

GUIDELINES ON OVERSEAS VISITS BY MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES

Ministers and parliamentary secretaries (ministers) may need to travel overseas for a variety of reasons, eg, to undertake negotiations and discussions with overseas counterparts, to put Australia's view at international meetings, to represent Australia on significant occasions and to gain first hand experience in areas of relevance to their duties.

The following guidelines for overseas visits by ministers outline the process involved in arranging visits and provide guidance on the sorts of issues that need to be taken into account when ministers are considering overseas travel.

Travel Proposals:

1. The Prime Minister is responsible for final approval of official overseas travel by all ministers, their spouses and their staff.
2. The Prime Minister will, normally twice a year, invite portfolio ministers to submit to him an outline of the travel proposals envisaged in their portfolios for the following twelve months. In May/June each year, the Prime Minister will approve a programme which covers the first six months of the financial year and will advise ministers of his in-principle approval for visits included in the ministerial overseas travel programme. The situation will be reviewed in November/December in order to settle the second half of the programme.
3. In first submitting proposals, ministers should take the following into account:
 - (a) proposals should indicate the purpose of each visit and the expected dates of departure and return. It is not always possible to predict the dates of visits some months ahead, but the information should be as comprehensive as possible
 - (b) proposals should be related to specific outcomes and should include only the highest priority visits where the purpose of the visit and involvement at ministerial level can be clearly and publicly demonstrated as essential
 - (c) the lengths of trips, the duration of absences from Australia and the costs of visits should be kept to a minimum
 - (d) priorities should be set and travel minimised through consultation within and across portfolios
 - (e) ministers should seek to combine visits, where appropriate, to reduce the overall number of overseas visits. Separate visits should not be planned for business which could more economically be included in one itinerary. Similarly, visits should not be extended to accommodate business which would be more effectively included in separate itineraries
 - (f) ministers who regularly attend international meetings should aim to tie their other essential travel in with these meetings if possible
 - (g) absences should be planned so as not to clash with parliamentary sitting periods or Cabinet or other (eg Budget) commitments

- (h) in portfolios with more than one minister, no more than one minister should be absent overseas at any one time, and
 - (i) to assist with the co-ordination of Australia's trade and investment effort, those visits which have trade and investment implications should be clearly indicated.
- 4. Subsequent to receiving in-principle approval, at least three weeks prior to departure ministers should write to the Prime Minister seeking confirmation of his approval and providing details of:
 - (a) the visit's purpose and itinerary (including details of meetings, and activities to be undertaken)
 - (b) the accompanying party
 - (c) flight and accommodation details
 - (d) comprehensive costings for the visit
 - (e) confirmation from the minister or their chief of staff that the most cost effective proposal has been put forward for consideration, and
 - (f) acting ministerial arrangements.
- 5. Submissions for parliamentary secretary travel must advise that the proposal is supported by the relevant portfolio minister (acting ministerial arrangements are not required for parliamentary secretaries).
- 6. The Department of Finance will issue travel warrants and allowance payments on receipt of a copy of the Prime Minister's response giving final approval for a visit.
- 7. In addition to the twice-yearly bids process, ministers may make ad hoc travel proposals as circumstances arise. Ad hoc travel proposals will be processed as final requests, not requiring in-principle approval, but will require the same level of detail as listed above.

Class of Travel:

- 8. Ministers are required to travel at a class no higher than business class on flights. If upgrades are provided, they must be declared in the usual way. However, there will be occasions where airlines offer two classes of travel only. On those occasions, where first class travel is equivalent to business class, travel at first class is permitted.
- 9. Frequent flyer points should not be used to upgrade the class of travel. However, ministers are encouraged to use frequent flyer points to offset the cost of travel.

Spouse Travel:

- 10. As a general rule, ministers should not be accompanied by their spouses on official overseas travel. Approval for a minister's spouse to travel on an official visit will be given only in exceptional circumstances and where:
 - (a) a host country or the organisation hosting the event which the minister is attending has extended an invitation to the spouse, and

- (b) where an official programme of engagements has been organised by the host government or host organisation to undertake over the period of the visit.
- 11. The spouse programme must be independent of the minister's programme. It is not sufficient to include a spouse in the minister's existing programme of meetings. The travel must be justified and defensible. An accompanying spouse must travel on the same itinerary as the minister. Children or family members should not accompany a minister on official overseas travel unless exceptional circumstances exist and the Prime Minister has approved the travel.
- 12. In the exceptional circumstances that spouse travel is approved, ministers and their spouses should travel business class. The Government will meet the cost of fares, accommodation and meal expenses incurred by spouses during official visits.

Accompanying Staff:

- 13. Ministers are normally entitled to be accompanied by one staff member. Additional staff support is rarely required because:
 - (a) Australian diplomatic posts overseas provide assistance with briefing and administrative support during ministerial visits, and
 - (b) departmental staff may accompany ministers and parliamentary secretaries on overseas visits (at departmental expense) to provide advice and administrative support.
- 14. Departmental Liaison Officers are expected not to travel overseas with ministers.
- 15. The one staff member should accompany the minister on the entire official visit rather than different staff members travelling on different legs of the visit.
- 16. Ministerial staff are not permitted to travel overseas on government business independently of their ministers, unless approved by the Prime Minister.
- 17. Accompanying staff are entitled to travel at a class no higher than business class. Refer to paragraphs 8 and 9.

Sponsored Travel:

- 18. Ministers should not accept, for themselves or their families, offers of sponsored overseas travel from any source, whether connected directly with their responsibilities or not, without the express approval of the Prime Minister.

General:

- 19. Ministers are on duty full-time when travelling overseas, although their itineraries may include a reasonable number of rest days. Ministers may request approval to take leave while overseas, but the period of leave must not be excessive and the visit must be clearly defensible in terms of the official business undertaken. All costs associated with a minister's leave are to be met by the minister. If a minister commences leave at the conclusion of an official programme, return travel to Australia is to be from the final destination of the original approved itinerary.
- 20. Overseas travel should be by normal commercial means. Overseas travel by Special Purpose Aircraft (SPA) or charter aircraft will be considered only where it is

absolutely necessary and commercial travel is not feasible, noting that the Guidelines for use of Special Purpose Aircraft set out the factors approving authorities must take into account. Costings for SPA use are to be provided when submitting the proposal.

21. Representation of ministers overseas by backbench members or senators will be considered only in exceptional circumstances. Parliamentary secretaries may travel as ministers' representatives if required. Ministers should not approach backbenchers about travel without having first obtained the Prime Minister's approval.
22. Ministers should not invite Opposition members to attend functions overseas without first having obtained the Prime Minister's approval.
23. Overseas travel by ministers, parliamentary secretaries and backbenchers representing ministers is funded under an appropriation that specifically indicates it is to be used for this purpose or under legislation authorising the payment of costs for a member of parliament. It must not be funded under departmental appropriations.

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