Flying with Your Pet - Pet Air Travel (Part 2)

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Choosing an Airline

The most important factor in selecting an airline is how they will handle and care for your four-legged family member. There should be absolutely no reason to doubt that your pet will be cared for properly and arrive safely along with the rest of your family. Even if you are loyal to a particular airline for business or leisure travel, when bringing your pet you should start your research at square one based on your pet's needs. Some airlines simply don't allow pets, others have questionable track records, while a few, like Midwest Airlines, go out of their way to welcome and ensure your pet's safety and comfort.

Questions to Ask Your Airline:

- Where does my dog travel on the aircraft?
- Is it temperature controlled and pressurized?
- What temperature do you keep the bin?
- How many dogs or cats travel per aircraft?
- When do you load the pets onto the aircraft?
- Are pets held and supervised in a cool/warm room before they are taken out to the aircraft and loaded?
- Does the pilot or ramp agent check on pets before their departure?
- Is each kennel separately strapped down to the aircraft floor?
- What is your procedure if the flight becomes delayed?
- Do you bring the pet to the owner until a delayed flight is rescheduled?
- What documentation do you require for my pet?
- For overseas travel (including Hawaii), inquire about any special health requirements (such as quarantine upon arrival).

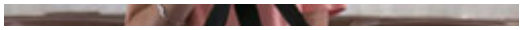
Carefully read all of their rules and regulations and make sure they meet your standards and expectations. You have every right to contact prospective airlines and ask them specific questions about their pet services.

For added assurance, public records of pet-related incidents by air carriers are released annually and posted on the D.O.T. website - it's a good idea to check out the reputation of the airline you're considering flying with! Keep in mind that most of the incidents occur due to unknown health issues related to the pet's health history.

Choosing a Flight

The safest and least stressful flights are always going to be direct flights. You may even consider driving a couple extra hours to another airport that offers direct flights (vs. one with layovers and flight changes). Also, try to avoid flying during extreme weather changes. If traveling in the middle of winter or summer, or from one climate to another, your airline may "bump" your pet off the flight for his own safety. Carriers such as Midwest Airlines leave it up to the pet parent and their veterinarian to decide if it's safe for them to fly in certain types of weather, as determined during the health exam. Also, if you can, avoid peak travel periods and holidays to ensure a stress-free flight.

In-Cabin or Below?



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Depending on your dog's size and demeanor, you may have the choice to bring your pet onboard. Small dogs or cats that are used to traveling in soft-sided carriers without too much fuss make great candidates for in-cabin companions. Brachycephalic (short-nosed) small breeds should always fly in-cabin, as they are more susceptible to breathing problems at high altitudes. Be sure to check with your airline as below-cabin brachycephalic pets are not allowed to fly during the heat in the summer months.

All other dogs and/or cats will be just as safe flying "below cabin" in a temperature-controlled, pressurized hold (some designated specifically for traveling pets). Be sure to ask prospective airlines what their accommodations are for below-cabin pets so they meet your expectations.

Choosing an Airline-Approved Kennel

While some airlines offer kennels for sale right at the ticket counter, it's recommended you purchase yours a few months in advance so your pet can get used to spending extended periods in it. Since the main risk to air-traveling pets is panic, you'll fly much more at ease knowing your pet is as comfortable for a few hours in his kennel as you are in coach.

To acclimate your dog to his new kennel, let him relax and rest quietly in his carrier for varying lengths of time, gradually letting him get used to being in there for a bit longer than the length of the flight. By travel time, he'll accept being in the carrier for extended periods as normal!

An approved transport crate must:

- Be tall enough for the animal to stand without touching the top of the cage, sit erect, turn around, and lie down in a natural position
- Latch securely
- Be free of interior protrusions, handles, or grips
- Have a solid, leak-proof bottom that is covered with plenty of absorbent material
- Be adequately ventilated so that airflow is not impeded

Part 1 Introduction: Calming Your Concerns	Part 2 Travel Planner Countdown: 1-2 Months Prior	Part 3 Travel Planner Countdown: 10 Days Prior	Part 4 Travel Planner Countdown: Travel Day

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