

GSA.gov Per Diem Usability Test

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General Services Administration
Template by GSA & Forum One



Section 1

Background

Per diem and its current interface

Per diem

“An allowance for lodging, meals, and incidental expenses”

GSA sets rates for contiguous 48 states and has a rate lookup tool on their website.

Per diem users

$$\begin{array}{rcl} & 13.9 \text{ million annual GSA.gov users} & \\ \times & 56.7\% \text{ use for per diem/travel} & \\ \hline = & 7.9 \text{ million annual per diem/travel users} & \end{array}$$

annual users from 06/01/22 to 05/31/23 (Google Analytics)
per diem/travel as primary reason for visit (Survey 3.0, Qualtrics) (n = 7477)

Current interface (July 2023)

New form

PER DIEM LOOK-UP

1 Choose a location

Name: City (optional):

ZIP:

OR

2 Choose a date

Select Fiscal Year:

Travel start date (mm/dd/yyyy): OR Travel end date (mm/dd/yyyy):

Buttons:

Results by trip

Results by fiscal year

Old form

Search by City, State or ZIP

For Fiscal Year:

Select a State:

City (optional):

ZIP:

Buttons:

Search by State

For Fiscal Year:

Map of the United States with state abbreviations.

Your search for Los Altos, California 94024 (Santa Clara including Sunnyvale / Palo Alto / San Jose)

Estimated per diem total: \$994 (Max lodging total + M&IE total)

Lodging breakdown: June 26, 2023 - June 29, 2023

Date	Daily Rate	# of Nights	Total
June	\$245	3	\$735

Max lodging total: \$735

Meals & incidental expenses breakdown: June 26, 2023 - June 29, 2023

Days, Month	Daily Rate	# of Days	Total
First day (06/26/23)*	\$55.50	1	\$55.50
Full day (Jun)	\$74	2	\$148
Last day (06/29/23)*	\$55.50	1	\$55.50

*The first and last calendar dates of M&IE are calculated at 75%.

M&IE total: \$259

Buttons:

New results

FY 2023 Per Diem Rates for California

I'm interested in:

Daily lodging rates (excluding taxes) | October 2022 - September 2023

Filter Results...

Primary Destination	County	2022 Oct	Nov	Dec	2023 Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Antioch / Brentwood / Concord	Contra Costa	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165
Bakersfield / Ridgecrest	Kern	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123
Barstow / Ontario / Victorville	San Bernardino	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120
Death Valley	Inyo / NAVAES China Lake	\$130	\$136	\$136	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130
Eureka / Arcata / McKinleyville	Humboldt	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118
Fresno	Fresno	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113
Los Angeles	Los Angeles / Orange / Ventura / Edwards AFB less the city of Santa Monica	\$182	\$186	\$186	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182
Mammoth Lakes	Mono	\$138	\$138	\$136	\$136	\$136	\$136	\$136	\$136	\$136	\$138	\$138	\$138
Mil Valley / San Rafael / Novato	Marin	\$189	\$186	\$186	\$186	\$186	\$186	\$186	\$186	\$189	\$189	\$189	\$189
Monterey	Monterey	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$240	\$240	\$240	\$166

Showing 1 to 10 of 33 entries

Buttons:

Old results

Section 2

Study design

The methods and tasks

Testing (July 2023)

Session style	Moderated usability tests with UserTesting.com. Sessions are recorded and participants think aloud.
Total participants	10 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7 web, 3 mobile
Participant criteria	Federal employees <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Travel is part (or potential part) of job duties
Session structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction (5 minutes)• Tasks (15 minutes) - 8 tasks• Interview (10 minutes) - 12 questions <p>Total: 30 minutes</p>

