



Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County

Travel Policy

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UNIFIED GOVERNMENT OF ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY

TRAVEL POLICY

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DEFINITIONS

AUTHORIZED refers to allowable expenses incurred while traveling on official Athens-Clarke County business.

COMMON CARRIER refers to airline, train or bus service.

COUNTY OR MUNICIPAL EXCISE TAX refers to local taxes charged by lodging establishments, also referred to as "hotel/motel" or "occupancy" tax.

EXPENSE RECONCILIATION refers to itemized receipts for all travel expenses including purchased meals.

FAMILY TRAVEL COMPANION refers to family members who are not employed by the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County.

GROUND TRANSPORTATION refers to shuttles, taxis or rental vehicles.

LODGING refers to a hotel, motel, inn, apartment or similar entity that furnishes lodging to the public for pay.

MEAL ALLOWANCE refers to the maximum daily meal rate for partial or full day travel using the U.S. General Services Administration Georgia or out-of-state rates.

MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT RATE refers to the IRS standard mileage reimbursement rate per mile traveled in a private motor vehicle when on official government business.

NON-EMPLOYEE TRAVEL COMPANION refers to volunteers or temporary workers that accompany employees traveling on official business with approval from the Department Director, Manager, Appointed/Elected Official or their designee.

OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL refers to overnight travel from a point of origin within Georgia to a point of destination outside of Georgia.

O.C.G.A. 36-80-24 refers to the Georgia law requiring elected officials to obtain authorization for government purchasing, travel and credit cards through an Athens-Clarke County Commission resolution and a signed "User Agreement" with the county.

PRIVATE MOTOR VEHICLE refers to a motor vehicle that is owned or leased for personal use by an employee.

POINT OF DEPARTURE AND RETURN refers to the beginning and ending locations used to calculate government-use miles traveled in a private motor vehicle. Departure point is defined as the location of departure (residence or primary work station) to the travel destination, and return point is the location of direct return (residence or primary work station).

RECORD RETENTION refers to receipts and other documentation that shall be maintained on file as required by the Georgia Records Retention Schedule.

TRAVEL ADVANCE refers to funds advanced to an employee prior to a travel event.

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TRAVEL CARD refers to a government credit card issued to an employee for the specific purpose of paying authorized travel expenses.

TRAVEL CARD CASH ADVANCE refers to cash obtained via an ATM from a Travel Card to cover authorized purchases at locations that do not accept credit cards.

TRAVEL CARD COORDINATOR refers to a designated employee who is responsible for reviewing receipts and other documentation; retaining electronic copies of all receipts and documentation; reconciling travel card purchases on a monthly basis; reporting unresolved card disputes to the Program Administrator and collecting cancelled cards for return to the Program Administrator.

TRAVEL CARD PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR refers to dedicated employees located in the Finance Department who manage the Travel Card Program; act as the liaison with the card issuer; issues and interprets policies/procedures on travel card use; provides updated Travel Card General Guidelines and annual U.S. General Services Administration **daily** meal allowance rates for Georgia and out-of-state travel.

TRAVEL EXPENSES refers to authorized expenses for meals, lodging, mileage, transportation, parking and miscellaneous expenses incurred while traveling on official government business.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This travel policy serves as a guide to managing travel expenses. It applies to Appointed/Elected Officials, employees of Athens-Clarke County and non-employees traveling on official government business unless otherwise specifically excluded in this policy.

The Finance Department administers the travel policy and travel card program. The Department is responsible for issuing and interpreting policies/procedures on travel and travel card use, providing updated Travel Card General Guidelines and annual U.S. General Services Administration daily meal allowance rates for Georgia and out-of-state travel.

The Finance Department periodically reviews travel activity for compliance and establishes review procedures.

Authorized travel expenses, including lodging, meals, common carrier and ground transportation, private motor vehicle mileage, registration fees and allowable incidental expenses, must be approved by the Department Director, **Mayor**, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official or their designee.

