

Frequently asked questions

International airfares and domestic transportation matrix

Last updated October 2024

1. What is the international airfares and domestic transportation matrix (travel matrix)?

The travel matrix provides the maximum international airfare and domestic transportation amounts that Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme employers can deduct from workers. The travel matrix also applies to the reimbursement of travel costs provisions outlined in section 7.5 of the PALM scheme guidelines.

The travel matrix applies to all PALM scheme employers in all locations, unless a worker chooses to book and pay for travel costs themselves.

PALM scheme employers must calculate deductions to recover travel costs from workers based off the **lower** of the actual flight costs and the amount specified in the travel matrix, less their \$300 compulsory contribution.

2. Why is there a travel matrix?

The travel matrix was introduced to safeguard Pacific island and Timor-Leste workers participating in the Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme from incurring excessive travel costs when flights were limited during the COVID-19 pandemic. As international flights and domestic travel remain relatively unpredictable the travel matrix continues to be a safety net for workers to ensure deductions are reasonable.

3. What about accommodation and meals?

Capped amounts for transit accommodation and incidentals have been included as separate line items in the travel matrix.

PALM scheme employers can recover up to \$160 for transit accommodation per room per night for unavoidable transit accommodation costs. Workers can only be charged for the actual cost of the room or the cap, whichever is lower. Where rooms are shared by workers, the cost must be split evenly between the workers.

Where meals have not been provided as a part of an airfare or where an overnight stay is required and the PALM scheme employer has paid for meals, workers can only be charged for the actual cost of the meals or the following caps, whichever is lower.

- breakfast \$32.00
- lunch \$36.00
- dinner \$61.00

4. What about baggage?

When developing the travel matrix, only flights with a baggage allowance were included. Excess baggage charges can be paid by the worker at the airport or included as a

deduction, where agreed in writing as per chapter 5 of the PALM scheme guidelines prior to their departure from their home country and from Australia.

5. How do I calculate the cap?

1. Calculate the actual cost of the one way or return international airfare and domestic transportation.
2. Reduce the amount by \$300 to account for the PALM scheme employer contribution (applied once per worker for the total return travel costs).
3. Use the tables to determine the maximum amount that can be recouped from the PALM scheme workers for international airfares and domestic transportation using the closest capital city or comparable regional destination to determine the appropriate cap for the location.
4. If accommodation is required, workers can only be charged for the actual cost of the room or the cap of \$160 per night per room, whichever is lower.
 - a. Where rooms are shared by workers, the actual cost of the room or the cap, whichever is lower, must be split evenly between the workers.
5. If meals are required, workers can only be charged for the actual cost or the caps outlined above, whichever is lower.
6. If any amount is left over, from **either** the flight and/or accommodation costs, it must be borne by the PALM scheme employer.

There are examples of how to calculate the cap at the bottom of the matrix.

6. What happens if a worker pays for travel costs themselves?

If a worker pays for the travel costs themselves then no deductions are required and the matrix is not relevant.

7. What if the estimated travel costs are considerably higher than the travel matrix and the PALM scheme employer is in a remote region not near the regions included in the travel matrix?

In limited and exceptional circumstances PALM scheme employers may submit a request for a one-off increase to the travel matrix cap.

To be eligible to apply for an increase, the PALM scheme employer:

- must be located in a remote or very remote region (as defined by the [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\) Edition 3](#))
- must not be located close to any of the capital cities or regional locations listed in the travel matrix,
- has researched and found that that travel costs will be significantly higher than the travel matrix, and
- has considered all reasonable alternative travel dates, airlines and domestic transport options.

PALM scheme employers must include evidence that the proposed cost is the **best value for money** such as comparable receipts and/or quotes, worksite details, proposed flights dates and paths and domestic transfers.

Please note, requests for an increase to the travel matrix are not guaranteed and will only be considered where the higher cost is unavoidable, of benefit to the worker and in line with other PALM scheme deed and guidelines provisions, such as net financial benefit (section 2.4 of the guidelines), deductions (section 5.1.6) and minimum net pay guarantee (section 5.1.7).

If agreed, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) may accept the increase in full or in part at its discretion. PALM scheme employers should contact their DEWR relationship manager before submitting the recruitment application that the increase relates to if they intend to request a temporary increase. Requests that relate to incoming flights that are submitted after the recruitment application is approved will not be considered. The worker must agree to or have the opportunity to agree to any exceptions to the travel matrix.

8. Can requests be made to increase the caps to meals and accommodation?

Requests for a one-off increase to the caps for meals and accommodation can also be submitted—however, this will only be considered where there is no other reasonable alternative option. Evidence of the proposed cost must be provided.

9. Why have costs for Vietnam been included and when do they apply?

The Vietnam Labour Mobility Arrangement (VLMA) will support the recruitment of up to 1,000 Vietnamese nationals to undertake short-term and long-term agriculture-related work in Australia for up to 4 years.

Only some PALM scheme employers are eligible to recruit workers under the VLMA. The travel matrix amounts for Vietnam will apply to workers recruited under the VLMA. Participating employers will use the updated flight matrix when calculating deductions to recover travel costs from workers in line with current guideline requirements.