• Defense Travel -**VOLUME XVI, ISSUE 3**

Summer 2023

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The Defense Travel Management Office serves as the single focal point for commercial travel within the Department of Defense; to establish strategic direction, set policy, and centrally manage commercial travel programs. The Defense Travel Management Office is a directorate of the Defense Support Services Center under the Defense Human Resources Activity.



www.travel.dod.mil



Director's Message

Jennifer McPherson-Todd | Director

Welcome to the summer edition of the Dispatch!

As we anticipated, and headlined in our Spring issue, travel volumes this summer have been off the charts! If you've traveled this summer on TDY or for leisure (or both, like me), you've likely experienced the crowds. The self-help guidance we published in May (sign up for loyalty programs and download the apps for your airline, hotel, and rental car companies) applies to your leisure travel too and can help you to track travel disruptions and more easily rebook. Tips for navigating TSA checkpoints can be found on page 15.

To further assist travelers, we have published a new webpage focused on <u>traveler</u> <u>health and safety</u>. It provides guidance on preparing for travel and has links to additional resources that provide information for a variety of special travel circumstances. There's also a link to sign up for the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), a must-have if you're traveling foreign OCONUS. Check out our new page today and let us know if there's something else you'd like to see by providing your feedback using the "Was this page useful?" button at the bottom of the page.

We're excited that we can help families with more of their PCS expenses.

Our featured traveler this issue, the Labrador retriever on our cover, gives a clue to our big news this summer: our new Pet Transportation policy, authorized by the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, helps families with more of their permanent change of duty station (PCS) expenses and support the transportation of the entire family, including their pet. My dog, Carson,

is a 4-year-old (190lb!) Mastiff/Great Dane mix. He loves going on car rides and being outdoors, but also loves a good nap – on the couch of course. His favorite word is "treat" and he never misses an opportunity to eat. I mention him so you'll know that this is personal to me too. Those of us with pets know how important this new policy will be for families that PCS.

Don't miss "A Day in the Life" of Beth Carver, our DoD Preferred Commercial Lodging program manager as she performs site visits to prospective program hotels (page 9), illuminating! Other articles include guidance on managing changing installation names in DTS Authorizations, a great new electronic wallet feature for Travel Cards, an overview of the online training we offer, and much more. Check it out for yourself.

Travel safely and enjoy the rest of your summer!

Historic New Policy Authorizes Pet Transportation Reimbursement During Relocation Travel



Effective January 1, 2024, the Uniformed Services are authorized to reimburse the cost of transporting a pet during a permanent change of station (PCS) move. The Chair of the Per Diem, Travel, and Transportation Allowances Committee (PDTATAC), Mr. Jeffrey R. Register, approved the policy on June 20, 2023, which implements new legal authority established by the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

Under the new policy, a Uniformed Service member may be authorized reimbursement of expenses directly related to pet relocation, such as transportation and quarantine fees, during a PCS move. **Reimbursement** will be limited to \$550 for a PCS within the continental United States and \$2,000 for a PCS to or from a location outside the continental United States. Reimbursement is also limited to transportation of a single household pet and only applies to a cat or a dog.

Pet transportation reimbursement policy has a long history among the Uniformed Services. In 2000, the NDAA included a proposal put forward by Hawai'i Rep. Neil Abercrombie to authorize reimbursement of \$275 in state pet quarantine fees. The legislation brought relief to Service members who were required to pay large out-of-pocket expenses to meet mandated quarantine requirements. Section 624 of the FY23 NDAA significantly expanded that authority by authorizing reimbursement of any cost related to the relocation of a pet.

This new policy does not affect reimbursement for transportation of military workings dogs, which is already addressed in the Joint Travel Regulations (JTR), nor service animals, which are covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In recognition of the important role that household pets play in military families and the significant financial cost of transporting them, this policy will partially ease that heavy financial burden and promote military family cohesion and morale for many years to come.