Highlights of this Travel Policy

- Travel expenses shall be paid with a government issued travel card, unless otherwise noted.
- Travel card cash advance, up to \$100 per travel event, is permitted to cover travel expenses in locations that do not accept credit cards.
- Travel Card expense reconciliation uses the same procedure as purchasing card reconciliation.
- Itemized receipts are required for all travel expenses including purchased meals.
- Daily meal allowance rates, designed to cover the cost of purchased meals (including taxes and tips), are based on travel location. The daily meal allowance rate is based on the combined daily breakfast, lunch and dinner rates established by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), **not** including the additional GSA incidental reimbursement rate. Snacks are an allowable expense with an itemized expense, subject to the daily meal allowance.
- Mileage reimbursement rates are based on the IRS standard mileage rate.
- Lodging selection shall be based on government or conference rates or the least expensive option available considering proximity to the business destination and personal safety.
- State of Georgia rental car contract rates are available to Athens-Clarke County employees traveling on authorized government business. These rates are not authorized for personal travel.
- The Travel Card Coordinator, designated by the Department Director or Appointed/Elected Official, is responsible for reviewing and retaining their organization's authorized travel expenditure documentation and resolving card issues with the Program Administrator.
- As required by O.C.G.A. 36-80-24, Elected Officials who desire a government purchasing, travel or credit card must be authorized by Mayor and Commission resolution and sign a "User Agreement". All other travel policies apply to Elected Official travel.

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1. APPLICABILITY: The provisions of this policy shall apply to all Appointed/Elected Officials; all other employees of Athens-Clarke County unless otherwise specifically excluded in this document; and non-employees participating in official Athens-Clarke County business on behalf of the government. This document serves as a guide to managing employee travel expenses.

Specifically, not covered by these policies are the expenses of witnesses appearing in the courts of Athens-Clarke County and individuals interviewing for employment with Athens-Clarke County.

- To comply with O.C.G.A. 36-80-24, Elected Officials who desire a county purchasing, travel or credit card must be authorized by resolution through a public vote of the Athens-Clarke County Commission and sign a “User Agreement” with the county. All other travel policies apply to Elected Official travel.
- Mayor and Commission Appointed Officials and Manager shall have their travel reimbursement forms approved by the Mayor. Assistant Managers and Department Directors shall have their travel reimbursement forms approved by the Manager. The Manager may appoint the Assistant Managers to approve Department Director travel reimbursement forms.
- Department Directors are designated as the approving authority for unique employee travel circumstances. In some instances, the Manager is listed as the approver if the unique travel circumstance involves a Department Director or requires higher level approval. The Mayor shall approve unique travel circumstances for Appointed Officials and the Manager.
- Appointed/Elected Officials are designated as the approving authority for unique employee travel circumstances in their offices.

2. AUTHORIZED TRAVEL: Travel and related expenses authorized under the provision of this policy shall be limited to the actual, necessary and reasonable expenses incurred when an Official or employee is traveling on Athens-Clarke County business. The standard for "reasonable expenses" may be determined by geographic location and other circumstances as determined by the Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.

As noted in this policy, certain travel expenses require the direct approval of the Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.

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Authorized travel expenses may include:

- (a) Travel to and from the location of a conference, seminar or school.** Travel may occur inside or outside Athens-Clarke County for government related education and training.
- (b) Travel to and from a location for the purpose of extraditing or transporting a prisoner or other individual** as may be required by the courts. Payments of expenses shall be with a government travel card and supported by detailed receipts.
- (c) Travel to and from a location for any purpose that is directly related to the functions and responsibilities of Athens-Clarke County Government.** This may include economic development, legislative/governmental relations and other activities necessary to conduct official Athens-Clarke County business.

A government owned vehicle should be used if available. If a government-owned vehicle is not available, reimbursement for mileage in a private motor vehicle using the IRS standard mileage rate is authorized.

