

Pet Travel Tips

We want you to be able to leave your pet with us when you travel, and know that they are safe, but you may want or need to take them with you on occasion. There are ways to make pet travel safer, easier, and more enjoyable—for both you and your pet.

From the June 2008 issue of The Budget Travel Handbook

Planning

If you're going to the beach or a state or national park, check the pet policy. You don't want to leave for the beach only to find out at the last minute that during peak travel season, the city doesn't allow dogs on the beach! Try websites like petswelcome.com to search for hotels where pets are welcome and any restrictions there may be.

Health & Safety

An ID microchip implant in your pet can help avert loss or misidentification while traveling. It's a one-minute procedure (costing about \$50) in which a tiny capsule is injected under loose skin over your pet's shoulders. If your dog or cat gets lost and turns up at a shelter or vet's office, a scanner can be used to read the number on the chip, and the microchip company will contact you.

Mark your pet's carrier and collar/ ID tags with important medical information—such as any allergies and your vet's phone number. Also, be sure to bring enough of any necessary medications to get you through an extra week in case of bad weather or other major problems.

Packing

Collapsible water bowls, which you can buy at Wal-Mart for \$5, are easy to carry on hikes and are great for hotel rooms. And they take up hardly any space.

Before a road trip, measure out each expected meal for your pet and put them in Ziploc bags. Then write the date and time of the meal on each bag—that way you'll know if you have enough food for every meal. You can also put any medicine doses in the bags, so you don't forget to give it them. Always pack one or two extra bags, just in case.

Never leave home with out a "doggie bag." Fill a canvas bag or small carry on style bag with cleaning wipes, plastic bags, paper towels, and enzymatic cleaner. If an accident occurs, you won't have to ask your host or a stranger for something to clean it up. Being prepared (even if you're only going away for a day) is the key to having your pet welcomed back.

For longer trips, order a small bag of your dog's food and ship it to the hotel. This keeps your luggage weight down, ensures your pet will have the food he or she likes, and keeps you from having to find a pet store. The hotel staff is generally fine about accepting such packages, as long as you warn them ahead of time.

Flying

Before flying with your dog in a carry-on bag, get him/her used to it by putting him/her in it when you run errands. Also, try to spend a week adjusting your dog's eating and pooping habits to suit your flight schedule. And when stowing your dog under the seat on the plane, leave a small opening in his carrier so he can see you if possible.

As soon as you board the plane, ask a flight attendant to check with the baggage handlers to make sure your dog has been loaded safely in the cargo space. They're happy to do it, and it gives me peace of mind. Use a marker to write your contact info on the crate, or hang an extra dog tag on it. Also, keep a photo of your pet with you.

Shipping a pet air cargo is not recommended, but if you're left with no other choice, fill cups with water and freeze them overnight. That keeps the water from spilling in the crate, and the water lasts longer. In hot weather, invest in a MiraCool mat for the bottom of the crate. You soak the pad in cold water for about 30 minutes, and it keeps pets cool for hours. The mat costs \$15-\$40 and is reusable.

Driving

Dog Car Seats can keep your pet and you safer while on the road. Having an auto accident because a pet got under foot, or bumped a gear shift would be a nightmare, especially if anyone was injured. Once your pet understands that he/sh can no longer ride in your lap, they will grow to love their dog car seat. Kyjen makes one called Outward Hound that costs \$18-\$30.

Hotels

Let the housekeepers know that your pet is inside the room and they don't need to clean it. The housekeepers are appreciative, and they likely will ask if we need anything.

A ground-floor room is convenient when your dog needs to go out, and it also makes it easier to get a crate in and out of the hotel. Crating your pet allows you to leave the room without worrying about accidents or chewed furniture.

If you have a pet that is nervous or shows off by barking when sounds they can't see occur, request a room at the end of a hall, so there'll be little traffic. Also, it's smart to pack a sweat suit to throw on for early-morning walks.

As an alternative to crating, you might secure your dog in the bathroom with a baby gate. Most bathrooms have hard floors, making accidents easier to clean. Your pet may be less surprised when the housekeepers come in because they can see them.