

IETF Meeting Attendees' Frequently Asked (Travel) Questions

Abstract

This document attempts to provide a list of the frequently asked questions (FAQs) posed by IETF meeting attendees regarding travel logistics and local information. It is intended to assist those who are willing to provide local information, so that if they wish to pre-populate answers to some or all of these questions either in the IETF wiki or a meeting-specific site, they have a reasonably complete list of ideas to draw from. It is not meant as a list of required information that the host or Secretariat needs to provide; it merely serves as a guideline.

Status of This Memo

This document is not an Internet Standards Track specification; it is published for informational purposes.

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1. Introduction

IETF attendees come from all over the world. The typical IETF meeting has representatives from over 50 countries. It is quite likely that a large portion of the participants in any given IETF are newcomers to the specific location where it is being held or even to the country or region itself. As a result, they are going to have questions regarding their personal travel needs and logistics that may only be answerable by someone who has been to the area before, someone who lives there, and/or someone who speaks the local language.

The IETF, the Secretariat, and any local host organizations responsible for the logistics of making IETF meetings happen are not travel agencies, but they often can and do assist with identifying and hosting the common information that most attendees wish to have while they are planning their trip. This document attempts to cover the most commonly asked questions and categories for information. This document is not intended to provide answers to these questions for every possible location in which IETF meetings may be held. Rather, it is intended to provide a set of FAQs for use by the hosts and others who have experience with the area where the event is being held, so that questions and answers can be handled efficiently, rather than waiting until someone sends an email to the meeting attendees mailing list in the days leading up to the meeting.

2. Why is this document necessary?

In reading this document, one may ask, "Isn't that why search engines and travel sites exist?" Although we can sometimes find what we're looking for with search engines, that results in hundreds of people spending time searching, which is not very efficient. In addition, despite the widely held belief that if it is published on the Internet, it must be true, sometimes the information that is available is either inaccurate, incomplete, or out of date, so it may be less reliable than firsthand information from someone who has been there. Also, no matter how much online translation has improved, some of the most useful local travel sites may be difficult for non-native speakers to navigate and find information, because navigation buttons, graphics, and other active content are typically not machine-translatable, and non-native speakers may not realize when machine translation is inaccurate in a critical way. Lastly, while the companies that serve as hosts for IETF meetings often have participants attending IETF, the folks who are responsible for handling the details of hosting an IETF may not be regular attendees. Therefore, this document, especially Section 3, is intended to be

something that can be provided to host event organizers that may not have much familiarity with the IETF, so that they have a better sense of the information that attendees will find helpful.

The format of this document was chosen so that it captures the FAQs, but usually not their answers. This is because IETF RFCs are typically static and infrequently updated, which does not make them a particularly suitable format to contain location-specific information. The questions found in this document are a result of informal review of the attendees mailing lists from past meetings and feedback from many individuals; they are believed to be reasonably static from one meeting to the next. This document is not necessarily all-inclusive, but it should serve as a reasonable baseline such that a static format like an RFC is appropriate. It is likely that this RFC will need to be revised periodically -- a clue that this is necessary will be when, over the course of multiple meetings, multiple additional questions that are not covered by this document repeatedly surface on the attendees mailing list and thus become FAQs.

The answers to this document's questions are expected to be stored in a location that is easily updated by multiple parties, so that site-specific information can be refined and updated as often as necessary, thereby creating a living document. There are several options as to where to store this location-specific living document. For some past IETF meetings, the hosting organization or an individual [HIROSHIMA] has set up a special website. The best recent examples of these, in terms of the information provided, are www.ietf75.se and ietf71.comcast.net. Unfortunately, these types of sites are not maintained indefinitely once the IETF meeting for which they were set up has concluded, so the only way to review them as examples is to use the Internet Wayback Machine [WEBARCHIVE]. Such a website has been a source of much additional information about the location and is always quite helpful. If the host decides to set up a site like this, the hope is that this document will provide guidance as to the type of information with which to populate such a site. However, it is by no means a requirement that the host set up an external website. Further, not every IETF meeting has a local host, or even a host at all. In these cases, the need for the same set of information is not lessened, but the IETF will be more reliant on the willingness of those with experience in the area where the meeting will be held to share the benefit of that experience with others. The IETF has provided a hosted wiki [WIKI] that can simply be populated with the same sorts of information. This has the added benefit of having a single location where additional information can be provided by experienced travelers, locals, and host representatives alike; it is therefore not completely reliant on the host. In the case where the IETF-hosted wiki is to be used, this

document may serve as a framework of categories that could be pre-built when the site-specific page is set up, so that others can begin populating the information.

3. Helpful Information

There are a number of general categories of information listed below. Some sections, such as Sections 3.1 and 3.2, contain information necessary for travel; the rest can be considered nice to have. All of it comes from actual FAQs from the attendees mailing lists.

