



STATE GOVERNMENT OF VICTORIA

MINISTERIAL GUIDELINES FOR OFFICIAL INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

PREFACE

Official international travel by Ministers is an essential tool to promote Victoria's strengths, enhance knowledge and to develop strategic relationships that facilitate access to important markets.

These *Ministerial Guidelines for Official International Travel* (the Guidelines) provide the strategic framework under which Ministers apply for, plan, conduct and report on official international travel, ensuring travel delivers maximum value for Victoria.

Enquiries relating to these Guidelines can be directed to the Department of Premier and Cabinet's (DPC) International team.

SCOPE OF GUIDELINES

- 1) The Guidelines apply to official international travel for (hereafter referred to as 'travellers'):
 - a) Ministers
 - b) Parliamentary Secretaries when representing a Minister
 - c) Ministerial staff
- 2) Parliamentary Secretaries may travel overseas to represent the government only as the delegate of the relevant Minister with the written approval of the Premier. Parliamentary Secretaries may only accompany a Minister where the visit is directly related to the Minister's official portfolio responsibilities.
- 3) Parliamentarians travelling overseas on parliamentary or electorate business are not covered by these Guidelines. International travel by Members of Parliament (MP) is instead subject to the Members of Parliament (Victoria) Guidelines.
 - a) MPs should always engage the Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as early as possible when developing travel plans.
- 4) Victorian Public Service (VPS) staff are not covered by these Guidelines. When accompanying Ministers on official international visits, VPS staff are subject to relevant VPS policies and guidelines for travel.
- 5) The Guidelines do not apply to travel undertaken by the Governor of Victoria at the request of the Government.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 6) Official ministerial international travel must be undertaken in accordance with these Guidelines and other policy and legislative frameworks for conduct by Ministers and their staff, including the *Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978*, the Ministerial Code of Conduct and the Ministerial Staff Code of Conduct.

- 7) Where appropriate and within their powers, Ministers will undertake whole-of-government representation, in addition to their portfolio responsibilities, to maximise the value of their international travel.
- 8) All official international travel must be coordinated, strategic, align with government priorities and meet community expectations. This helps to ensure travel presents value for money and the duration of absences from Victoria are minimised.
- 9) Travel must be linked to time-sensitive and tangible outcomes, where ministerial representation can be demonstrated as necessary. Trip objectives must demonstrate that overseas travel is the optimal way in which objectives could be achieved. These objectives may include:
 - a) *Advancing formal partnerships with international governmental, industry, and other stakeholders, including by negotiating or finalising agreements.*
 - b) *Enhancing Victoria's reputation as an attractive destination to live, work, study, and do business, including by encouraging stronger international trade and investment ties.*
 - c) *Progressing the Victorian Government's economic, cultural, and/or diplomatic policy interests, including through representing the State at major international events, advancing knowledge in areas of strategic interest, and connecting Victorian businesses and institutions with global partners.*
 - d) *Facilitating institutional and people-to-people relationships with key international partners, including by forging senior ties with government stakeholders and promoting knowledge, cultural, education, and arts exchanges that build understanding and Victoria's capabilities.*

DEVELOPMENT OF TRAVEL PLANS

- 10) When developing travel plans, a Minister's department(s) should engage DPC as early as possible.
 - a) DPC's International team will provide advice relating to proposed travel plans and whole-of-government considerations.
 - b) DPC can assist departments to engage other Victorian Government, Commonwealth Government, and external stakeholders to support trip planning and delivery.
- 11) Travel plans should be coordinated through consultation within and across a Minister's portfolios. Where Ministers travel in more than one portfolio capacity, they should identify a clear departmental lead for planning which can coordinate with the other relevant department(s) as necessary. In general, lead departments will be those with the portfolio area most relevant to the reason for travel.
- 12) Ministers should be aware of obligations under the *Australia's Foreign Relations (State and Territory Relations) Act 2020* when planning international travel, which include notifying the Minister for Foreign Affairs of an intention to negotiate or enter into a foreign arrangement. Ministers planning to pursue foreign arrangements while overseas should seek advice from DPC as early as practicable.