DTMO Helps New Recruits

The Recruit Travel Assistance Program, managed by DTMO's Travel Programs and Services Division and co-operated with the Travel Assistance Center in Chesapeake, Virginia, provides travel support to military recruits who experience disruptions when traveling from Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS) or their hometowns to their initial basic training centers. In FY22, we assisted approximately 22,000 recruits.

The program helps recruits with general information requests, providing meal provisions, and overnight accommodations if required. Travel disruptions can be particularly tough on new recruits, many of whom are traveling away home for the first time.

The program is coordinated with the US Military Entrance Processing Command (USMEPCOM), the individual MEPS, recruiters, Travel Management Companies (TMCs), ground transportation providers, restaurants, lodging facilities, and United Service Organizations (USO) airport locations.

When hotel shuttles are not available, we use both Uber for Business and Lyft Concierge to arrange transport between airports and lodging facilities. These platforms enable us to arrange multiple rides simultaneously for group travel, which is a great time-saver. We pre-arrange return rides from the hotel to the airport, sending the recruit a link to their cell phone to arrange their pick-up time even though they didn't book it. The platforms enable us to track and monitor the status of the rides arranged and provide easy access to receipts for centrally billed accounts (CBAs) reconciliation. Both Lyft and Uber are on the GSA schedule and provide the Department with discounts.

Recruits may request support via Live Chat or by calling toll-free to (877) 563-7746. Parents of recruits should not use these contact tools. Key aspects of recruit calls and chats are manually captured by Action Officers through a ticket management system for reporting and reconciliation of charges to CBAs. For more information, see our <u>Recruit Travel Assistance webpage</u>.

Managing Installation Name Changes in the Defense Travel System (DTS)

Use the former names until September 30, 2023 and start using the new names on October 1, 2023.

As highlighted in the Spring 2023 Dispatch, <u>nine Army installations</u> are undergoing name changes through the end of 2023. At press time, seven installation names have been officially changed, and two more are scheduled before the end of the calendar year.

Regardless of the actual effective date of the new Army installation name, in DTS the new per diem location name changes will be effective as of October 1, 2023. The old base per diem location names will expire on September 30, 2023.

For those installations with names that officially change after October 1, the per diem location in DTS will still change on October 1, so the new name must still be selected.

Travel documents with trip dates of October 1, 2023 or later that use an old Army installation name as per diem locations must be updated to reflect the new Army installation name beginning October 1, 2023. The new per diem location names can only be added on or after October 1, 2023.

- Trips beginning prior to October 1, 2023 that continue into October 2023: A second per diem location must be added to the itinerary using the new Army installation name for the travel dates of October 1, 2023 forward.
- Trips created prior to October 1, 2023 with travel dates beginning on or after October 1, 2023: Must be updated after the October 1, 2023 effective date to reflect the new per diem location Army installation name.

To update the per diem location travelers can amend their Authorization to change the per diem location before or during travel or update the per diem location upon return from TDY when the Voucher is created.

• Trips created prior to October 1, 2023 that end by September 30, 2023 do not need to be updated.



(continued on page 6)

Failure to update the Army installation per diem location for trips that occur on or after October 1, 2023 may result in DTS updating the per diem amount to \$0. Per Diem location changes may also affect ILP rates, adjust other lodging rates, and add pre-audits. Review your document after making the per diem location change and contact your <u>local Defense Travel Administrator</u> if further assistance is necessary.

Former Name – Use until September 30, 2023	Location	New Name – Use on and after October 1, 2023
Fort Benning	GA	Fort Moore
Fort Bragg	NC	Fort Liberty
Fort Gordon	GA	Fort Eisenhower
Fort A.P. Hill	VA	Fort Walker
Fort Hood	ТХ	Fort Cavazos
Fort Lee	VA	Fort Gregg-Adams
Fort Pickett	VA	Fort Barfoot
Fort Polk	LA	Fort Johnson
Fort Rucker	AL	Fort Novosel

DoD Preferred Takes Care of Travelers



The DoD Preferred Commercial Lodging program is offered at 81 TDY locations in the United States, providing commercial lodging options when no DoD or Privatized lodging is available. As part of our program management responsibilities, we regularly assess the need for commercial lodging options in areas with a large volume of DoD travelers. We constantly assess customer satisfaction in participating hotels (there are 480 total) to ensure they continue to meet our duty of care and review each hotel against our quality standards and program requirements. We also scout new hotel offerings in established locations, as well as potential new site locations. For example, we expanded to the National Capital Region this year and in 2024 we will add the San Diego, CA and Colorado Springs, CO areas.

