the property had a plumbing problem or some other unforeseen issue. The defendants then cancelled the reservation, convinced the guest to cancel, or switched the guest to a different property.

To further their fraud, Goel and Raheja took steps to discredit negative reviews, and they otherwise tried to hide negative reviews from prospective future guests. They posted bogus negative reviews about the guests who panned their listings or called out the fraudulent and deceptive listing practices, and they removed negatively reviewed listings and then re-listed the properties using new listing identifiers, thereby removing the bad reviews.

Goel and Raheja used these and other lies and misrepresentations to trick guests into booking properties they would not have otherwise booked and to profit at the expense of guests and the rental platforms. The last-minute nature of the cancellations also caused guests and the rental platforms to suffer losses when guests were forced to find alternative lodging at the last minute.

Raheja admitted in his plea agreement to lying in April 2023 to federal law enforcement officials investigating the scheme. Raheja falsely stated that he never intentionally overbooked properties and that he was not aware of any intentional overbooking.

United States District Judge Wesley L. Hsu scheduled an August 14 sentencing hearing for Goel, who will face a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison. Judge Hsu scheduled a September 11 sentencing hearing for Raheja, who will face a statutory maximum sentence of 10 years in federal prison.

The FBI and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Office of Inspector General investigated this matter with assistance from the Federal Housing Finance Agency Office of Inspector General.

Assistant United States Attorneys Kerry L. Quinn and David Y. Pi of the Major Frauds Section are prosecuting this case.

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