Tasks

Task #	Location	Date	PD location	Ask
1	Fairplay, CO	Daily rate for August	Standard rate	Lodging
2	Doylestown, PA	Daily rate for August	Non-standard rate: Bucks, Bucks County	Lodging
3	Davis, CA	Daily rate for August	Non-standard rate: West Sacramento / Davis, Yolo County	Lodging, meals, and incidental expenses
4	Honolulu, HI	September 3-5 (2 nights)	Outside GSA jurisdiction - Department of Defense rate	Lodging
5	Austin, TX	September 10-14 (4 nights)	Non-standard rate: Austin, Travis County	Lodging, meals, and incidental expenses
6	Participant's current location	Daily rate for today	*Varies	Lodging

Tasks

Task #	Question
7	Is per diem based on where you are lodged or where your work site is?
8	If you can't find a hotel below the maximum lodging rate for your destination, what do you do next?

Interview

1. Have you used GSA's per diem feature before? How often?
2. Have you ever used your agency's electronic travel system or travel management system?
3. What brought you to use GSA's per diem tool?
4. Were there any tasks today that were easier than you expected?
5. Were there any tasks today that were harder than you expected?
6. What could be changed that would make things easier?
7. [New form] What parts of the interface do you like or dislike?
8. [New results] What parts of the interface do you like or dislike?
9. [Old form] What parts of the interface do you like or dislike?
10. [Old results] What parts of the interface do you like or dislike?
11. Is there anything else I should have asked you or that you would like to share?
12. Do you have any questions for me?

Section 3

Study results

Findings from the tests

Reasons for using GSA.gov

Users plan for their trip with GSA.gov, and then book the trip with their agency's electronic travel system, Concur or DTS.

“We typically have to present to leadership and say, we want to go to these sites, and here's why, and here's what it would cost.”

Accuracy

Participant	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8
1								
2								
3								
4				***				
5								
6	***							
7								
8								
9								
10	***			***				

Color code	Performance	Tasks	Percentage
	Success	47	61.0%
	Partial success	6	7.8%
	Partial failure	3	3.9%
	Failure	21	27.3%

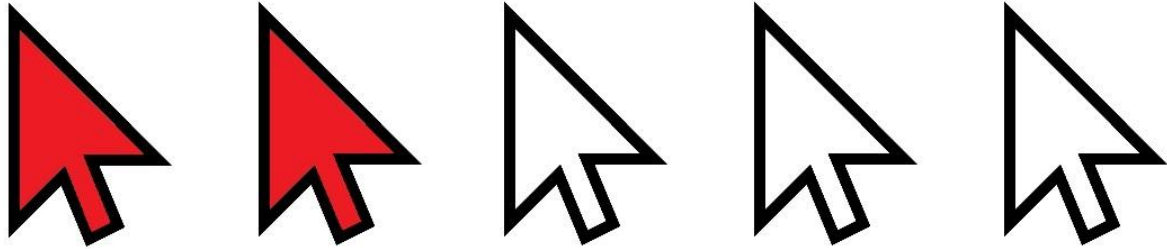
Color code	Device	Participants
	Web	7
	Mobile	3

*** indicates that the participant gave up after not being able to complete the task

Interactions

Interactions included mouse clicks, text entries, significant scrolling, and zooming in and out.

Errors were defined as interactions that did not bring users any closer to their goal.



Two of every five interactions were errors.

