



Should Your Pet Travel with You?

Pet travel is great for many, but not all, furry friends

by Sharon O'Brien

Before you set out with your pet as a traveling companion, take time to determine whether your animal friend is a good candidate for pet travel.

Many pets, especially dogs, enjoy traveling and would much rather go along for the ride than be separated from you while you are away, but some animals don't handle pet travel due to health issues, temperament, or their reaction to the stress that accompanies changes in their routine.

How to Decide if Pet Travel Works for Your Pet

Here are a few rules of thumb regarding pet travel, to help you decide whether your pet should join you on your trip, and what to do if your pet stays behind:

Consider the type of travel you have planned, and whether your pet can really participate. Dogs may love camping and hiking, but your cat probably won't. Cats may be perfectly happy curled up in a corner of your RV, but the same quarters may be confining and potentially dangerous for a large dog. Think about what your pet needs to be happy, healthy and safe while traveling, and whether you will be able to create that pet travel environment throughout your trip.

Before you travel somewhere, be sure there are no pet restrictions where you're going. Most countries impose strict pet quarantines of several months, so unless you plan a very extended stay, international pet travel is not realistic in most cases.

For pet travel within the United States, most people don't realize that the rules vary from state to state. North Carolina has restrictions on pets in hotels and other accommodations, for example, and Hawaii requires pet quarantines of 30-120 days on all carnivorous animals to help prevent the spread of rabies.

Pets that are sick, injured, or pregnant are not good candidates for pet travel. It's not fair to the animal, and your vacation is likely to be less than relaxing if you spend every day caring for an animal that could get better care at home.

If your pet bites, barks, yowls or whines excessively, or is unable to follow basic obedience commands, he or she should stay at home. It is unfair to subject other travelers to such behavior.

If You Decide to Leave Your Pet at Home

If you decide that pet travel is not a good idea for your companion, be sure to leave your animal friend in good hands while you are away. Choose a safe environment with someone you trust:

Family members, friends and neighbors who are willing make good pet sitters, because they know your pet and can often care for them in familiar surroundings, which creates less stress for your pet.

Professional pet sitters are another good option. Most offer services ranging from daily feeding, walking and play time to full-time house sitting and pet care in your home. When choosing a pet sitter, be sure to interview more than one potential sitter and check their references before hiring them to care for your pet. For more information about pet sitters, check with the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters or Pet Sitters International.

Another option is to board your pet with a professional kennel or veterinary clinic. Generally, the level of human interaction for your pet is less at a kennel or vet clinic than with a professional pet sitter or someone you know, but for animals that need medical care a veterinary clinic may be the best alternative. For a list of kennels in your area, check with your veterinarian or contact the American Boarding Kennels Association.

If you are still unsure if pet travel is a reasonable option for your companion, ask your veterinarian for advice.

Tips to Prepare Your Pet for Travel

A little advance planning can make pet travel safer and more fun

If you enjoy traveling with your four-legged companion, you're in good company. A recent survey by a leading pet care products manufacturer found that when given the choice, more than 70% of Americans would prefer to travel with their pets. Today, many parks, hotels and other travel destinations welcome pets who travel, and if you are considering a trip with your pet here are some pet travel tips that will make the trip safer and more fun for you and your furry friend.

Get a vet check-up. Have your vet issue a health certificate stating that Fido is healthy and able to travel, and that all vaccinations are up to date -- especially distemper, rabies, and bordatella (a highly contagious virus that causes a persistent cough in dogs; also known as kennel cough because it is often shared by dogs in kennels).

If Fido gets lost and end up in a shelter, having vaccination records will help you get him out faster.

Make sure your pet is wearing a collar and pet ID tag. If you and your pet travel companion become separated, you will have a better chance of being reunited if your pet is wearing an ID tag with your current address and phone numbers, including your cell phone number. Since ID tags are relatively inexpensive, it's a good idea to add a second tag with either the contact information of a friend or family member, or the address where you will be staying if you plan to be there awhile.

Consider having your veterinarian insert a pet microchip. A microchip is a good way for rescuers to identify your pet if the collar and ID tag become lost. And if Fido has a medical condition or disability, get a free pet medical alert tag and register your pet in a free U.S. nationwide pet registry.

Bring plenty of medication. If Fluffy takes medication, be sure to bring enough to last through the trip. And it's a good idea to have your vet write an extra prescription slip, in case the pet meds are lost.

Is Fido well-behaved? Behavior is an important consideration when planning to travel with your pet. Bad manners and not listening to his owner may be tolerable in the backyard, but when traveling it's very important to know that Fido will mind his manners and obey basic commands. If needed, brush up on basic training, either by yourself or with a training professional.

Does Fido play well with others? A socialized animal -- one who is used to being around strangers and other animals -- will tolerate the stress of pet travel much better than one who prefers to be only with you. If Fido is not socialized, consider leaving him with a trusted friend, pet sitter, or at a boarding facility; you will enjoy the trip much more without having to worry about whether your pet having a good time.

What's the best way to travel? A majority of people who travel with their pets travel by car. Airline travel can be difficult for pets, but not impossible if you plan well in advance. Contact airlines and find out what their pet travel policies are, and make the best decision for you and your pet.

Practice riding in cars. If the only time Fido gets in the car is to go to the vet, chances are he's not going to enjoy the ride to Aunt Martha's. Before you go, practice short trips with your pet, and reward him so he knows that car travel is a good thing.

Invest in a quality pet carrier. If you fly with your pet you will be required to use an airline-approved pet carrier, but a good pet carrier will also keep your pet safer in a car.

Is your destination pet-friendly? There's nothing worse than arriving late at night and finding out your hotel doesn't accept pets. There are many hotels and motels that welcome pet travelers, so check them out and make your reservation early.

Pack a bag for Fluffy. In addition to carrying health documentation (see above), be sure to bring your pet's health records, medication, a favorite toy or two, and special food if that is required.

With a little advance planning, you and your pet can travel successfully together, exploring new territory and returning home safe and healthy.