Each year, we send a team to conduct unannounced, in person assessments of the hotels either already participating in or being considered for the DoD Preferred program. During the visit, we do a complete walk through of the hotel facilities, take photographs and complete a comprehensive checklist to ensure a particular property meets DoD's specific safety, security, and quality standards. We look at the quality of the guest rooms and public spaces within the hotel, check to see if traveler financial protections are offered, and what traveler conveniences (amenities) are available. For current DoD Preferred hotels, we use the opportunity to review traveler questionnaire scores directly with hotel management and, when warranted, address traveler concerns.

While we are on travel, we also visit new hotels to explain the program and answer any questions about how they can participate in the DoD Preferred program.

Customer satisfaction scores are critical to the program management of DoD Preferred. Every traveler who visits one of our participating properties is sent a questionnaire after completing their voucher. We use these scores to provide feedback to hotels about how well they are doing and to point out where they might improve. Our satisfaction level improved from 63% to 70% in the program's first 6 months (July – Dec 2015), increased to 79% by the end of our first full year (2016), and has been

(continued on page 8)

sitting comfortably between **86% and 87%** for the last several years. We credit this high satisfaction rating in part to our hands-on assessment of hotel quality, safety, and security standards and acting on customer feedback.

We put ourselves in the shoes of travelers. To ensure that we understand what DoD travelers are experiencing, team members look to customer satisfaction scores to help select which hotels to stay in while on the road. They may choose properties with areas of concern, such as an element which received a lower score on the questionnaire or a low number of bookings, so they can get an idea of customer experiences. If spending multiple nights in one area, they typically switch hotels every night to gain a more complete idea of customer experiences in participating hotels.

Interestingly, team members often run into fellow DoD travelers in lobbies and elevators when completing site visits. We see this as a perfect opportunity to engage our traveler community and ask questions about a particular hotel, as well as answer any questions they may have. It is not uncommon for team members to share their business card with travelers just in case they can help answer more questions about the program. These interactions are important for two reasons. First, travelers realize that a real person is staying in the same hotel and making decisions based on real experiences. Second, we always learn something from encounters with the travelers, whether it is gathering more information about a particular location, like secondary installation gates that are more convenient for some travelers, or additional hotels that should be considered.

While hotel site visits are a vital aspect of monitoring the quality of DoD Preferred properties, it is just one of the ways we assess hotels. We also rely heavily on the Travel Assistance Center's (TAC) customer experiences and feedback gathered through surveys and customer reports. If the TAC report or surveys indicate a problem with a particular hotel, we share the feedback with both property and higher-level hotel chain management. The hotel is then required to provide a response and corrective action plan. If the complaint is egregious, hotel participation can be suspended or even terminated. We also share any positive feedback we receive with hotel and chain management.

When evaluating hotels for the following program year, we take those hotels meeting the basic requirements and compare them against one another. We then take other factors into account including the overall quality of the hotel, guest amenities, food options, distance to DoD facilities, and rates.

In 2022, the team completed more than 130 hotel visits. By the end of this month, they will have conducted more than 175 hotel visits in preparation for the 2024 program. We not only review all hotels that currently participate, but also visit new sites to investigate the hotel offerings at those locations.



4:30 pm

A Day in the Life

Follow Beth Carver, Program Manager DoD Preferred Commercial Lodging, on her typical day on the road reviewing and new hotels for the DoD Preferred program.

