

Travel Policies help your business AND the traveller



Managing your business travel – and getting it right – is an important part of any organization, large or small.

As any seasoned travel Booker would know, there are lots of situations that can arise when your staff are on the go, making coordinating business travel a stressful task. In addition to any general complaints you might receive from travellers, you'll also need to be prepared for the following:

- After-hours emergencies
- Fly In, Fly Out emergencies
- Last-minute bookings and cancellations
- Employees' international travel
- Meeting internal requirements
- Reporting and risk management – especially record-keeping
- Complex group bookings
- Reconciliation of all travel related receipts

With these risks in mind, it's a good idea to start treating your business travel like any other controllable expense in your organization – and a dedicated business travel policy helps you do just that.

However, even if you already have a dedicated travel policy in place, there are ways to take it from good to great – and communicating it clearly across your organization will increase booking efficiencies, save you time and money, and reduce some of that “traveller noise”.

What's important to your business?

Before you implement a travel policy or make your existing one even more comprehensive, you'll need to first identify what is most important to your business. One way to start is to pinpoint your current areas for improvement.

For instance, some of these may apply right now:

- Employees who travel last-minute
- No single process for booking travel
- No preferred partners (so you may end up paying higher rates)
- Employees who book their own travel and go over budget

Once those problems are identified, you can come up with goals for your policy. These goals might include:

- Reducing the cost of each trip
- Securing favourable rates
- Increasing the speed of reimbursement
- Saving time on booking travel by improving processes

Breaking those goals down into individual parts can also be useful and help prepare you for finding improvements. For instance:

1. Who does your policy target? You may need to create separate policies for different types of travellers.
2. What do they require? Transfers? Meals? Aisle seats?
3. When are they travelling? Advanced bookings or last-minute trips?

4. Where are they travelling? Do the destinations vary or are there regular locations?
5. Which are they using? Cars? Hotels? Airlines? What is your company rule and when can travellers make exceptions?

The more specific your policy is, and the more it is tailored to your travellers' needs as well as the needs to the business, the more likely people are going to understand – and stick to it. Keep reading to see how you can do just that...

How do you strengthen your policy?

Crafting a strong policy takes time, and bolstering an existing one will probably mean spending time with a number of stakeholders.

Here are some ways you can help the process:

Answer every possible question

- Can travellers book their own travel? From what sites?
- How much can they spend, and how do they pay?
- How are trips approved, and what happens if one isn't approved?
- How about upgrades? Seat selection?
- When are expenses reimbursed and how are they submitted? What is the meal allowance when travelling?
- Can travellers combine business and leisure as part of the trip?
- What is absolutely prohibited and where can there be flexibility?

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Make your policy visually appealing

A carefully designed PDF with graphics and illustrations will make it easier for your travellers to not only understand it, but also absorb the key considerations in a faster and easier manner than reading through a long documented policy.

Keep it simple

Make sure it's simple and easy to understand, especially for newcomers to your company.

Be flexible

Sometimes travelling is not black and white. Allow people to go over budget as long as they have a good reason.

Create exceptions for frequent travellers

Make sure you let VIPs bypass certain requirements or keep information on file each time they need to fly.

Emphasize accessibility

Your policy should be accessible, online, and linked to wherever possible.

Communicate it clearly

Hold regular training on the policy, as well as updates or other key traveller information. That way, you'll make sure everyone stays informed.

Shorten the number of steps to approval

Make travel approval a two or three step process, and it'll be easier for people to remember.

What are examples of great travel policies?

It's one thing to create a robust policy. It's another thing to make sure that people actually follow it.

Some of the best policies aren't reliant on a particular format or tool, but instead follow a set of principles. Just like these:

Get input from the most frequent travellers

Successful travel policies are ones that are crafted to apply to those who actually travel (they'll be the ones using it!) whilst also considering the needs of the business.

Develop a vision for the policy

Saving money is certainly a concern, but it's really just one piece of the policy. Creating efficiencies, reducing stress, and risk management are all desirable policy outcomes; breaking down these components will help travellers form a better understanding of how following the policy will get the best outcomes for them and the business.

Automate

Use the same templates and the same process. Technology helps here – business travel partners give employees access to the same booking portal every time, as well as a centralized location from which their profiles can be managed.

Make it fun

Companies such as Google give rewards to employees if they spend under their travel budget, then let them use that surplus on future trips. They're incentivized to save money for the business!

Create a travel culture

Encourage employees to share travel stories and showcase those who travel "smart". Share good behaviour, rather than just stamping out the "bad".

Your policy is only the beginning

Ultimately, creating a robust travel policy is one part of the equation. You should also make sure it's as easy as possible for employees to follow – which is exactly why many businesses choose to work with a business travel provider.

Not only can Travel Management Companies access the best fares, but they also partner with you and work to understand your culture and needs so they can solve your problems before they even happen.

Additionally, your business travel consultant can:

- Find the best fares and deals individual agents cannot
- Understand the nuances of specific industries and markets
- Provide extensive after-hours support during a crisis
- Provide technology that makes it easier to book and keep records
- And much, much more

Working with a business travel provider can make sure you really get the most out of your travel policy.

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