Much of the needed information may already be available in another form online. There is no need to reproduce information that can be found on external websites, so simply providing pointers to information already available in other locations is quite appropriate. However, it is very helpful if some validation and vetting of the provided information is performed in order to avoid outdated or inaccurate information. Additionally, because this is a static and location-agnostic document, it's quite likely that some questions are either irrelevant or confusing for some locations. Therefore, "not really relevant here" and "we don't know" may be valid answers to some of these questions. In those cases, it's better to say this explicitly rather than to simply omit the section, as this will confirm that the information was not simply omitted. The main thing to remember when providing information in these categories is that those traveling to the event have not been there before, so one should not assume a high level of background knowledge about the area, its customs, etc.

3.1. Travel

- o Recommended airport(s) for domestic and international connections. To avoid confusion, include the appropriate International Air Transport Association (IATA) airport code(s) whenever possible.
- o Non-flight options to get to the city where the meeting is being held (e.g., if there are convenient rail travel options).

3.1.1. Transit between the Airport or Train Station and Primary Hotels

Information in this section is especially critical if the airport is significantly distant from the venue or use of a taxi is otherwise impractical or not recommended (e.g., if attendees must use a train or long-distance bus to get to the venue from the airport). If train travel options are provided as an alternative to flying, it is recommended that the list below be provided for those options as well (e.g., transit between the train station and primary hotel).

- o Estimated travel time. This is also important for return travel from the venue to the airport. It is worth noting any recommendations about leaving extra time if airport security and check-in is always busy or if there will be significant differences in travel time due to rush hour traffic.
- o Shuttles (if applicable).
- o Arranging transit directly with the hotel (if applicable). Hotels sometimes provide car service or are willing to pay taxi bills upon your arrival so that the charges can be added to the hotel bill instead of requiring local currency. It is helpful to know in advance if this is common or uncommon in the local area.

3.1.1.1. Taxi Information

- o Credit cards accepted? Which ones?
- o Foreign currency accepted?
- o Estimated costs for taxis, as well as any rules/recommendations about metered fares versus fixed-rate or pre-negotiated fares
- o Description of "official" taxis if appropriate
- o Links to websites or phone numbers for remote/pre-booking taxis
- o How to find the taxi stand at the airport/train station
- o Printable local-language address card to show taxi driver in case of language barrier
- o Ride sharing (the IETF wiki usually has a section where attendees can post arrival times and work out taxi sharing)

3.1.1.2. Mass Transit

Navigating an unfamiliar mass transit system can be challenging. Things that seem obvious to locals may not be obvious to visitors.

- o English map
- o How and where to purchase farecards/tokens
- o How to use tickets/tokens (where to insert them, how to get them stamped, how to transfer, etc.)

- o How trains/buses are labeled and how to identify the destination of a particular train/bus
- o The general frequency of service -- in particular, whether one should just go to the station or consult a schedule first
- o Which transit system to use for which destination (when there are multiple transit systems in the area)
- o Nearby stations and how to identify a station entrance (common logo, color, etc.)
- o It may be helpful to advise when things are not commonly labeled in a western character set (e.g., place signs) and provide pictures or unicode text representations of the signage as it will appear.

3.1.2. Getting Around near the Conference Venue

The same information relevant for airport transit will likely be relevant here, including taxi and mass transit information. If possible, walking directions between the conference venue and the hotel(s) should be provided if the venue is not co-located with the hotel.

Additionally, it is helpful to note if having a vehicle available (rental or personal car) is a help or a hindrance in getting around in the local area. For example, it may not be recommended to try to drive in the area near the conference venue due to:

- o Parking availability and costs
- o Congestion charges and other restrictions on when and where one can drive
- o Traffic

3.2. Regional/International Considerations

- o Plug type/voltage. This can simply be a reference to electricaloutlet.org [PLUGS] unless there are specific exceptions or details that need to be highlighted.
- o Visa requirements, pointers regarding travel documents. IETF typically provides information about visas via a pointer to an embassy or similar page that has general information about common types of visas, when they are required, waived, etc. It also includes information about how to obtain a letter of invitation

should one be required. It is helpful to provide information that goes beyond that, especially if there are known issues where it may be difficult for entrants from certain countries to get a visa processed in the time between when the meeting is announced and when travel must commence. If there are expedite processes, this is a good place to discuss them.

- o Languages commonly spoken
- o National/regional holidays, work stoppages/strikes, or other issues that may impact travel or business hours during the week of IETF

3.2.1. Health and Safety

- o Phone numbers to access local emergency services (e.g., 911, 112, 999, etc.)
- o Closest health clinic/hospital facilities
- o Areas of high crime to avoid
- o Common local scams, including taxi scams
- o Hostile flora and fauna and how to identify/avoid
- o Local air-quality considerations. Everyone has different thresholds for "unhealthy" air quality, and those with health or respiratory problems may need to be able to locate local air-quality monitoring information to determine how to best prepare themselves.
- o Smoking rules
 - * Are most bars and restaurants smoking or non-smoking? Are separate smoking sections available?
 - * Rules about smoking in public places
 - * Availability of dedicated smoking/non-smoking rooms in hotels
 - * Rules about smoking outdoors

3.2.1.1. Water Availability

- o Is local tap water potable/drinkable? If not, is it truly unsafe because of impurities or contamination or does it simply taste bad by local standards?