Behaviors

Efficacy - smiles, nods

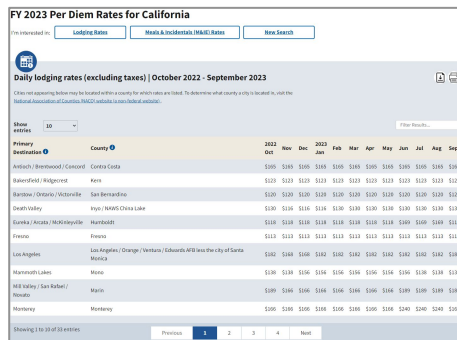
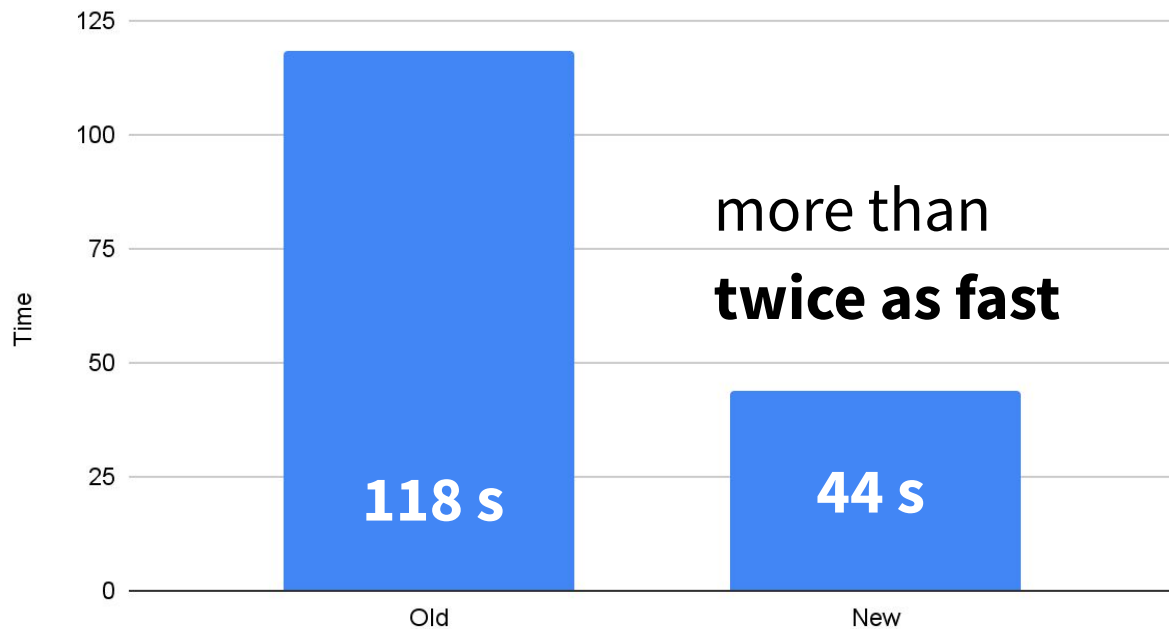
Weariness - rests head on chin, pursed lips, sighs

Confusion - “hmm...”, “umm...”, “huh?”, squints eyes, pushes lips to side, tilts head

Frustration - frowns, shakes or jolts head, furrows brows, crosses arms, throws hands in air

Anxiety - picks at face, laughs uneasily, swallows hard, breathes in sharply through nose, excessive blinking

Time



Results



Subjective



“Smarter,



not harder”

Your search for **Los Altos, California 94024** (Santa Clara including Sunnyvale / Palo Alto / San Jose)

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Date	Daily Rate	# of Nights	Total
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Max lodging total: **\$735**

Meals & incidental expenses breakdown: June 26, 2023 - June 29, 2023

Days, Month	Daily Rate	# of Days	Total
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*The first and last calendar dates of M&IE are calculated at 75%.

M&IE total: **\$259**

[Additional terms and conditions](#)

[New Search](#)

[Print Results](#)

FY 2023 Per Diem Rates for California

I'm interested in:

[Lodging Rates](#)

[Meals & Incidentals \(M&IE\) Rates](#)

[New Search](#)



Daily lodging rates (excluding taxes) | October 2022 - September 2023

Cities not appearing below may be located within a county for which rates are listed. To determine what county a city is located in, visit the [National Association of Counties \(NACo\)](#) website to view federal websites.

Show entries

10

Filter Results...