- Employees should use MapQuest, Google Maps or a similar service to calculate the approximate mileage of the route traveled.
- The IRS standard mileage rate includes gasoline, oil, tires, insurance, registration fees, licenses, repairs, maintenance and depreciation for miles driven. Employees will not be reimbursed separately for these costs.
- Mileage reimbursement exceeding the IRS standard mileage rate is classified as taxable compensation to the employee.
- The private motor vehicle owner is the only person reimbursed for miles driven when two or more persons travel in the same car.

3. TRAVEL EXPENSE PAYMENT METHODS

Authorized travel expenses are paid by one of three methods:

1. Government Travel Card.
2. Travel advance for Elected Officials without Commission authorization to use government travel or credit cards (required by O.C.G.A. 36-80-24).
3. Post-travel reimbursement for mileage, emergency travel or Elected Official travel.

- Emergency travel shall be approved by the Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.

4. TRAVEL CARD PROGRAM: The Finance Department administers the travel card program. The Department is responsible for issuing and interpreting policies/procedures on travel card use, providing updated Travel Card General Guidelines and annual U.S. General Services Administration meal allowance rates for Georgia and out-of-state travel.

- All departments and Appointed/Elected Officials using travel cards should have a designated Travel Card Coordinator.

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- There is a \$4,000 standard credit limit for each travel card. If necessary, a higher limit can be authorized if approved by the Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.

Requesting a Travel Card

Employees, Appointed Officials and Manager who do not currently possess a travel card are required to obtain approval from the Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official **at least two weeks prior to the travel event**. Travel Card request forms shall be submitted to Clair Sayer, Finance Department Administrative Assistant, at travelcard@accgov.com.

Travel Card Cash Advance

Employees may use the travel card to obtain a cash advance to cover purchases at locations that do not accept credit cards. Travel card cash advances shall be limited to \$100 per travel event. Cash expenditures **require** detailed receipts. ATM fees associated with the cash advance are allowable. Employees shall refund undocumented cash expenditures.

5. TRAVEL EXPENSE RECONCILIATION

Documenting Expenses: Itemized receipts shall be required for all travel expenses, including meals. The credit card signature copy is not acceptable without the itemized receipt.

Travel Card Lost Receipts: The Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official shall have the authority to approve expenditures for travel card purchases with lost or missing receipts.

Travel card expense reconciliation uses the same procedure as purchasing card reconciliation. The employee shall provide all travel receipts to the Travel Card Coordinator. Reconciliation questions should be directed to the Finance Department's Purchasing Division at purchasing@accgov.com.

Post-travel reimbursement for mileage, emergency or elected official travel shall be submitted on the travel reimbursement forms available on the intranet. Mileage reimbursement forms shall be approved and signed by the Department Director, Mayor, Manager, Appointed/Elected Official or their designee and forwarded to the Finance Department Accounts Payable Division at accountspayable@accgov.com for review. For emergency and Elected Official travel, an electronic copy of the itemized receipts shall be attached to the reimbursement form.

6. TRAVEL EXPENSE REVIEW.

Travel Card Coordinators shall review their department's travel expenditure documentation. Documentation should be in sufficient detail to determine individual purchases.

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Travel activity shall be reviewed periodically by the Finance Department for policy compliance. The Finance Department's Accounting Division will establish review procedures. Compliance issues and recommended corrective actions shall be reported to the Department Director, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official. Repeated failure to comply with travel policies may subject an employee to removal from the program or other disciplinary actions as deemed appropriate by the Department Director, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.

7. COMPLIANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY.

Internal control. All Departments and Appointed/Elected Officials shall develop a written travel internal control policy. A copy shall be provided to the Accounting Division. The policy should address a clear separation of duties for program participants. At a minimum, internal control should ensure that a knowledgeable individual, such as a direct supervisor, reviews and authorizes payment for travel expenses.

- The Finance Department's Accounting Division shall have the authority to determine sufficient internal control.

8. RECORDS RETENTION:

Travel expense receipts and other documentation shall be maintained on file as required by the Georgia Records Retention Schedule. Such documentation shall be attached to the travel reconciliation form and available for inspection and audit.

