

# Employee bleisure travel: Set guidelines for a win-win

Imagine you're daydreaming about visiting China when out of the blue, your company asks if you're available to make a business trip over there. Could it be? Your dream vacation, funded by your job? You excitedly tell them yes as your mind starts racing thinking about what you'll do over there, but then they interrupt you to mention there's a catch: the trip starts Monday and ends Thursday, after which point you'll need to fly back home so you can rest up for the coming week.

What? No sightseeing? No leisure travel? Only crushing jet lag? What a bummer.

In these kinds of situations, shouldn't workers be allowed to take advantage of fate bringing business and pleasure together? That's the question surrounding bleisure, a portmanteau of business and leisure if you hadn't guessed—when it comes to business travel, should things be strictly business-focused, or should a work trip offer a chance to make work more exciting?

Only employers can answer that question.

## Thinking outside the office

Nothing in the last half-century changed work quite like the pandemic. While baby boomers built a life commuting to work and punching out at 5 o'clock 'til their pension kicked in, millennials learned in 2020 that work is a two-way agreement. In exchange for years of my life, they say, employers need to provide, at the very least, opportunities for growth, fulfillment, and who knows what else? Maybe even some satisfaction. At the very least, they refuse to be cooped up in an office, and who can blame them?

And it's not just millennials jumping on the trend. People who got used to the work status quo are realizing things don't have to be that way.

For work that can be done outside the office, numerous studies show remote work to add an overwhelming boost to productivity—not a reduction. So if working outside the office doesn't disrupt the ability of work to get done, what's to stop people from relocating to locations more affordable or desirable than company HQ?

Why shouldn't remote workers fantasize about the exciting prospect of a workcation? (We're full of portmanteaus today.) If work can go wherever workers want to go, why not take it somewhere you want to be?

## How corporate travel managers can handle the bleisure trip

# NOTES

(noun)

*bleisure*

*a portmanteau of business and leisure or a fateful occurrence bringing business and pleasure together*



It's hard to imagine a better scenario for digital nomads than waking up in a hotel room, getting their work done, and going out to explore a foreign town. And as remote work becomes more and more commonplace with people steering clear of in-person jobs, the workcation is becoming a staple in the modern work-life balance. According to [one report](#), 85 percent of remote-working respondents intend to work away from home in a scenic location within the coming year.

What does this mean? Companies unwilling to seriously consider a workcation for their employees are likely to suffer retention problems and get left behind. So, it's time to mix business with pleasure. This isn't a bad thing. Even the most dedicated workaholic needs the occasional change of scenery (if you have an employee who never takes vacation days, they're probably on the verge of burnout), so get them some exotic leisure days pronto.

With a few exceptions, most of us enjoy our work trips. It's nice when employers put up the money to show the importance of their employees. It often fosters goodwill with employees when they get to explain where they're going and why to friends and family. All in all, business travel is a good thing, making the job of travel managers a little easier when it comes to negotiating those extended stay accommodations. Employees aren't too dismayed to spend workdays in a new city or country, and if they want to stay a little longer for personal reasons, they're less frustrated to hear that some of the cost might be on them.

Some expenses must be covered by employers, of course. Departing and returning flights, meal per diems, in-room wi-fi, and ground transportation are non-negotiable, but beyond that can be a point of discussion. Travel managers can alleviate some (or all) of the headache by laying out a solid groundwork of how company travel works for employees. Consider creating a document that explains in detail what each business trip should achieve, whether that's learning more about a given subject, making new contacts in the industry, or simply bonding with coworkers. The clearer the expectations, the less confusion there is about the line between business travel and a getaway.

## **Which expenses should employers cover?**

Opinions vary about how much companies should cover when employees take bleisure trips. For example, when travel planners budget \$600 for travel based on flight prices leaving Monday and returning Thursday, they may feel hesitant about changing a return flight to Sunday if doing so costs an extra \$500, which is understandable.

Same with hotels. The hospitality industry in general makes its money on the weekends, meaning the costs of

covering employee accommodations on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday are likely to exceed most normal business travel budgets. It is not up to your company to personally bankroll the entire hotel industry by covering an employee's leisure trip following their work duties, but they're expected to cover some of the expense.