Primary Destination	County	2022 Oct	Nov	Dec	2023 Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Antioch / Brentwood / Concord	Contra Costa	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165	\$165
Bakersfield / Ridgecrest	Kern	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123	\$123
Barstow / Ontario / Victorville	San Bernardino	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120	\$120
Death Valley	Inyo / Mono / Nevada	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130
Eureka / Arcata / McKinleyville	Humboldt	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$118
Fresno	Fresno	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113	\$113
Los Angeles	Los Angeles / Orange / Ventura / Edwards AFB less the city of Santa Monica	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182	\$182
Mammoth Lakes	Mono	\$138	\$138	\$138	\$138	\$138	\$138	\$138	\$138	\$138	\$138	\$138	\$138
Mill Valley / San Rafael / Novato	Marin	\$189	\$189	\$189	\$189	\$189	\$189	\$189	\$189	\$189	\$189	\$189	\$189
Monterey	Monterey	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166	\$166

Showing 1 to 10 of 23 entries

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Subjective

"Oh look at that! That's awesome! I was just saying I wish there was a calculator and there is one. Has this always been here? This is wonderful. I'm excited, lots of good news today."

Your search for Los Altos, California 94024 (Santa Clara including Sunnyvale / Palo Alto / San Jose)			
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*The first and last calendar dates of M&IE are calculated at 75%.			
M&IE total: \$259			
Additional terms and conditions			
New Search			
Print Results			

Web analytics

Percentage of web traffic on each lookup

Data collected from 06/01/22 to 06/30/23

10%

90%

1%

Your search for Mountain View, California 94040 (\$)

Estimated per diem total: \$675 (Max lodging total + M&IE total)

Lodging breakdown: June 26, 2023 - June 28, 2023

Date	Daily Rate	# of Nights	Total
June	\$245	2	\$490

Max lodging total: \$490

99%

FY 2023 Per Diem Rates for California

I'm interested in: [Lodging Rates](#) [Meals & Incidental \(M&IE\) Rates](#)

Daily lodging rates (excluding taxes) | October 2022 - September 2023

Cities not appearing below may be located within a county for which rates are listed. To determine what county a city is located in, visit the National Association of Counties (NACOS) website (a non-federal website).

Primary Destination	County
Antelope / Brentwood / Concord	Contra Costa
Oakland / Alameda / Alameda	Kern
San Jose / San Jose / San Jose	San Bernardino
Death Valley	Inyo / Inyo / Inyo
Costa / Costa / McKinleyville	Humboldt
Freemont	Freemont
Los Angeles / Orange / Ventura / Edwards AFB less the city of Santa Monica	Los Angeles

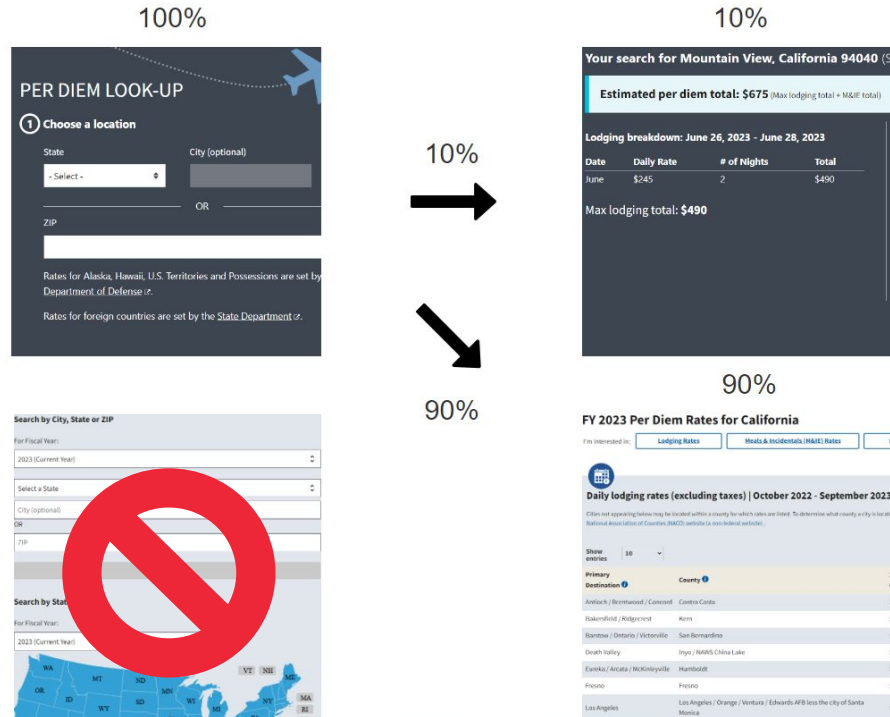


Section 4

Recommendations

Improving the per diem experience

Replace the old form with the new form.