9. PERSONAL LEAVE COMBINED WITH BUSINESS TRAVEL:

Employees may combine business and personal travel. Employees who are combining business and personal travel, shall only be authorized for the cost of roundtrip airfare, lodging and other business travel expenses for the authorized business travel days under this policy. Personal expenses while traveling on official government business shall be paid by the employee. Personal expenses not authorized or permitted under this policy shall not be charged to the travel card.

10. FAMILY COMPANION TRAVEL:

Family members may accompany employees traveling on official government business. Family members shall not utilize government contracted pricing available to employees traveling on government business except lodging when occupying the same room as the employee. Employees shall not secure government fares for family companion travel or non-official business. Expenses for family members traveling with an employee shall not be charged to the travel card.

11. NON-EMPLOYEE TRAVEL COMPANIONS:

Non-employee travel companions, such as volunteers and temporary workers, may accompany employees traveling on official business with approval from the Department Director, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.

12. TRANSPORTATION - GENERAL

(a) Direct Route. All travel shall use the most direct and/or economical route possible.

(b) The Point of Departure & Return. The points of departure and return for travel status

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shall be the office at which the employee carries out his duties or their residence, whichever is the shortest distance to the destination.

(c) Travel Insurance. Employees may purchase travel insurance at their personal expense, unless approved by the Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.

13. TRANSPORTATION - COMMON CARRIER: Common carrier refers to airline, train or bus services. The Travel Card Coordinator or employee should schedule reservations as soon as possible if discounts are offered by the carrier. Travel emergencies, approved by the Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official are exempt from this requirement.

(a) Carrier selection. Employees may choose any carrier that serves the area of travel. Employees shall use the most logical itinerary and lowest priced fare available on the selected carrier unless a higher fair is approved by the Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.

(b) TSA Pre-Check Fee. The TSA Pre-Check or similar U.S. Government fee for airport pre-screening is an authorized expense for government business travel.

(c) Non-refundable fares. Non-refundable tickets should be purchased whenever feasible.

(d) Cancellations. Athens-Clarke County shall pay for the fare and any penalty incurred for a government required change, cancellation of travel plans or other unavoidable situations approved by the Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official. If a travel event is cancelled, the Travel Card Coordinator or employee shall cancel the carrier reservation and request a credit, refund or reversal of charge.

(e) Exchanges. Cancelled flight credits not used before an expiration date may lose value. Employees are responsible for using airline credits for government travel before expiration. Credit for cancelled reservations should be used for the employee's next authorized trip if the airline serves the destination.

(f) Reward & Incentive Programs. Employees on official government business are permitted to open and maintain reward memberships with airlines, hotels, car rental companies and other travel suppliers; however, authorized travel reservations must be purchased with the government travel card.

- i. Employees shall not obtain promotional items or points from a merchant if it circumvents the purchase of the most economical means of travel. Any such arrangement is a violation of this policy.
- ii. The cost of these memberships is the responsibility of the employee and not an authorized expense of Athens-Clarke County.
- iii. Employees may retain promotional items, such as frequent flyer miles or bonus points, earned on official government travel.

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(g) Seating Upgrades. Business and first class tickets are not authorized unless pre-approved by the Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official. Unapproved upgrades may be purchased at the employee's personal expense.

(h) Baggage. Airlines may charge for checked luggage and curbside check-in. The cost of the first bag is an authorized expense. The Department Director, Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official shall authorize additional or overweight luggage. If unapproved, the employee is responsible for additional baggage fees.

(i) Reserved Seating. A reserved seating charge is an authorized expense.

(j) Private Aircraft. The use of owned or rented private aircraft for government travel is prohibited unless approved by the Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.

14. TRANSPORTATION - GROUND

(a) Shuttles. Shuttles to and from airports, bus and railroad stations are authorized when not included in carrier or hotel fares.

(b) Taxis. Taxis to and from airports, bus and railroad stations and between business meetings are authorized while traveling on government business. Taxi service provided by UBER, LYFT or similar services is permitted.

