

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **GENERAL TRAVEL**

**Q. I have travel for official business, how do I get started?**

A. Official travel requires an approved authorization. An authorization must be created and approved in the agency's official electronic travel system, Concur, prior to traveling. For information on how to use the system, click here [Concur Tri-Fold](#)

**Q: How do I pay for my trip?**

A: FSIS covers the costs of official travel; however, travel can be funded in a number of ways. Frequent travelers must use a Government Travel Card for **booking and paying for reservations. Infrequent travelers may either request** a Travel Card, an advance for expenses not paid by the agency's central account such as per diem and hotel accommodations, or pay their expenses upfront and allow the agency to reimburse them upon submitting their travel voucher.

**Q. When I am on official travel, what expenses am I allowed to claim?**

A: Travelers are allowed to claim: transportation (air, train, privately- or government-owned vehicle, taxi, rental car); per diem expenses; miscellaneous expenses (baggage services, computer/scanner/printer/fax machine, official telephone calls, laundry, lodgings tax (energy, surcharge, and fees (when fees are not optional; and travel expenses of an employee with special needs)). However, the traveler's approving official must approve all claims for travel expenses before they can be paid by the agency.

**Q: What does CONUS mean?**

A: CONUS is an acronym for Continental United States. (It includes the 48 contiguous States and the District of Columbia).

**Q: What if I am traveling outside of the United States?**

A: Travel outside CONUS includes the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands, situated both outside CONUS and the *Non-foreign area*—The states of Alaska and Hawaii, the Commonwealths of Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the territories and possessions of the United States (excludes the former Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands, which are considered foreign areas. Travel outside CONUS has additional requirements not necessary for travel within CONUS (i.e., passport, visa, country clearances). For information on foreign travel, click here <https://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/emp/static/centerContent/fsisPage.jsp?keyword=ForeignTravelFAQ1052>

**Q. What is per diem?**

A. Per diem is the allowance for lodging (excluding taxes), meals and incidental expenses. The meals and incidentals portion of per diem is also referred to as M&IE. **The per diem rate is different by city, county, and state.**

**Q. How do I find the per diem rate for (city/county, state)?**

A. Please visit [www.gsa.gov/perdiem](http://www.gsa.gov/perdiem) to find the rates. Click on the state you need to view that state's rates. If the city or county you are looking for is not listed, then the standard CONUS rate of \$77 for lodging and \$46 for meals applies.

**Q. Can hotels refuse to honor the per diem rate to federal government employees and federal government contractors?**

A. Hotels are not required to honor the federal per diem rates. It is each property's business decision whether or not to offer the rate. Travel expenses over the reimbursements limits

established in the Federal Travel Regulation are referred to as "Actual Subsistence". All requests for Actual Subsistence MUST be approved by the FSIS Office of the Administrator well in advance of travel.

<https://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/emp/static/centerContent/fsisPage.jsp?keyword=RequestforActualPerDiemAll7939>

You must complete form AD-3820-6 "Request for Actual Subsistence" form. You must provide a justification and list at least 3 hotels that you contacted.

**Q. Is there a limit on actual subsistence reimbursement?**

A. Yes. Your reimbursement cannot exceed 300 percent of the applicable per diem rate.

**Q. Are lodging taxes included in the CONUS per diem rate?**

A. Lodging taxes are not included in the CONUS per diem rate. Lodging taxes should be claimed as a miscellaneous travel expense on your travel voucher. However, for foreign areas, lodging taxes are part the foreign per diem rates. Separate claims for lodging taxes incurred in foreign areas not allowed.

**Q: Am I able to claim tax-exempt status for my hotel stay?**

A: Tax-exempt States are listed at the following website:

<https://smartpay.gsa.gov/about-gsa-smartpay/tax-information/state-response-letter>

**Q. Are taxes and gratuity (tips) included in the Meals and Incidental (M&IE) expense rate?**

A. Yes, the meals and incidental expense (M&IE) rate includes taxes and tips in the rate, so travelers cannot request separate reimbursement for these expenses.