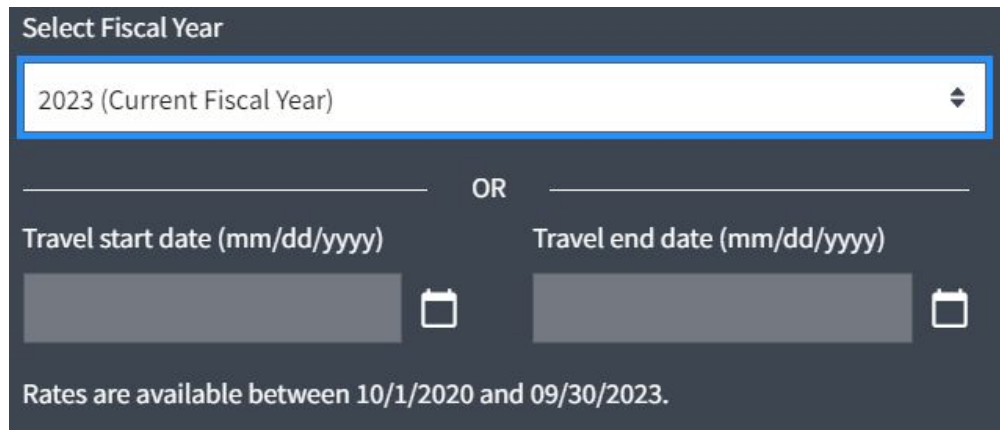


The amount of users seeing the new results increases from 1% to 10%, an order of magnitude larger.

Remove the conditional logic which disables the date fields.

"It's not letting me click the start date, so that to me is a little bonkers."

"Okay, does it even work?
[laughs] I'm a little bit skeptical."



The screenshot shows a dark-themed form titled "Select Fiscal Year". At the top is a dropdown menu with "2023 (Current Fiscal Year)" selected. Below this, the word "OR" is centered between two horizontal lines. Under the first line is the label "Travel start date (mm/dd/yyyy)" followed by a disabled grey date input field and a calendar icon. Under the second line is the label "Travel end date (mm/dd/yyyy)" followed by a disabled grey date input field and a calendar icon. At the bottom, a text line states "Rates are available between 10/1/2020 and 09/30/2023."

Swap the placement of the date picker and fiscal year dropdown.

"I think if it was ordered that way I would have naturally punched in the dates and maybe selected fiscal year underneath of that, and just see where it took me."

Proposed change ->

2 Choose a date

Travel start date (mm/dd/yyyy)

Travel end date (mm/dd/yyyy)