(c) Rental vehicles. Rental vehicles are authorized during government travel. Rental charges shall be paid with the government travel card. Vehicle rentals should be made using the Georgia rental car contract, if possible.

i. **Rental Reservation.** Travel Card Coordinators or employees are responsible for vehicle rental reservations from a State of Georgia contracted car rental agency. Rental vehicle reservations are available under the state contract [for inter-state and in-state travel](#). Travel Card Coordinators or employees are responsible for requesting rental reservations instructions from the Finance Department prior to travel at Clair.Sayer@accgov.com.

ii. **Rental Vehicle Sizes.** The State of Georgia rental vehicle contract provides compact, intermediate or full sized rental vehicles. Larger vehicles, such as vans, can be rented if there are four or more employees.

iii. **Insurance.** If needed, the Human Resources Department can provide an electronic copy of the auto insurance card to traveling employees. The insurance card provides proof of liability insurance coverage. ["Collision Damage Waiver" insurance is included in the state rental vehicle contract.](#) For non-State contract vehicle rentals, employees should purchase rental car collision damage waiver coverage and carry an Athens-Clarke County insurance card for liability coverage. Collision Damage Waiver coverage is an authorized expense. [Note: Athens-Clarke County waives any](#)

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liability for authorized non-government or volunteer passengers. Family companion passengers are not covered for liability or medical expenses by Athens-Clarke County.

- iv. **Parking Tickets & Moving Violations.** Parking fines or moving violation citations are not authorized travel expenses.

15. REGISTRATION FEES: Registration fees are allowable for an authorized event.

16. LODGING & ACCOMMODATIONS: Prior to checkout, an **employee** should inspect their itemized lodging bill for unauthorized charges. Payment shall be limited to the special rate or single room rate. If employees elect to share a room, one employee should pay the full bill on their travel card.

(a) Lodging selection. The employee shall select the least expensive option available taking into consideration proximity to the business destination and personal safety.

(b) Government or conference rates. The Travel Card Coordinator or employee shall request government rates or the conference lodging rate and select the lowest available rate. When the lodging selection is the conference or convention site, authorized lodging expense is limited to the government or conference rate, if available.

(c) Lodging upgrades. Upgraded room accommodations that incur an additional charge are not authorized unless approved by the Manager or Appointed/Elected Official. Employees may upgrade hotel accommodations at their personal expense. Complimentary upgrades offered by hotels should be noted on the detailed receipt.

(d) Tax exemption.

Employees shall be responsible for sales and hotel motel taxes paid for lodging while traveling on government business in Georgia unless authorized by the Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.

Hotel/Motel Excise Tax Local government officials and employees traveling within Georgia on official business are **exempt** from paying the **county or municipal excise tax** on lodging ("hotel/motel" or "occupancy" tax) [OCGA 48-13-51 (H) (3)], regardless of the method of payment (*this exemption does not apply to employees staying at an out-of-state hotel/motel*).

The Travel Card Coordinator or employee shall inform the Georgia hotel/lodging of this exemption when making a reservation or at check-in. The employee should have government identification. No form is required for exemption from hotel/motel taxes.

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Sales Tax Within Georgia, an employee traveling on official government business is eligible for **exemption** from **Georgia Sales Tax** when the payment method is a government issued travel card or directly billed to the government. Most hotel/lodging establishments require a Georgia sales tax exemption form, which is available at <https://www.accgov.com/7981/Employee-Travel-Forms>.

Georgia Hotel-Motel Fee No one is exempt from the \$5 per day hotel-motel fee, until the rental exceeds 30 consecutive days.

- (e) Deposits.** Deposits to reserve hotel accommodations shall be made with a government travel card.
- (f) Refundable vs Non-Refundable.** The Travel Card Coordinator or employee shall determine if rates are non-refundable before booking. Non-refundable rates are not authorized unless required by conference lodging.
- (g) Cancellation.** The Travel Card Coordinator or employee shall examine the cancellation/exchange rules and fees before reserving lodging accommodations.
- (h) Conference w/no official lodging.** When a conference does not offer official lodging, the Travel Card Coordinator or employee is required to obtain lodging within reasonable proximity.

