



Australian Government

GUIDELINES ON OVERSEAS VISITS BY MINISTERS

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GUIDELINES ON OVERSEAS VISITS BY MINISTERS

Ministers (including Parliamentary Secretaries or Assistant 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 to take 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.
 - (a) The Prime Minister may delegate authority for approval, for example to the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff.
2. Portfolio ministers will be asked, once a year, to submit an outline of the travel proposals envisaged in their portfolios for the following financial year, for information and to assist forward planning of ministerial travel priorities.
3. When planning overseas travel, ministers are expected to take the following into account:
 - (a) visits relate to specific outcomes and the purpose of the visit and involvement at ministerial level can be clearly and publicly demonstrated as essential
 - (b) the lengths of trips, the duration of absences from Australia and the costs of visits are kept to a minimum
 - (c) priorities are set and travel minimised through consultation within and across portfolios
 - (d) ministers seek to combine visits, where appropriate, to reduce the overall number of overseas visits. Separate visits are not planned for business which could more economically be included in one itinerary. Similarly, visits are not extended to accommodate business which could be more effectively included in separate itineraries
 - (e) ministers who regularly attend international meetings aim to tie their other essential travel in with these meetings if possible
 - (f) absences do not to clash with parliamentary sitting periods or Cabinet or other (eg Budget) commitments, if possible
4. Ministers are expected to submit a request for approval for each proposed overseas visit at least three weeks prior to departure, 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
 - (f) acting ministerial arrangements
 - (g) if the visit involves absence from Parliament, leave sought from the relevant Whip
 - (h) if the visit coincides with scheduled Cabinet meetings, arrangements made for secure remote participation.
5. Requests for Assistant Ministers' travel are expected to advise that the proposal is supported by the relevant portfolio minister (acting ministerial arrangements are not required for Assistant Ministers).
6. The Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority will issue travel warrants and allowance payments on receipt of a copy of the Prime Minister's approval for a visit.

Class of Travel:

7. Ministers are expected to travel at a class no higher than business class on flights. If upgrades are provided, they are declared in the usual way. However, when airlines offer two classes of travel only and first class travel is equivalent to business class, travel at first class is acceptable.
8. Frequent flyer points are not used to upgrade the class of travel. However, ministers are encouraged to use frequent flyer points to offset the cost of travel.

Spouse Travel:

9. As a general rule, ministers are only accompanied by their spouses on official overseas travel in exceptional circumstances, including where there are unique representational responsibilities, or 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) an official programme of engagements has been organised by the host government or host organisation to undertake over the period of the visit.
10. An accompanying spouse is expected to travel on the same itinerary as the minister. Accompanying spouses are expected to travel at a class no higher than business class. The Government will meet the cost of fares, accommodation and meal expenses incurred by spouses during official visits.
11. There may be occasions when a Minister seeks to be accompanied by a spouse at no additional cost to the Commonwealth.
12. Children or family members are not expected to accompany a minister on official overseas travel unless exceptional circumstances exist and when specifically approved by the Prime Minister.

Accompanying Staff:

13. The number of staff expected to routinely accompany a Cabinet minister on overseas travel is two personal staff, in recognition of the fact that ministers often require the support of, for example, a media and policy adviser to adequately meet the demands of their visit programme.
14. Other ministers are normally 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 on overseas visits (at departmental expense) to provide advice and administrative support.
15. Departmental Liaison Officers are not expected to travel overseas with ministers.
16. The staff member/s are expected to accompany the minister on the entire official visit as far as practicable, rather than different staff members travelling on different legs of the visit.
17. Ministerial staff are not expected to travel overseas on government business independently of their minister, unless specifically approved by the Prime Minister.
- (a) On occasions when ministerial staff accompany their minister on overseas visits and staff travel part of a journey independently of their minister for logistical reasons, approval is not required.
18. Accompanying staff are expected to travel at a class no higher than business class.

Sponsored Travel:

19. Ministers are not to 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:

20. 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 if the period of leave is not excessive and the visit is clearly defensible in terms of the official business undertaken. All costs associated with a minister's leave are met by the minister.
21. Overseas travel is usually by 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 expected to be provided when submitting the proposal.
22. Representation of ministers overseas by backbench members or senators will be considered only in exceptional circumstances. An Assistant Minister may travel as a Minister's representative if required. Ministers are not expected to approach backbenchers about travel without first having obtained the Prime Minister's approval.
23. Ministers are not to invite Opposition members to attend functions overseas without first having obtained the Prime Minister's approval.
24. Overseas travel by ministers 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, not under departmental appropriations.

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