APPROVAL OF TRAVEL

- 13) The Premier must approve all official ministerial international travel and may request Ministers to amend travel plans at any point in the approval process.
- 14) The application and approval process for international travel consists of two stages:
 - a) **Stage One:** Lodgement of a 12-month forward schedule of proposed travel for in-principle consideration and approval.
 - b) **Stage Two:** Lodgement of more detailed travel requests for final approval. This should be lodged at least 20 working days prior to travel.
- 15) A summary of the two-part application process and the reporting process is at Attachment A.

Stage One: Applications for in-principle approval

- 16) The process is coordinated by DPC, and will generally be conducted twice per year, designed to create a rolling 12-month schedule enabling the Premier to consider travel plans from a whole-of-government perspective. It also allows Ministers to strategically review their travel priorities every six months.
- 17) Stage One applications are submitted using the table at Attachment B and assessed against the strategic objectives and guiding principles of the Guidelines.

Stage Two: Applications for final travel approval

- 18) Ministers who have been granted in-principle approval for travel then write to the Premier seeking final approval using the template at Attachment C.
- 19) Applications are assessed against the Guidelines, with a focus on costs and alignment with the objectives set out in Stage One above. The Premier then writes to Ministers indicating their decision on the second, final application.
- 20) DPC must be consulted on any significant variations to Ministers' travel plans. Significant variations include changes to the accompanying travellers, the purpose of the travel, the countries being visited or major cost increases.

Approval of travel without prior in-principle approval

- 21) In exceptional circumstances, Ministers may seek to travel at short notice to capitalise on emerging opportunities. Under these circumstances, Ministers must write to the Premier as soon as practicable seeking approval to travel, using the process outlined in Stage Two above, including use of template at Attachment C.
 - a) When planning to undertake international travel at short notice, Ministers' departments should engage with DPC as soon as is practicable.
- 22) In such an application, Ministers must include an explanation of why the travel is urgent and why it was not foreseen in during Stage One of the approval process.

ACCOMPANYING TRAVELLERS

- 23) Applications for final travel approval must include the details of all accompanying ministerial staff and/or partners, with clear reasons for each individual travelling with the Minister.
- 24) Unless in exceptional circumstances, a spouse or de facto partner must not accompany a Minister on official international travel. Should a spouse or de

factor partner intend to accompany a Minister on official travel, DPC should be notified as soon as possible.

- a) For example, a Minister may consider requesting a spouse or de facto partner accompany them on official international travel when it could be considered culturally offensive to attend key program engagements unaccompanied, because the host and their spouse or de facto partner will be in attendance.

25) The number of ministerial staff accompanying a Minister for some or all of an international trip must be kept to a minimum and be in line with the objectives of the official travel.

26) Where a Minister seeks to be joined on their travel by a public service body Head, such as a departmental Secretary, the responsible department will need to consider whether acting arrangements are necessary. This will depend in part on whether the Head will be exercising their powers and responsibilities under the *Public Administration Act 2004* while overseas.

EXPENSES AND ENTITLEMENTS

27) Where possible, all expenses (including airfares, accommodation, insurance, surface transport, passports, vaccinations, visas, hospitality and international roaming) must be paid in advance of travel.

28) It is appropriate for Ministers to travel business class and on fully flexible fares.

29) Expenses for official travel will be met by the relevant ministerial office and department(s), and expenditure levels should be prudent. All costs will be publicly scrutinised and must be reasonable in that context. Travellers must pay for any personal expenses that they incur. The relevant Department finance team is responsible for providing further advice.

30) In many cases, travel insurance is covered automatically through the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA). Ministers are responsible for ensuring that they have appropriate travel insurance.

Travel and Accommodation Standards

31) Accompanying travellers are eligible to use Business Class when undertaking official international travel.

32) Unless in exceptional circumstances, flight and accommodation bookings must be made through the Victorian Government's travel services provider and with regard to maintaining appropriate costs. Further information on this and other expenses is available through the Buying for Victoria¹ website. Government discount rates (including those available through DFAT and the Victorian Government travel services provider) must be used where available.

33) Accommodation must be of an appropriate business standard (e.g. facilities to support meetings and or workstations). Where possible, advice on suitable accommodation should be sought from relevant Victoria Government Trade and Investment (VGTI) offices. DPC can assist with engaging Global Victoria, which manages the VGTIs.