17. MEAL ALLOWANCE: Employees traveling within Georgia or out of state (United States and Canada) are provided a daily meal allowance designed to cover the cost of purchased meals (including taxes and tips), based on travel location. The meal allowance is based on the combined daily breakfast, lunch and dinner rates established by the U.S. General Services Administration, **not** including the additional GSA incidental reimbursement rate. Snacks are an allowable expense with an itemized receipt, subject to the daily meal allowance.

The GSA daily meal allowance rate is built into the travel reimbursement form located on the finance department website homepage.

- (a) Inside Athens-Clarke County.** Expenses associated with meals inside Athens-Clarke County are authorized if one of the following conditions exists:
 - i. The registration fee includes a meal as part of an authorized training program.
 - ii. The meal is part of a required work-related meeting.
- (b) Meal allowance for partial day travel.** The breakdown per meal for partial day travel shall be the GSA rate for the travel location. If business travel requires the employee to leave before 7:00 am to reach the business destination or arrive home later than 6:30 pm, the respective breakfast and dinner meal allowance for the business destination is allowable for that day. An itemized receipt is required. All other travel policy requirements remain in effect.

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(c) Georgia meal allowance rates. The Accounting Administrator will provide Georgia GSA daily meal allowance rates at least annually to Departments and Appointed/Elected Officials.

(d) Out-of-state meal allowance rates. The Accounting Administrator will provide the GSA out-of-state **daily** meal allowance rates as needed to Departments and Appointed/Elected Officials.

(e) International meal allowance rates. The Accounting Administrator will provide GSA International daily meal allowance rates, if available, as needed to Departments and Appointed/Elected Officials.

(f) Meals – Other/Grocery Store Purchases. Employees with medical diet restrictions who cannot eat the meal(s) provided by a restaurant or event are allowed to buy food from a grocery store. The cost of grocery store food shall not exceed the GSA daily meal allowance rate.

18. INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL: Athens-Clarke County will cover the following costs for authorized international travel.

1. Commission for currency conversion or employee checks, when deemed necessary.
2. Bank charges for international ATM withdrawals.
3. Services of guides, interpreters, packers or drivers when deemed necessary.
4. Fees for the issuance of passport, visas and affidavits when required for international travel.
5. Costs related to vaccinations and inoculations required and recommended for international business travel.

19. MISCELLANEOUS TRAVEL EXPENSE

(a) Authorized Miscellaneous Expense incurred on official travel status should be paid by the travel card. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Business office expenses (copy services, postage, and supplies).
- Business-related phone calls, faxes, and internet usage charges and fees.
- Laundry/cleaning expenses on trips lasting a minimum of seven (7) days.
- Tolls
- Parking

(b) Non-Authorized Miscellaneous Expenses incurred on official travel status include, but are not limited to:

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- Travel expenses not required to ensure the employee's performance of official government business. Scheduling or extending travel periods to increase meal allowance or other travel expense is expressly prohibited.
- Alcoholic beverages except as approved by the Manager for specific government business activities.
- Clothing - except under circumstances approved by the Mayor, Manager or Appointed/Elected Official.
- Travel expenses incurred by any person other than the employee unless otherwise provided for in this Policy.
- Payments to friends, relatives, or other individuals for costs of meals, lodging, or transportation that are not an authorized activity or program.
- Loss or theft of personal funds or property.
- Mini-bar charges (alcohol & food).
- No-show or late fees (unless business or weather related).
- Personal expenses including but not limited to childcare, pet care, entertainment, recreational, grooming, reading materials, toiletry items, saunas, massages, shoe shines, souvenirs or personal gifts.
- Valet services for parking, when self-parking options are available unless there are valid security reasons.