**Q. What are incidental expenses?**

A. Travelers are entitled to \$5 per day (included in MI&E rate) for incidental expenses. Incidental expenses would include fees and tips given to porters, baggage carriers, bellhops, hotel maids, stewards or stewardesses.

**Q: Does the Agency require the use of a calling card when they are in travel status?**

A: No, there is no current policy that requires FSIS employees to use a calling card while on travel status. However the Agency does provide the option of using a government issued calling card as an easier method (in terms of authorization and documentation) of employee communication than traditional authorization/reimbursement. The cards can be obtained for free through the submission of a Footprints ticket to OCIO/Telecomm. Use of the calling card while in travel status would still be governed by the applicable Communications Services limitations described in FSIS Directive 3800.1.

For those not using calling cards, communications services are considered, by the Federal Travel Regulations (§301-70.301) to be miscellaneous expenses, and as such are reimbursed in the same manner as other miscellaneous expenses. Under the Agricultural Travel Regulations (Section 9, Miscellaneous Expenses) such expenses must be itemized and estimated on the authorization. Personal communications on the authorization, as defined in FSIS Directive 3800.1, II. Communications Services are restricted under the ATR to trips lasting "more than one night" and only "if the approving official deems them appropriate."

Reimbursement is only for expenses actually incurred, and the ATR (Section 9, Miscellaneous Expenses, (1) Personal Communications) limits reimbursement of personal communications for the 50 states, DC, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to no more than \$5 a day cumulative total. In addition to proper authorization, reimbursement of telephone calls under FSIS Directive 3800.1 requires that travelers separate calls of a personal nature from calls made to conduct official business, and where possible, support the documented claim with receipts. Supervisors can require supporting documentation or receipts, regardless of cost, in their role as Travel Approvers.

**Q: What if my meals are provided at the event I am attending or included in the registration fee?**

A: If a meal(s) are provided at the event, you must deduct the amount listed below for the meal(s) which was provided as indicated in the following chart:

<b>M&amp;IE TOTAL</b>	<b>\$46.00</b>	<b>\$51.00</b>	<b>\$56.00</b>	<b>\$61.00</b>	<b>\$66.00</b>	<b>\$71.00</b>
<b>Continental/Breakfast</b>	<b>\$7.00</b>	<b>\$8.00</b>	<b>\$9.00</b>	<b>\$10.00</b>	<b>\$11.00</b>	<b>\$12.00</b>
<b>Lunch</b>	<b>\$11.00</b>	<b>\$12.00</b>	<b>\$13.00</b>	<b>\$15.00</b>	<b>\$16.00</b>	<b>\$18.00</b>
<b>Dinner</b>	<b>\$23.00</b>	<b>\$26.00</b>	<b>\$29.00</b>	<b>\$31.00</b>	<b>\$34.00</b>	<b>\$36.00</b>

Exception: A meal provided by a common carrier or a complimentary meal provided by a hotel/motel does not affect your claim for meals.

**Q: What is a conference rate?**

A: The conference rate is a pre-determined maximum allowance of up to 25 percent greater than the applicable locality lodging portion of the per diem rate. Under this reimbursement method, employees will be reimbursed the actual amount incurred for lodging up to the conference lodging allowance. The conference rate must be authorized by the approving official of the program area which is sponsoring the conference. For more information, travelers can refer to FTR 301-74 "Conference Planning".

**Q: Who can I call if I have general travel questions?**

A: You can contact the OCFO Travel Resource Center at 1-800-949-3964 (Option 5). You may also send an email to the [FSCGeneral@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:FSCGeneral@fsis.usda.gov).

**Q: Can I travel business or first class?**

A: Yes, but only if your flight exceeds 14 hours and you do not have a rest stop in route or at destination. Only the Administrator's Office can approve premium class and your request must be approved in advance of your trip.