¹ Buying for Victoria website can be accessed at buyingfor.vic.gov.au

Travel Allowances and Reimbursements

- 34) Travel allowances are payable in advance for the cost of meals and incidental personal expenses. Allowances are calculated according to the ECA² International rates, which change according to the country visited.
- 35) Reasonable, travel-related out of pocket expenses may be reimbursed when receipts or evidence of expenditure is produced.
- 36) Official expenses, such as hospitality within the visit program, will not be paid under a travel allowance.
- 37) The Department of Government Services can calculate travel allowances and provide departments' finance areas with guidance on ECA rates and reimbursements.

Loyalty and Club / Lounge programs

- 38) Existing memberships of airline club lounges and loyalty programs may be used during official overseas travel. However, such memberships must not be the determining factor in airline selection.
- 39) Any frequent flyer points (or similar) accumulated by travellers undertaking official overseas travel can only be used for membership of airline club lounges or for further official travel and must not be redeemed for personal use.
- 40) Access to airline club lounges is usually included in business class tickets. As Ministers have access to business class travel, there is no need for departments to purchase lounge memberships on behalf of Ministers.

Sponsored travel

- 41) Ministers may sometimes be invited to undertake official overseas travel funded partly or wholly by a non-Victorian Government entity (for example, at the invitation of a foreign government or international organisation).
- 42) Such 'sponsored travel' for Ministers and any accompanying travellers should only be considered in exceptional circumstances, and where there is no perceived or real conflict of interest.
- 43) Sponsorship must be explicitly called out in the application submitted to the Premier, and can only be accepted with the written approval of the Premier.
- 44) Ministers must also declare sponsored travel in accordance with the *Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978* and relevant obligations outlined in the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

PERSONAL LEAVE

- 45) As a rule, personal leave should not be taken while on official overseas travel and may only be approved with the written approval of the Premier.
- 46) A Minister's requests for leave while undertaking official travel must be included in that Minister's final application to the Premier.
- 47) All costs associated with any approved leave are to be personally met by the relevant Minister and/or staff.

² ECA is a company which provides information and advice on terms and conditions for staff employed abroad. ECA's international rates are widely used by governments and companies around the world. DGS holds a subscription to ECA on behalf of the Victorian Government.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- 48) Ministers must submit a comprehensive post-travel report outlining the full costs of travel, details of the ministerial travelling party and the outcomes and benefits of the travel to the Premier for approval.
- 49) Reports must be developed using the template at Attachment D and sent to the Premier within 40 working days of the Minister's return from the associated official international trip.
- 50) Ministers are responsible for the content, accuracy and timeliness of reports. Reports that are inaccurate or inadequate will be returned for amendment.
- 51) Premier-approved reports must be published on the relevant departmental website, and this should be within 60 working days of the Minister's return.

PASSPORTS, SAFETY, AND SECURITY

- 52) Ministers are entitled to a diplomatic passport, while Ministerial staff are entitled to an official passport when accompanying a Minister on official travel.
 - a) Ministers and accompanying travellers are responsible for ensuring they have the correct documentation and permissions to travel, including visas.
- 53) The safety of Ministers and accompanying travellers is paramount. Travel risks, including security, safety, health, natural disasters or legal risks, should be considered and regularly monitored with reference to the DFAT travel advisories on the Smart Traveller website (www.smartraveller.gov.au).
 - a) DPC must be consulted as soon as practicable on travel proposed to regions or countries where the DFAT travel alert rating is at the "reconsider your need to travel" or "do not travel" level.
- 54) Ministers and their travelling parties must take reasonable steps to protect sensitive Victorian Government information and technology.
 - a) In planning ministerial travel, departments should engage with their relevant Information and Communications Technology teams to understand which devices are appropriate for travellers to take overseas and how these can be securely used.
 - b) Suspicious approaches or contacts should be reported to the relevant security team and/or local Australian diplomatic mission.

REVIEW OF GUIDELINES

- 55) In consultation with departments, DPC International will monitor the implementation of the Guidelines and regularly assess their effectiveness. Variations to the Guidelines may be approved at the Premier's discretion.