Rates are available between 10/1/2020 and 09/30/2023. Calculate

OR

Select Fiscal Year

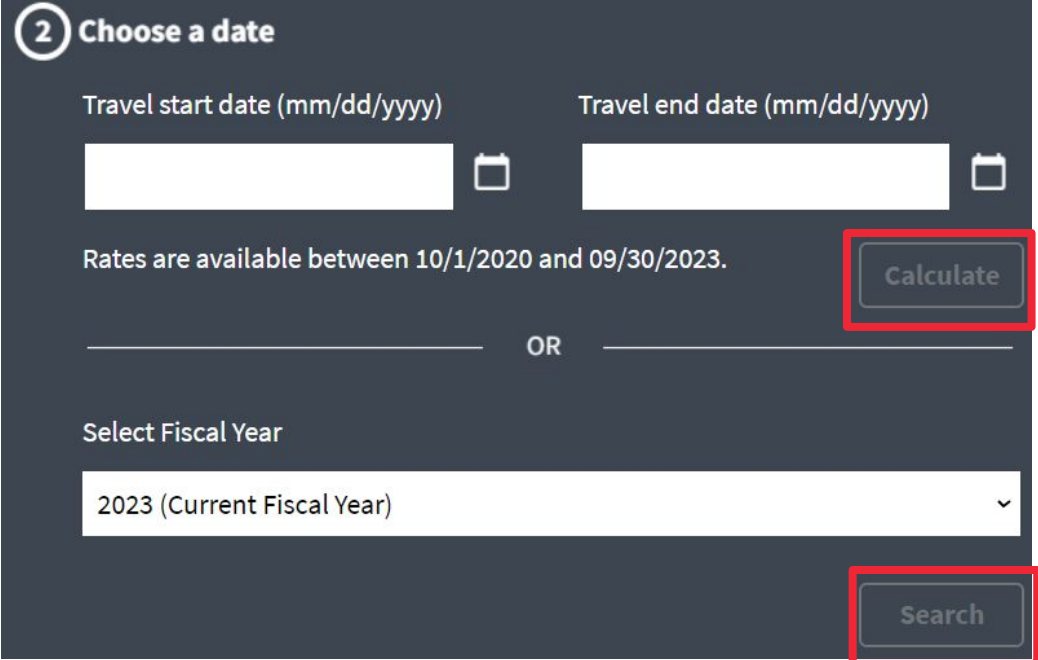
2023 (Current Fiscal Year)

Search

Highlight the new per diem calculator.

“if the start and end date was advertised as a calculator, people would pay more attention to it.”

Proposed change ->



The image shows a dark-themed user interface for a per diem calculator. At the top, a section titled "2 Choose a date" contains two input fields for "Travel start date (mm/dd/yyyy)" and "Travel end date (mm/dd/yyyy)", each with a calendar icon to its right. Below these fields, a text line states "Rates are available between 10/1/2020 and 09/30/2023." To the right of this text is a button labeled "Calculate", which is highlighted with a red rectangular box. Below the date fields and the availability text, there is a horizontal line with the word "OR" in the center. Underneath this line is a label "Select Fiscal Year" followed by a dropdown menu. The dropdown menu is open, showing the text "2023 (Current Fiscal Year)" and a downward-pointing chevron icon. At the bottom right of the form is a button labeled "Search", which is also highlighted with a red rectangular box.

Swap the placement of the city and state fields.

Users are being encouraged to input a city because doing so increases their chance of success.

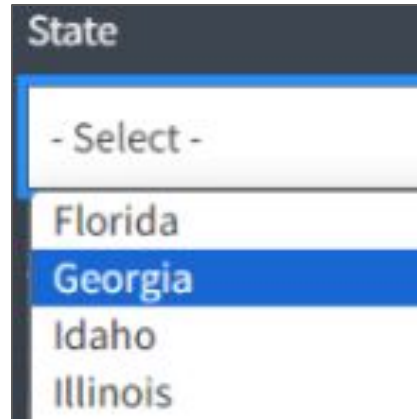
Proposed change

City (optional)	State
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="- Select -"/> ▼

Add Alaska, Hawaii, and the U.S. territories to the state dropdown list.

“Okay, alphabet, not that hard. [pauses] Why, why? Why? Why?”

Super fun activity: try to find Hawaii in the image below.



Highlight when the standard per diem rate applies.

Selecting the wrong per diem rate was the most common reason for failure.

"I don't see Fairplay listed. I feel like there's something I should be getting here that I'm not."

Proposed change



Standard per diem rates

If your destination isn't listed, check to see if its county is listed. If not, the standard rate applies (\$98 for FY23).

Summary of Recommendations

Complete report available upon request.

Email: eric.kellenberger@gsa.gov or kristal.byrd@gsa.gov

9

SEVERE

12

MODERATE

9

MILD