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AIRPLANE TRAVEL WITH YOUR DOG

I'm planning to travel by air and would like to take my dog with me. What are some of the factors I need to consider before taking my dog on an airplane?

Having your dog accompany you during travel may add enjoyment to your trip. It's important to keep your dog's safety in mind when traveling, so be sure to check with the airline well in advance of your trip. Familiarize yourself with the airline's pet requirements so that you can avoid any last minute problems. Here are some basic tips for airline travel with your dog:



If possible, avoid flying your pet as checked cargo during times when temperatures on the ground are likely to be below 40°F (4 C) or above 80°F (21 C). Some airlines will not check pets as baggage in the summer months because of potentially hot conditions in the cargo holds.

Take direct flights and try to avoid connections and layovers. This eliminates missed baggage connections and the chance that your dog will be left exposed in extreme weather.

Many airlines will allow one pet to travel in coach and one in first class, with some provisions. Some airlines limit the number of pets traveling within the cabin area so be sure to notify the airline that your dog will be traveling with you. Your dog must be in a standard carrier that will fit under the seat and must not disturb your fellow travelers. Obviously, only small dogs qualify for this type of accommodation.

Seek the advice of your veterinarian before traveling. Update all vaccinations and take all necessary health papers with you. A health certificate for your dog is required on many flights. Check with your airline to be sure of their requirements. If you are traveling to a foreign country, be aware that many countries require a specific international health certificate. It may take several days or even weeks for your veterinarian to acquire the form so plan well in advance. You might also inquire about possible requirements to quarantine your dog should you be traveling to a foreign country or an island.

If possible, use airlines that hand carry your dog (inside the carrier) to and from the aircraft. Otherwise, the carrier could simply be placed on a conveyor belt.

Do not feed your dog for six hours before the flight; allow water until flight time. Water should be available in the carrier during the flight. Give the dog fresh water as soon as it arrives at your destination.

Avoid the busiest travel times so airline personnel will have extra time to handle your dog.

Do not tranquilize your dog without first discussing it with your veterinarian.

Make sure the travel carrier has specific feeding and identification labels permanently attached and highly visible.

Baggage liability limitations apply to your dog. Check your ticket for liability limits or, better yet, speak directly with the airline. If you are sending an economically valuable pet, you may want to purchase additional liability insurance.

Be aware that airline travel may pose a risk for dogs with a pre-existing medical problem. For example, you should carefully consider traveling by plane with a dog that has kidney or heart disease. Also, one study has shown that short-faced breeds of dogs (English bulldogs, Boston terriers, Pekinese, etc.) do not travel well in certain situations. Discuss these issues with your veterinarian prior to travel.



What do I need to consider when buying a travel carrier?

Your dog's travel carrier will be its "home" for much of your trip. It's important to choose the right carrier. Here are some helpful guidelines:

The carrier should be large enough for your dog to stand up and turn around freely. Crates are available for dogs from two to two hundred pounds. Make sure it is an "airline-approved" crate.

The walls of the crate should be strong and waterproof. This will prevent crushing and waste (urine) leakage.

There must be adequate ventilation on at least three sides of the carrier.

The carrier must have sturdy handles for baggage personnel to use.

The carrier should have a water tray which is accessible from the outside so that water can be added if needed.

Cover the bottom of the carrier with an absorptive covering or underpad. At many pharmacies, you can purchase flat absorbent underpads that are designed for bedridden people with bladder control problems.

Pet stores, breeders, and kennels usually sell carriers that meet these requirements. Some airlines also sell carriers that they prefer to use. Check with the airline to see if they have other requirements.

Try to familiarize your dog with the travel carrier before you leave for your trip. Let your dog play inside with the door both open and closed. This will help eliminate some of your dog's stress during the trip.

What about carry-on kennels for my small pet?

Small pets can usually be transported in the passenger cabin as long as the container will fit under the seat. Be sure and check with the airline regarding their specific carry-on requirements. Sometimes there are restrictions on the number of pets allowed in the cabin on a flight. There also may be an extra charge.

Soft, airline-approved, carry-on kennels, sometimes called Sherpa bags, are available.

Is there any other advice that might be useful as I prepare for my trip?

By applying a few common sense rules, you can keep your traveling dog safe and sound.

Arrange ahead of time to stay in a hotel that allows pets. Many bookstores carry travel guidebooks with this type of information. There are also helpful websites, such as www.petswelcome.com, www.petfriendlytravel.com or www.travelpets.com.

Make sure that your dog wears a collar with an identification tag securely fastened. It should have your name, address, and telephone number.

Always travel with a leash-harness for your dog. This is more secure than a collar. Familiarize your dog with the harness before the trip. Attach your dog's leash while it is still inside the carrier. Outside the carrier, a frightened dog can easily run away before you have a chance to secure it.

If you leave your dog unattended in hotel rooms, make sure that there is no opportunity for escape. Leave the dog in the carrier or in the bathroom. Be sure to inform housekeeping personnel of your dog and ask that they wait until you return before entering the room. Use the "Do Not Disturb" sign.

Should your pet get lost, contact the local animal control officer. We strongly recommend a pet identity microchip.

Remember, advance planning is vital to making the trip an enjoyable experience for both you and your dog.