

Corporate Traveler's Edge: A Guide on APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC)

What is an APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC)?

The APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) is a travel document that streamlines and facilitates business travel for citizens of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) member economies. It is a significant initiative within the APEC community, aimed at promoting seamless business travel and enhancing economic integration among its member economies. There are currently 21 APEC participating countries: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, United States and Vietnam.

The card acts as a multiple-entry visa, granting cardholders access to participating economies without the need for individual visas. The ABTC facilitates faster immigration clearance and provides access to designated fast-track lanes at airports and ports. Eligible individuals, who meet specific criteria and are citizens or permanent residents of participating APEC economies, can apply for the ABTC, which is valid for up to five years. This card eliminates the need for separate visa applications and reduces administrative burdens and costs for frequent business travelers.

Its primary purpose is to ease business travel by providing streamlined immigration clearance and visa facilitation for cardholders. The ABTC allows for multiple-entry visits to participating APEC economies for business purposes without the need for individual visas. However, it does not authorize the cardholder to engage in employment or work activities in those countries. It is crucial to comply with the immigration regulations of each participating country and a work permit must be obtained if the primary purpose of the trip is to actively engage in productive work activity.

Are there benefits to obtaining an ABTC?

The APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) offers several benefits to cardholders, including expedited immigration clearance and visa facilitation.

- 1) **Visa Facilitation:** The ABTC allows cardholders to enter participating APEC economies without the need for individual visas. This streamlines the entry process and saves time and effort in obtaining separate visas for each destination.
- 2) **Expedited Immigration Clearance:** Cardholders are granted access to designated fast-track lanes at airports and ports, enabling quicker immigration clearance upon arrival and departure. This helps to reduce waiting times and streamline the travel experience.
- 3) **Multiple-Entry:** The ABTC is a multiple-entry travel document, allowing cardholders to make multiple visits to participating APEC economies within the validity period of the card. This flexibility is beneficial for individuals who frequently travel to the region for tourism purposes.
- 4) **Cost and Time Savings:** By eliminating the need for individual visas, the ABTC can save travelers the costs associated with visa application fees and time spent in the visa application process. This makes travel planning more efficient and cost-effective.
- 5) **Extended Stay Options:** While the ABTC does not grant unlimited stay, it often allows for longer durations of stay compared to regular tourist visas. Cardholders can generally stay for a specified duration per visit, typically ranging from 60 to 90 days, depending on the participating economy. This can provide more flexibility for tourism activities.



It is important to note that while the ABTC can be used for certain tourism purposes, its primary intention is to facilitate business travel. The exact extent of its use for tourism may vary between participating APEC economies, as each country has its own regulations and requirements. It is advisable to check with the immigration authorities or embassies of specific APEC economies for detailed information regarding the use of ABTC for tourism and any additional requirements or limitations.

What does the process look like?

The processing time for the APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) can vary depending on the issuing economy. Generally, it takes several weeks to a few months to process an ABTC application. The exact duration may depend on factors such as the volume of applications, the completeness of the application, and the efficiency of the issuing authority.

As for the application process, it is important to note that the ABTC application cannot be filed online in all participating countries. The availability of online application systems may differ per country. Some economies offer online application options, while others may require applicants to submit physical application forms and supporting documents in person or by mail.

If online application is available, applicants can typically fill out the application form electronically, upload the necessary supporting documents, and submit the application online. The online system may also allow applicants to track the progress of their application and receive notifications regarding the status of their ABTC.

For APEC economies where online application is not available, applicants may need to download and complete the physical application form, gather the required supporting documents, and submit them to the designated issuing authority by mail or in person.

The ABTC can be renewed. The renewal process allows cardholders to extend the validity of their ABTC once it expires.



Can dependents be included?

Dependents cannot be included on the ABTC. The card is issued to individuals who meet the eligibility criteria and are actively engaged in business activities. It is not designed to accommodate dependents or family members of the cardholder.

Each eligible individual, who meets the requirements for the ABTC, must apply for and obtain their own individual ABTC. Dependents or family members who wish to travel under the benefits of the ABTC would need to individually meet the eligibility criteria and apply for their own ABTC if they qualify.

It's important to note that the specific eligibility criteria and regulations regarding the ABTC may vary among participating APEC economies. Therefore, it is recommended to consult with immigration experts or with the local authorities for the most accurate and up-to-date information on the ABTC application process and eligibility requirements.

Does the application need a sponsor?

You do not need a sponsor for the ABTC application. The ABTC is typically obtained through an individual application process, and it does not require a specific sponsor or sponsorship from an organization or individual.

The ABTC application process involves meeting the eligibility criteria set by the issuing economy, providing the necessary supporting documents, and submitting the application directly to the designated issuing authority. The eligibility criteria generally include being a citizen or permanent resident of the issuing economy, actively engaged in business activities, and having a clean criminal record.

While you do not need a sponsor for the ABTC application, it is important to note that some economies may require proof of business activities or employment as part of the application process. This can include providing business registration documents, a letter from your employer, or other relevant documentation to demonstrate your active engagement in business.



Can the ABTC be issued digitally?

Yes, some APEC economies have already switched to issuing a digital ABTC instead of the physical card. Out of the 21 participating APEC countries, at the time of writing, only 10 economies have so far transitioned to virtual ABTC. These countries are Australia, Brunei, Chile, Indonesia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, and Thailand.

Holders of virtual ABTCs issued by participating countries that utilize the virtual platform can now access the virtual ABTC on their smart phones and present it to the authorities at port of entry.

Summary

APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) is a travel card that enables business travelers within the APEC participating countries to utilize a single card facilitating entry into the member countries and fast track immigration clearance. It is not a similar concept to the EU Free Movement whereby citizens of member countries have access to the labor market without having to apply for a separate work authorization. The APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) is purely for business travel and engaging in productive work may not be possible. The card may be issued as a physical card or a virtual card depending on whether the issuing country has transitioned the process online.