- o How does one differentiate between tap water and bottled in a restaurant when ordering?
- o Are water fountains/bubblers or water bottle refill taps commonly available in public places?

3.2.2. Money

- o General credit card acceptance in common locations, including any restrictions (e.g., requires a 'Chip and PIN' card, no American Express, etc.)
- o ATM locations near the venue and at the airport. Note whether these accept foreign cards, which systems they participate in, and whether they have an English language option.
- o Tipping customs, particularly for taxis, restaurants, and hotel staff
- o Currency conversion rate -- a reference to a currency converter site, e.g., Yahoo! [CURRENCY] will suffice unless there are specific conversion details believed to be relevant
- o In establishments where foreign currency is accepted either for purchase or for exchange, note whether this is recommended or not due to favorable or unfavorable exchange rates, etc.
- o For what types of purchases (if any) bargaining/haggling on the price is expected or customary, and if so, customary methods for successful bargaining

3.3. Food

The nature of IETF's schedule means that food and drink provide both a welcome break as well as a venue to continue discussions with colleagues, either related to IETF work, other shop talk, or anything *but* shop talk. During IETF's lunch break, approximately 1000 people are simultaneously looking for reasonably priced lunch options, with time frames ranging from "grab and go" for a working lunch to 75 minutes for a sit-down meal. When meetings have concluded for the day, the wide variety of attendees means that people are looking for all types of food, all price ranges, and atmospheres ranging from a place suitable for an in-depth conversation to a table at the bar. The more information that is available about the food and drink options nearby, the better. This information is especially helpful during the first few days of the

conference, because the number of folks looking for assistance from the hotel concierge or other information desk staff at one time tends to overwhelm the personnel available.

3.3.1. Restaurants

It's generally helpful to note whether restaurants require/recommend reservations, if they have busy/rush times that should be avoided or planned for, etc.

It's helpful for restaurants to be categorized by:

- o Price
- o Proximity to venue (it's useful to highlight quick options for lunch breaks)
- o Type of cuisine (this is a great place to highlight local specialties and favorites)
- o Special dietary needs such as vegan, vegetarian, halal, and kosher. It's also extremely helpful to discuss methods for communicating these needs to restaurant staff when ordering. A more in-depth discussion of dietary concerns can be found in [HEALTHY-FOOD].

3.3.2. Other Food Items

- o Local grocery/convenience stores -- for attendees who cannot find restaurant options that meet their dietary needs
- o Coffee shops and tea houses nearby -- specifically, where can we find the best espresso or cup of tea?
- o Bars and pubs nearby
- o Restaurants or pubs with private rooms or large seating areas for big groups

3.4. Communications and Electronics

- o Places to purchase local SIMs and types of mobile voice/data service supported, (e.g., Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), Long-Term Evolution (LTE), Universal Mobile Telecommunications System (UMTS), CDMA, etc.)
- o Places to get replacement electronics and accessories (e.g., power cords, adapters, batteries, etc.)

- o Public Wi-Fi access (outside of hotel and venue) including Wi-Fi availability in the recommended airports, mass transit, etc.

3.5. Weather

- o Link to a site or brief information on temperature and humidity norms for the time of year when the meeting will be held, e.g., Weather Underground [WEATHER]
- o If this is an area known for extreme weather, note any amenities to make travel easier, such as enclosed walkways or indoor passages between buildings.
- o This also refers to indoor weather: what is the common indoor temperature?

3.6. Fitness

- o Soccer: If the weather cooperates, it is common for some IETFers to try to hold a "soccer BoF" -- a pick-up soccer game sometime during the week of IETF. Thus, a field appropriate for soccer in close proximity to the venue is useful information to have.
- o Running/walking paths or routes. Some folks prefer this method for exercise over using a treadmill.

3.7. Tourism and Souvenirs

While this is certainly not necessary information for the primary goal of an IETF attendee, many attendees earmark a day or two on either side of the conference for sightseeing, so this is an opportunity to highlight local attractions. Links to sites containing information about walking tours, local tourist attractions and the like are certainly appreciated. If there are events scheduled adjacent to IETF such as music or food festivals, cultural events, etc., attendees are happy to hear about these events as well.

Additionally, many attendees choose to purchase souvenirs as gifts or for personal use. In addition to the standard "tourist-trap" items such as t-shirts and knick-knacks, many attendees look for items that are locally crafted, local specialties, or otherwise significant to the local area and culture. This is another topic that can be highlighted in the information provided to attendees.

4. Acknowledgements

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5. Security Considerations

This document is not a protocol specification and therefore contains no protocol security considerations. However, some of the above items refer to the physical security of IETF participants and their property. This document is not intended to be a comprehensive discussion of physical security matters for IETF attendees.

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