**Q. Why is the M&IE reimbursement rate for the first and last travel day different than the rest of my trip?**

A. As per the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR), you are only eligible for 75 percent of the total M&IE rate for their temporary duty travel location (not the official duty station location) on the first and last travel day. For your convenience, the M&IE breakdown:

<b>M&amp;IE TOTAL</b>	<b>\$46.00</b>	<b>\$51.00</b>	<b>\$56.00</b>	<b>\$61.00</b>	<b>\$66.00</b>	<b>\$71.00</b>
<b>First&amp;Last Day Travel</b>	<b>\$34.50</b>	<b>\$38.25</b>	<b>\$42.00</b>	<b>\$45.75</b>	<b>\$49.50</b>	<b>\$53.25</b>

**Q. If my trip is greater than 35 miles from my duty station, am I entitled to stay in a hotel?**

A. Per diem (hotel accommodations and meals) is allowed if the employee's assignment requires them to be in travel status for over 12 hours AND over 35 miles or more outside of their duty station. In cases where the employee's temporary duty assignment is expected to exceed 12 hours, a travel authorization authorizing per diem must be issued. The Agency policy can be found in FSIS Directive 3800.1 "Temporary Duty Travel within CONUS". It is important for the approving official to determine whether the employee will be in travel status away from their official duty station beyond their normal duty hours.

**Q: I am driving to a one-day conference without staying overnight; do I get reimbursed for any expenses?**

A: If you travel for 12 hours or less, you are only entitled to reimbursement for mileage.

**Q. I am on vacation and I just received notification that I must go on an emergency unscheduled business trip. Can I travel from a location that is not my residence or temporary duty station for official temporary travel?**

A: Yes. If you are on leave and the leave is interrupted for official travel, the approver may authorize departure from your leave location and return to that location. City Pair Fares are authorized if the travel is authorized.

**Q. I will be traveling to Tampa, Florida on official business. I would like to visit Disneyland. Can I add my vacation location to my already approved travel authorization?**

A. No. If you are traveling for personal convenience or vacation time which would entail an indirect route, you are responsible for the additional cost. In this case, Contract City Pair is not allowed. Reimbursement will be limited to that which the Government would have paid if the employee traveled by a direct route.

**Q. When do I have to submit my travel voucher?**

A. The Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) requires travelers to complete and submit travel vouchers within 5 business days after returning from your trip.

**Q. I am on a long-term travel assignment. How often must I submit a travel voucher?**

A. You must submit a voucher at least every 30 days.

**Q. Do I need to provide receipts?**

A. Yes. You must provide a receipt to substantiate your claimed travel expenses for lodging and receipts for any authorized expenses incurred costing over \$75.

**Q. My flight to China is over 14 hours. Can I be upgraded to business class accommodations?**

A. Yes. You may be eligible for an upgrade to business class if your flight is over 14 hours, the origin or destination is outside the continental US, and you are required to report to duty the following day or sooner. However, you will need to complete FSIS Form 3820-11 along with your foreign travel request before business class accommodations will be authorized.

**Q. I found a flight on Expedia or Price Club that is cheaper than the Government City Pair fare. My office has limited travel funds this year. Can I purchase the cheap airline ticket and claim reimbursement on my travel voucher?**

A. No. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and FTR requires departments to use Concur or another GSA Electronic Travel Service (ETS) for official travel. This allows the government to implement consistent procedures, increase compliance with travel policies (including the Fly America Act for international travel), standardize reporting, and improve responses to Freedom of Information Act requests.

**Q. Is it mandatory that I use Concur to book my lodging?**

A. You must use Concur to book your travel lodging whenever possible. There are circumstances when arranging lodging outside of Concur is acceptable such as:

- Conferences – where a specific conference room rate has been arranged by the sponsor.
- No rooms at the government rate are available when you conduct your search.
- No traditional hotels are available at the location you are traveling to, and you must use an alternative lodging, such as a military base, bed and breakfast, etc.
- Listed hotels in Concur are too far outside the location of your TDY.

Concur assists you in meeting federal travel requirements for lodging. If you book lodging outside Concur you are still required to meet federal standards by staying in establishments that are OSHA approved, have smoke detectors in each room, have fire egress, and have proper safety features such as sprinkler systems and fire extinguishers available on premises.

**Q. Can I use a contract fare for personal travel? What if the personal travel is being taken in conjunction with official government travel?**

A. No. Use of contract fares is limited to official travel only. If personal travel is being taken in conjunction with official government travel, the contract fares cannot be used for that portion of the trip that is personal.

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