4:00 pm Arrive at the hotel where I'll stay for the night. Take mental notes of how easy it was to find. When checking in, I ask the desk clerk about the best places to eat while noting the clerk's level of courtesy and knowledge.

Head to my room and take photos of the room number



plaque in the hall, the bedroom, and bathroom. I look at everything, including hall lighting, fire extinguishers, elevators/stairways, etc.!

- 5:30 pm Venture out to dinner. When I return, I note if there is adequate lighting in the parking lot and assess how safe I feel walking to the front door. I also look to see if there is adequate security and if someone was at the front desk to see me enter.
- Next day, 8:00 am When checking out of my room, I ask to speak with the general manager. I present my business card and a DoD Preferred Commercial Lodging program information packet. I also share my experience at their hotel.
- 8:30 am I provide information about the program, review their questionnaire scores, and ask for a tour of the hotel and guest rooms. I take more photos and continue documenting what I see. I'll ask about past and future renovations, what meals are included in the standard rate, and inspect the fitness center. Does it have free weights? Is there a pool and is it indoor/outdoor/seasonal? I note if there is a guest laundry and if it is complimentary. I ask about any other amenities the hotel might have to offer DoD travelers like dinner or receptions on select nights.
- 9:00 am Once the site visit is complete, I sit in the lobby and review the checklist and make additional notes about my evaluation of the hotel, the stay, the quality of the rooms, and the public spaces.
- 9:15 am Drive to the next hotel where I won't stay overnight, but I'll meet with the general manager and ask for a tour to see rooms. I take photos and complete my checklist. I'll continue my hotel visits until it is time to head to the hotel where I'll stay the night and start the process all over again.

Tell Us What You Think!

DoD Preferred

A short questionnaire is sent to all travelers who booked <u>DoD Preferred</u> hotels and who completed their DTS voucher. By answering just a few questions, travelers assess the quality, safety, security, and hotel experience for their stay. Results are scored to create a customer satisfaction score card for the hotel, which is then shared with the hotel and is a key factor in deciding which hotels should participate in the program in the future.

Traveler questionnaire scores have improved our portfolio of higher rated hotels for DoD travelers. The percentage participating of hotels rated by AAA as three or four diamond properties jumped to 81%. Questionnaires completed by DoD travelers and our own site visits helped drive those changes. DoD Preferred's overall satisfaction score is 86%.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

A random sampling of travelers may receive a Defense Travel Enterprise Customer Satisfaction Survey. The surveys are sent monthly to travelers who haven't received the survey recently. When we identify trends or shortfalls, the data informs our decision-making to improve travel programs and services.

Traveler responses really do have an impact on the programs and services that travelers use regularly. Let us know about your experience!

NDTA Summer Virtual Chapter Meeting -Topic: Lodging

The National Defense Transportation Association (NDTA) is hosting a webinar with speakers from the DoD Preferred Commercial Lodging program and GSA's FedRooms on August 24, 2023 from 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm eastern time. Register on <u>NDTA's webpage</u> for this virtual meeting. Other topics include long-term lodging and emergency lodging.

Only YOU Can Prevent GTCC Delinquencies!

Government Travel Charge Card (GTCC) delinquencies have risen sharply over the past several years, more than doubling pre-pandemic amounts. Delinquent payments have a negative impact on the Department's ability to accomplish its travel mission. Below is guidance for reducing Travel Card delinquencies.

Cardholders

For both temporary duty (TDY) and permanent change of station (PCS) travel, policy dictates that you:

- Pay your bill on time and in full
- Use split disbursement to pay your bill directly from your travel voucher
- Submit your voucher within five working days of completion of TDY or arrival at the new permanent duty station for PCS travel
- Use your travel card for authorized travel expenses only
- Submit interim vouchers for each 30-day increment of travel using the DTS scheduled partial payments capability

Supervisors

For both temporary duty (TDY) and permanent change of station (PCS) travel:

- Return TDY and PCS vouchers for correction when the cardholder has not included a split disbursement
- Work with organization travel administrators to track the status of unsubmitted vouchers
- Instruct travelers who are on long term travel (both TDY and PCS) to schedule partial payments
- When notified by the APC, ensure counseling is provided and/or other appropriate administrative actions, including salary offsets, are taken
- Notify your leadership/command of the delinquency and the steps being taken to correct it



Agency Program Coordinators

Take these actions to identify and reduce delinguencies:

- Ensure that training for your cardholders is up to date
- Run and review the GTCC Management Reports to identify:
 - Delinquent accounts
 - Unauthorized charges
 - Review/validate temporary credit limit increases
- Work with supervisors to take appropriate actions with their delinquent/non-compliant cardholders

For more detailed information, see:

- <u>Cardholder Guidance</u>
 - <u>Agency Program Coordinator (APC)/</u> <u>Supervisor Guidance</u>

Mobile Wallet Capability for GTCC Transactions Coming September 1!

Department of Defense (DoD) travel cardholders will soon have the ability to add their Government Travel Charge Card (GTCC) to their smartphone Mobile Wallet to make purchases at contactless terminals. The feature will be available to use on both DoDissued and personally owned mobile devices.

What Mobile Wallet app do I choose?

Smart devices come with the most common apps preloaded. If you have an iPhone, for example, your phone will likely have Apple Pay already installed. Other popular Mobile Wallet app options, which will work with the GTCC, include Google Pay and Samsung Pay. The setup is simple: launch the app, take a photo of your travel card or enter the applicable information, and follow the step-by-step instructions.



Why is adding your GTCC to a Mobile Wallet useful when you travel?

It's convenient and safer! Mobile Wallets are quickly accessible and convenient, making it easier for travelers to make payments for in-store purchases, while in an airport, or even after a morning run. It usually takes the payment terminal only a second before you are alerted that the payment has been submitted.

With your Mobile Wallet, every transaction is encrypted, which means your GTCC account number is never shared with the merchant. To complete a transaction, you might be required to provide a passcode or authenticate through fingerprint or facial recognition, which adds an additional layer of security.

How do Mobile Wallets work?

Many of you may already be using a Mobile Wallet for personal use and if so, you'll use it for your GTCC the same way. At checkout, if you see the contactless symbol on a vendor's payment reader, all you will have to do is open the Mobile Wallet app on your smartphone, select your travel card, and then hold the device a few inches above the payment reader until confirmation is received. There may be a sound indicating confirmation as well.

If you have personal credit cards and your GTCC in your Mobile Wallet, be sure to only use your GTCC for official/authorized travel expenses while in a temporary duty (TDY) or Permanent Change of Station (PCS) status.

Enjoy using this new GTCC feature!

GSA SmartPay Training Forum Re-Cap

The General Services Administration (GSA) hosts the SmartPay Forum for travel card program managers annually. As the administrator of DoD's travel card program, the largest of all Government Travel Charge Card programs, DTMO attends to provide updates and to learn about current and future innovations.

This year, the GSA SmartPay Training Forum was held virtually June 13-15. Travel card Component Program Managers (CPMs) and Agency Program Managers (APCs) had an opportunity to attend courses delivered by Citibank, Visa, and GSA on:

- CitiManager Account Maintenance
 Visa IntelliLink Operations
- Delinquency Management Tips
 Program Management Tips
- CitiManager Reporting

GSA SmartPay General Information

The DTMO Travel Card team presented a program update, providing information on policy and program changes implemented since last year's Forum, plans for implementing new capabilities such as virtual accounts and mobile wallets, and FY22 key program metrics. Also, DTMO's Lodging Program team hosted a virtual booth, which has received 471 visits so far. Additionally, the team provided attendees with links to lodging webpages and videos.

To review the presentations and get more or to access copies of certificates for courses you attended, visit the <u>event webpage</u>.

CPMs or APCs who were unable to attend are encouraged to plan for next year's forum. GSA has announced that it will be an in-person event (after three years of virtual delivery) in New Orleans, LA. We can almost taste the beignets now!