**Assume that your company will be responsible for the following:**

- **Departing and returning flights:** No, don't go looking for the cheapest red eyes on Skyscanner to plan out trip expenses. Instead, find flights to and from the destination that work within a normal human schedule and provide yourself with \$100-200 of wiggle room to negotiate how much employees will need to cover should there be any differences.
- **Room accommodations:** If you originally scheduled a trip to last three days, you owe your employee three days of accommodations. Some employers offer another day, but beyond that ought to be the employee's responsibility.
- **Food costs:** Inflation costs are no joke. Three meals a day used to cost you around \$60 or so, but that's all changed, especially when you factor in locations where tourism subsidizes much of the local economy. Budget for at least \$150 a day, and probably more for business trips that take place in more metropolitan locations.
- **Ground transportation:** Getting employees from the hotel to the conference hall or restaurant should be covered by your company. Some choose rental cars, others go the taxi route, but once business functions are over, those costs are up to the employee. If your company chooses the rental car route, consider splitting those costs up with traveling employees to make things more affordable for everyone.
- **Necessities for work:** Depending on the kind of work expected of your employees on their trip, things like wi-fi, baggage check costs, and even customs fees may be required. These are the company's responsibility. However, companies should not worry about covering hundreds of extra miles of leisurely travel.

It's worth having discussions at the executive level about what your company is willing to cover. From there, lay out an official policy about what employees can expect on work trips, including any bleisurely extensions. Otherwise, there may be disagreements that lead to resentment and frustration, all of which might have been avoided were terms and conditions clearly laid out beforehand.

**Workcation doesn't mean longer hours**

Employers want to see more get done. Employees simply want to *be* done. It's an eternal struggle. Thus, when employers foot the bill to send employees somewhere scenic, they sometimes feel entitled to special requests that may infringe on that employee's personal time. These include attending business dinners, meeting prospective clients outside business hours, traveling hours from their hotel room, and more. When looking at it from the employer's point of view, it may seem reasonable to expect a little give as a provider of that kind of travel money. From an employee's perspective, though, work is work.

Just because you're sending an employee out to a fancy location doesn't mean they owe you extra time on the clock. Human resources are still resources, and they have limits. Every 8-hour day is substantial, so make sure to respect those hours and avoid having workers wring out their social sponge in pursuit of more leads. It's unavoidable in some cases, but most non-sales staff aren't going to have much of an impact following the end of a typical workday.

Remember, sending your workers on a business trip isn't actually doing them a favor, even if it seems like it. Just like you expect them to keep their personal lives out of work, you must keep work clearly separated from their personal lives after hours. Except in special circumstances—such as sales staff who work on commission rather than pure salary—business trips should respect the same usual hours that exist in the office.

## **Ask employees to stay safe**

When it comes to bleisure travel, safety becomes abundantly important. Optics-wise, it's a bad look when employees leave for a business trip and come back sick or bandaged up. While most business trips don't result in a lot of wandering and exploration, using the company car for boondocking can have some unintended consequences.

Remind your employees to stay safe. Tell them to wash their hands, try to get home before late hours of the night, avoid dangerous areas, and drink bottled water until they know it's safe not to. There are plenty more things to consider, but a little awareness can go a long way when it comes to navigating new places.

Consider creating a contract for bleisure trips that separates employer liability for the employee's own choices once work duties end and they wander off on their own.

## **Make it a win-win**

Hey, there's nothing wrong with asking your traveling employees to post photos to social media from time to time to spread the word that your company keeps a finger on the pulse of travel trends and sends its people to cool places. You may even be able to leverage some of your company's discounted rates to make bleisure trips more affordable for employees. Being in business has its perks, and finding ways to save money can be mutually beneficial.

You may want to consider speaking with your connections in the travel industry to see about getting an extra guest booked for a few more days. They get an extra guest, and your employee feels pampered with a discounted rate for a few nights. A win-win.

If there's any possibility of turning bleisure into something slightly more business-y, take advantage of it.

## **Vacations are good for employees**

At the end of the day, people work best when they feel respected and valued. Finding ways to cover some of the leisure portion of their trip is an effective, affordable way for companies to provide that kind of appreciation. See what you can do to make it happen.