# Guidelines on Official Overseas Travel by Ministers

## General

1. The following guidance applies to Ministers (including Parliamentary Under-Secretaries) travelling on official business overseas.
2. Official travel overseas by Ministers can provide important benefits to their portfolios and New Zealand generally. Ministers may consider travelling overseas in relation to their portfolios for one or more of the following purposes where there will be a clear benefit to New Zealand:
   1. to attend specific conferences, meetings or events;
   2. to familiarise themselves with specific issues;
   3. to meet international obligations;
   4. to represent New Zealand on significant occasions.
3. When planning overseas travel, Ministers should take the following into account:
   1. visits relate to specific outcomes, and the purpose of the visit and involvement at Ministerial level can be clearly and publicly demonstrated;
   2. the length of time out of New Zealand and costs are kept to a minimum;
   3. priorities are set and travel is minimised through consultation with other Ministers to reduce the overall number of overseas visits. Ministers should seek to combine visits, where appropriate;
   4. Ministers who regularly attend international meetings aim to tie their other essential travel in with these meetings, if possible;
   5. absences on parliamentary sitting days and from Cabinet meetings are minimised, when possible.
4. It is usual practice for no more than four Cabinet Ministers to be absent from New Zealand on official business at the same time. The Prime Minister may approve exceptions to this in special circumstances. [2.125 Cabinet Manual]

## Approval process

1. The Prime Minister’s approval in-principle is required for all proposed overseas travel. No commitment or understanding may be entered into before this preliminary approval is given. [2.123 Cabinet Manual]
2. Where there is any doubt about travel to a particular destination, the request must be supported by a recommendation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs.   
   [2.124 Cabinet Manual]
3. Ministers should write to the Prime Minister seeking in-principle approval for any overseas travel well in advance where possible. The in-principle approval request should include the following details (where possible):
   1. intended travel dates and purpose of travel (including expected meetings, events to be attended, activities to be undertaken);
   2. composition of the travelling party;
   3. estimated travel costs, and how the travel will be funded (Ministerial travel is generally funded from “Vote Internal Affairs (Members of the Executive – Travel));
   4. Ministers who will act in the travelling Minister’s portfolio(s) during their absence. (Acting Ministers are not usually required for Associate or Parliamentary Under-Secretary portfolios as these responsibilities revert to the primary portfolio Minister);
   5. whether leave from Parliament has been sought/approved by the Party Whip if the House is sitting during the Minister’s absence.
4. Any proposal that a Minister accept payment of international airfares or other travel-related costs by another country or international organisation must be approved by the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. [2.127 Cabinet Manual]
5. Once the Prime Minister has approved the proposed travel in-principle, a paper setting out the information in paragraphs 7.1 to 7.5 and paragraph 8 above must be submitted to Cabinet for formal approval. [2.123 Cabinet Manual]
6. Cabinet’s approval is not required for proposed travel to Australia or the Ross Dependency in Antarctica. Only the Prime Minister’s written approval is required. [2.123 Cabinet Manual]

## Class of Travel

1. Ministers are expected to travel no higher than business class on international flights.   
   First-class travel is only acceptable where business class is not available or where a complimentary upgrade is offered.
2. Ministers may not downgrade their own business class ticket in order to fund another person’s travel. The use of business class travel ensures Ministers are ready to commence work immediately upon arrival.

## Airpoints

1. Members of Parliament are automatically members of the Air New Zealand Airpoints programme.
2. Ministers are strongly encouraged to use any Airpoints earned from Vote funded sources to offset travel costs that would otherwise be a charge to the Vote.

## Sponsored Travel

1. Any proposals for bodies other than government organisations to fund travel, accommodation or expenses incurred by a Minister should be assessed in light of the Cabinet Manual guidance on public duty and personal interests of Ministers (in particular paragraphs 2.59, 2.63 and 2.64), and on gifts (paragraphs 2.88 to 2.93). The Secretary of the Cabinet is available for advice. [2.128 Cabinet Manual]

## Accompanying Ministers/MPs

1. When a delegation of Ministers travel overseas, the Lead Minister is responsible for submitting all paperwork relating to the approval and reporting of travel on behalf of the delegation.
2. On occasion, it may be appropriate for Ministers to be accompanied overseas by other Members of Parliament. In these instances, the Lead Minister is responsible for submitting all paperwork relating to the approval and reporting of travel.
3. On some occasions, a Minister may propose that a Member of Parliament travel on behalf of the Minister. In these instances, the Minister is responsible for submitting all paperwork relating to the approval and reporting of travel.

## Accompanying staff and officials

1. Ministers travelling overseas may be accompanied by staff from their own offices and/or department officials. The number of accompanying staff must be kept to an absolute minimum and should be determined in light of the nature of the visit [2.130 Cabinet Manual].
2. Proposals should make it clear how the travel of any officials accompanying the Minister will be funded.

## Accompanying spouses/partners, family member or support person

1. It may be appropriate for a Minister to be accompanied by a spouse, partner, or family member as a member of the official party with costs met by the Crown. Approval is not given automatically; the Prime Minister will consider requests case by case.   
   [2.129, Cabinet Manual]
2. Consideration may also be given for a support person to accompany a Minister on official overseas travel.
3. Circumstances that may be considered appropriate for a Minister to be accompanied by a spouse/partner, family member or support person include:
   1. the attendance of a spouse/partner at an event is expected for protocol reasons;
   2. the host nation has extended an invitation to a spouse/partner;
   3. a specific programme for spouses is being offered at a Ministerial event;
   4. where there is a public interest in New Zealand ministerial representation including a spouse/partner (such as significant international commemorations);
   5. the Minister requires additional support while travelling (such as due to an injury or impairment, or to assist with caring for an infant).
4. The accompanying person must travel on the same itinerary as the Minister, if travelling as part of the official party.
5. Children or other family members are not expected to accompany Ministers on official travel unless there are exceptional circumstances and must be specifically approved by the Prime Minister.
6. A Minister may also seek approval for a spouse/partner, family member or support person to accompany them on official travel at their own cost.
7. Proposals should make it clear how the travel of the accompanying person will be funded.

## Personal travel overseas

1. Ministers may occasionally extend overseas visits outside the formal itinerary for personal reasons, subject to the Prime Minister’s approval, and provided no additional costs are incurred by the government as a result. [2.132 Cabinet Manual]
2. Any extension to official overseas travel for personal reasons must be noted in the paper seeking Cabinet approval.
3. Ministers may make personal visits overseas, subject to the Prime Minister’s approval, obtaining leave from the House, and the agreement of Ministers to act in such absences. The Cabinet Office should be advised of such absences. [2.133 Cabinet Manual]

## Reporting on Overseas Travel

1. Ministers must report to Cabinet on the achievements and outcomes of their overseas travel within one month of their return. Reporting on overseas travel is not required for travel to Australia (unless for a significant bilateral visit) or to the Ross Dependency in Antarctica. [2.131 Cabinet Manual]