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Online Training Provides Flexibility to Learn Anytime, Anywhere

How would you sustainably train a workforce as diverse and geographically dispersed as the two million plus DoD employees who travel or provide travel support?

At DTMO, the solution is online, or "web-based" training (WBT), which provides 38 modules with interactive simulations and knowledge assessments that are available 24/7. WBTs offer users training on a variety of topics and issue certificates of completion when the topics are successfully completed.

In fact, since its inception in 2006, DTMO has issued more than 17.7 million certificates for completed training and is currently averaging 1.8 million annually, providing millions of hours of learning to educate DoD employees about:

- The Defense Travel System (DTS), with training for Authorizing Officials (AOs), Defense Travel Administrators, and Travelers
- The Joint Travel Regulations, with travel policy topics
- Travel Program overviews, such as GSA City-pair, DoD Lodging, DoD Dine Smart, U.S. Government Rental Car
- Compliance, by certifying completion of required training for AOs and travel card holders

Use of on-demand training allows the Components more time to focus on their missions and rely on DTMO to meet their training needs. As changes are made to DTS, travel policy, or programs, DTMO updates the WBTs to accurately reflect current information.

With our web-based training, DTMO has adopted emerging instructional and web design approaches to deliver training that expeditiously enables learners to gain the knowledge they need to travel or manage travel easily.

Our dynamic, HTML-based training adapts to the changing capabilities of browsers, features high-resolution content, and provides users dynamic interaction with content and assessment material.

To access our web-based training, log into your <u>Passport/TraX</u> account and navigate to Training.

Summer Travel Tips

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) recommends that summer travelers follow these travel tips for the most efficient TSA checkpoint experience:

Tip 1: Be checkpoint ready. Arrive at the checkpoint lane with a mobile or printed boarding pass and <u>valid ID</u> readily available. Be sure your reservations include your Known Traveler Number (KTN) or CAC ID.

When approaching the screening area, remember to empty pockets and place the contents in a bin or carry-on bag. Those without TSA PreCheck must remove large electronics and 3-1-1 liquids from carryons and will be asked to remove outerwear prior to screening. Listen closely and follow TSA officer instructions for guidance through the screening process.

Tip 2: To avoid accidentally packing any prohibited items, TSA recommends starting with an empty bag. Prohibited items include firearms, ammunition, explosives, flammables, knives, razors, replica weapons, and more. Some of these items may be included in your checked luggage. For specifics, view TSA's "<u>What Can I Bring?</u>" page. If you are a military service member traveling with any of these prohibited items, view TSA's "<u>Military Travel</u>" page for more information on the correct procedure for packing these items.

Tip 3: Remember the 3-1-1 Liquids Rule. Passengers may bring a quart-sized bag of <u>liquids, aerosols,</u> <u>gels, creams, and pastes</u> through the checkpoint **as long as each item is 3.4 ounces or less. Liquids over 3.4 ounces must be packed in your checked bags.** Sunscreen is often in a container larger than 3.4 ounces, so pack it in your checked bags.

<u>Medically necessary</u> liquids, gels, and aerosols over 3.4 ounces are allowed in reasonable quantities, but they must be declared at the checkpoint for inspection.



Tip 4: Enroll in TSA PreCheck®. In June 2023, 88% of TSA PreCheck passengers waited less than five minutes at TSA checkpoints nationwide.

Traveling with the kids? Children 17 and under may join a parent/guardian with TSA PreCheck in the dedicated lanes when TSA PreCheck appears on the child's boarding pass. DoD civilian employees and active-duty Military can <u>enroll for free</u>.

Tip 5: Arrive early. Travelers should give themselves plenty of time to account for traffic, parking, rental car returns, airline check-in, security, and making any airport purchases before boarding a flight.

Tip 6: Ask TSA before you travel. Questions? Contact TSA by sending a message to @AskTSA on Twitter or Facebook Messenger, by texting 275-872 ("AskTSA") on any mobile device or calling the TSA Contact Center at 866-289-9673.

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