

On the Road Again

Tips on Traveling with your pets

Pets are included in more than two-thirds of all family vacations. They are, after all, an important part of the family. A little planning can go a long way to make certain that your pets travel safely and have a good time, too.

Preliminary Planning:

Prior to your departure, take your pet to the vet for a check-up to ensure that your animal is healthy and will not have problems with stress or underlying illnesses. This gives your veterinarian an opportunity to discuss potential parasites, diseases, and other precautions that may be necessary to take while you are away from home. Your vet will also be able to provide you with a health certificate, which is required by many states and countries. It is also extremely helpful to plan ahead by consulting books or the internet to locate hotels that allow pets.

Next make sure your pet has a current ID tag that has your telephone number on it, as well as a rabies tag. Consider having your pet microchipped in order to help others find you in case your pet gets lost in a strange place. The new "Home Again" microchip includes Amber Alert-type bulletins in a 25 mile radius of the location in which your pet is lost. It also includes current vaccinations and medical alerts, which is especially important if your pet is taken to a shelter. Another advantageous feature of the "Home Again" microchip is that it includes free use of the National Animal Poison Control hotline should your pet pick up or eat something dangerous. I recommend this microchip not only for travelers, but for all pet owners, especially in hurricane-prone areas, such as Florida.

En Route by Road:

If you are traveling by car, give your pets an opportunity to become accustomed to spending time in an automobile with a few practice rides around town before heading on your trip. Some states require restraints to safe-guard pets in case of an accident and to protect you from distractions, such as a cat lounging between your foot and the brake pedal or a dog on your lap that insists on licking your face while you're driving 70 mph on an interstate. Depending on the size and personality of your pet (some get nervous or sick, while others relax and enjoy the ride), you may want to use a carrier that can be buckled in a special pet harness, or a pet seat.

It is best to wait until the end of day when you reach your destination to feed pets, but they do need water and to stretch their legs every two hours. Bring bowls and water, as well as their favorite toys and comfortable bedding. Be careful about temperature. Large dogs will not do well in the back of a large vehicle with only two windows down for ventilation while driving. To breathe easily, they will require air conditioning. And, it goes without saying, never leave a pet alone in a car when it is hot outside....or under any circumstances, for that matter.

In Flight:

Airlines have different rules regarding pet travel, so be sure to call ahead of time and check. Airline travel works best for small pets that can go with you, provided they are quiet and do not "freak out." Pets that stress easily should not travel because the plane ride, coupled with a long stay in a new environment, can lead to illness. Pets with laid back personalities can handle such trips with ease. Remember that baggage can be exposed to extreme temperatures, delays, and even get lost, so think twice about traveling by air with large pets that go under the plane. You may want to look into professional pet shippers that take

animals from door to door.

Travel decisions are best made based on your pet's health, size, and temperament. If your pet isn't up for an extended trip, consider boarding him or her at a veterinary facility, which I highly recommend in case of medical problems or an emergency. I believe strongly that it is a more controlled environment, which is safer for your pet. Be sure to visit the facility where your pet will be kept and inquire about walks, monitoring, playtime, and baths. With the right accommodations, you can rest assured that your beloved friend will be well taken care of so you can enjoy your vacation guilt and worry free.