E-Travel News

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Spring Forward
Daylight Savings Time begins
March 13, 2011

E-Travel Online Training
Contact your Department Travel Coordinators to sign up.
    March 10 - 10:00 am
    March 24 - 10:00 am
See E-Travel Online's User Home Page for more training opportunities by USTravel.

Managed Spend Cards

Managed spend cards are Visa cards very similar to One Cards. They are different in that managed spend card limits do not cycle (refresh) each month. The established limits decrease as transactions post. The limits can be changed at any time to reload or reduce purchasing capability. A managed spend card can be set to expire in one or two years (no renewal card) or three years (renewal card is issued).

Managed spend cards can be used for:

- Infrequent travel – issue a card to an infrequent traveler and set up limits to cover some or all costs of the trip. The card will have a zero or minimal balance at the conclusion of the trip. The cardholder can retain the card for future travel, and the limits can be increased again just before the travel takes place.

- Specific use – issue a card to a traveler who only needs to charge transactions at a specific type of vendor. Assign very limited MCCs to the card and spend limits that approximate the cost of the use. For example, a managed spend card could be set up for seasonal vehicle rental and have

   ♦ An assigned MCC for Budget Rent a Car, or

   ♦ An assigned MCC for several car rental agencies, or

   ♦ An assigned car rental MCC group.

It is up to the departments to determine if the managed spend card is an option for traveler use.

Alaska Airlines Auto Upgrade Robot

Alaska Airlines has implemented an automated upgrade service for MVP Golds and qualifying MVP mileage plan members. The Auto Robot seeks qualifying reservations and almost instantly performs the upgrade to first class. Although the majority of travelers are very excited about this service, there are some travelers who do not wish to be upgraded when they are traveling on State business.

The Auto Robot sometimes jumps in to upgrade a reservation so quickly that it causes problems in online booking tools by interrupting the auto-ticketing process before it is completed. When this interruption happens to a reservation booked in E-Travel Online **before the Final is sent**, travel planners may not receive the Final. If the Final is not received within 2 hours of submitting the travel request, Travel Planners should call USTravel to let them know, as they may be unaware of the service interruption unless reported.

USTravel has been working with Alaska Airlines to resolve some issues caused by their Auto Robot and has established a process for blocking the auto upgrade for those who do not wish to be upgraded. This can be controlled by placing a temporary block in a reservation on a trip-by-trip basis using one of the following methods:

- E-Travel Online / Reporting Information page - Under *For MVPGold/qualified MVP-Select Yes, To decline Alaska Air auto-upgrade*, select "**Yes, I do not wish be upgraded for this trip.**"

- Contact Alaska Airlines to add the inhibitor to a particular trip.

- Contact USTravel.

   ♦ No extra charge for agent assisted bookings.

   ♦ $4 surcharge for unassisted bookings.

E-Travel Office

USTravel

E-Travel Online Help Desk
(907) 500-4290 / 877-500-4290
Email: e-travelhelp@ustravel.us

Reservation Call Center
(907) 500-4292 / 866-762-8728
FAX: (907) 465-8288
Email: e-travelaprvl@ustravel.us

Research
Email: soaresearch@ustravel.us

ETMT

Kathy Adair
State Travel Manager
(907) 465-6534

Carmen Engen
Accountant IV
(907) 465-2447

FAX: (907) 465-3798

Email:
doa.dof.e-travel@alaska.gov

See us on the Web!
http://statetravel.alaska.gov

Travel E-Qs

There will be a random quarterly drawing for a prize from the answers submitted by March 15, 2011 to: doa.dof.e-travel@alaska.gov

1. What is the benefit of issuing a managed spend card to an infrequent traveler?

2. How would you place a permanent block on the Alaska Airlines auto upgrade robot?

3. Under what circumstance would USTravel require the CVC code from the back of a traveler's One Card ?

4. What is the key to access the features on the new TA?

5. What is the search parameter setting for an "anytime" time search?

Contest prize winnings are considered non-cash compensation, and will be included as W2 earnings

Price Comparison

When tracking price comparisons between the web and E-Travel Online, it is important to be knowledgeable of the fare types and how the E-Travel preferences are set in the traveler profile. E-Travel Online offers flexibility to travelers in order to purchase a trip that best suits their business need. Each profile has preferences that can be modified based on the trip destination or specially desired routings. How these preferences are set can determine the type of fare and scheduling that is returned in E-Travel Online. These particular settings are important to note when traveling from Alaska to the lower 48 states where multi-connections and layovers are most common. For example, some travelers need to purchase non-restrictive fares, while others may simply want the lowest available. Some travelers want a specific flight and search by schedule instead of price. Fares can differ (higher or lower) depending on the actual flight being selected, the connection time, and how many stops a flight may have. Bottom line, you must be comparing "apples to apples" which means that you must use the same search criteria.

When booking rural air, there may be lower fares offered on rural carrier websites because most rural carriers do not participate in the GDS, and therefore rates are not published in E-Travel Online. (ERA is an exception.) Some rural carriers have been added to E-Travel Online for convenience in viewing their schedule, but since the rates are not in the GDS, they do not have "live inventory" in E-Travel Online and must be booked through USTravel by using the Rural Air Form. The Service Standards, posted on the Travel Website, do allow for specific rural carrier bookings to be made directly with the carrier, as long as there are no hotel or rental cars in the reservation.

Occasionally, a vendor may offer a special fare that is only available for purchase on their website, is not published in the GDS, and will not be available in any booking tool. USTravel can purchase these types of tickets upon request, if they are provided the CVC code from the back of the traveler's One Card, which is required for most web purchases. Most web purchases are instant purchase and can't be held in a preliminary status.

Tips & Tricks

E-Travel Online Time Selection Enhancement

The TIME drop-down box now defaults to "Anytime" instead of "Select." Users will no longer be required to make a selection. All other previously available time options are still applicable.

The search parameters used for an "Anytime" time search are Noon plus/minus a 12-hour time frame on a segment basis.

For example, if 9:00 am is selected for the outbound flight and "Anytime" for the return flight, the outbound time is based on the profile time window setting, while the return will have a 12-hour window.

"Anytime" will reserve a car rental for 12 noon, and does not apply to hotel bookings.

New TA Form

A lot of positive feedback has been received regarding the functionality of the new Excel TA form that was released in mid-January. One of the most commonly asked questions is "How can I access the new features?" The answer is MACROS. If you are unfamiliar with macros, there is a quick reference guide published just above the actual Excel 2003 and Excel 2007 versions of the TA in Finance's Travel website. The handy document explains just how to get all those "neat things" to work in our new TA.

The paper TA will soon take the back burner as departments begin to use DATA-BASICS to process travel requests. However, for some situations the paper TA will still be necessary so it's a good idea to become familiar with "turning on macros" today!!

**If one dream should fall
and break into a thousand pieces,
never be afraid
to pick up one of those pieces
and begin again.**
Flavia Weedn