

Flying with Your Dog - Tips for Safe Air Travel with Pets



As the travel season approaches, many pet owners will be faced with the decision of whether or not to bring their dog along as they travel. It may be very tempting to bring your best friend along with you on your travels, but each dog's particular temperament, as well as any illnesses or physical impairments need to be taken into consideration when making travel arrangements for your pet. If you have any doubts whether or not your pet is fit to travel you should consult your veterinarian; a pre-trip visit with the vet is advisable for any owner traveling long distances with their dog, just a quick check to make sure they have all their vaccinations and assess their overall health can avoid unwanted issues.

Crating

If your companion is able to travel without difficulty you will need to devote some time to prepare him/her for the journey ahead. Dogs that can comfortably fit within a crate of 23" x 13" x 9" can be taken on board the plane with you, but larger dogs will need to be placed within the cargo hold on the underside of the aircraft. If your dog is not crate trained you will need to get them used to the idea of being in the container for prolonged periods of time, especially if your trip is taking you cross country.



The best way to get your dog used to the crate is to gradually introduce them to it, never forcing them to go inside, instead associating the crate with items they enjoy such as a favorite treat, toy or placing them inside for meal time. You also need to make sure that you have the proper sized crate for your animal, they should be able to get up and turn around inside; a crate that is too small can be uncomfortable and make the dog aggravated, while a crate that is too large may encourage the dog to relieve themselves at one end of the crate while lounging in the other.

Crates containing larger dogs are not accepted on certain flights, and while this information is different from carrier to carrier, here are a few basic guidelines:

- Pets not accepted on flights longer than 12 hours in duration.
- Kennels must be constructed of wood, metal, plastic or any similar, durable material that is leak proof and escape proof; collapsible kennels are not accepted.
- The crate must have ventilation on both sides.
- Kennels must have a water container with outside access for filing.
- There are limitations to the number of checked pets per customer - usually two.
- Pets will not be accepted when temperatures extremes of over 85 degrees Fahrenheit or below 45 degrees Fahrenheit exist at any point on itinerary.

- Weight requirements - usually 100 lbs. is the max combined weight for dog and kennel.
- Kennel sizes depend on what type of aircraft you will be flying in, commuter planes will generally not allow anything larger than 29" x 53".
- Crates must be properly labeled on outside, with tags all of your contact information and any identifying information for your dog.

Breed Restrictions



Each airline has its own specific set of regulations, and unfortunately many airlines do not allow Bully breeds, and brachycephalic (short nosed) breeds are often banned because of increased difficulty breathing at higher altitudes - the cargo cabin is not pressurized in the same manner as the passenger cabin. Continental, United Airlines, America West, Alaska/Horizon and American Airlines ban Pit Bull breeds from flying. These airlines also reserve the right to deny service to any dog that they deem to display any of the major characteristics of a Pit Bull or are believed to show aggressive behavior.

The following airlines accept Pit Bulls and other Bully breeds (brachycephalic breeds are still discouraged/prohibited from flying):

- Northwest
- Delta
- US Airways

Fees

Again, fees for placing your pet in cargo differ from airline to airline, but you can expect to pay anywhere from \$80 to \$150 for a one-way flight. This space can sometimes be purchased ahead of your departure date, and it is advisable to call ahead and request space for your pet.

Safety

The Humane Society of the United States recommends that you do not transport your pet by air unless absolutely necessary. As mentioned previously, the cargo hold where pets are placed are not designed in the same way as a passenger cabin and have less resistance to the changes in air quality affected by altitude. These cargo holds are not made for life support and many animals continue to be injured or killed on commercial flights each year due to extreme temperatures, poor ventilation, lack of oxygen and rough handling by baggage handlers. Since 2005 all North American based airlines are required to publish statistics on companion animal incidents taking place while the animals were in their care either in the cargo hold, waiting to board or awaiting pickup. The [Air Travel Consumer Report](#) publishes monthly statistics on incidents involving companion animals, you can see all the statistics for 2007 broken down at [Airline Pet Incidents 2007](#).

Here are a few safety guidelines to remember if you do decide to fly with your pet:

- Take a direct flight and always fly on the same plane as your dog.
- Do not ship your brachycephalic, or pug nosed/snub nosed, dog. These breeds include American Staffordshire Terrier, Boston Terrier, Boxer, Brussels Griffon, Bull Terrier, Dutch Pug, English Bulldog, English Toy Spaniel, French Bulldog, Japanese Chin, Japanese Pug, Pekinese, Shih Tzu, Staffordshire Bull Terrier.
- When you board the plane notify the captain and at least one flight attendant about your special cargo on board, they are more likely to take special precautions if they are aware your companion is on board.
- Choose flights that will accommodate temperature extremes; i.e. early morning/late evening in summer.
- Fit your pet with a collar that will not get stuck in carrier doors and contains all of your contact information for both your home and vacation location.
- Place a label on the outside of the carrier with your name and contact info, as well as contact info for someone in both your home and vacation areas. Make sure these are cell phone numbers where someone can be reached on an urgent basis.
- Do not give your pet tranquilizers for the flight, these can decrease respirations and make it more difficult to breathe at high altitude.
- Do not feed your for 4-6 hours before your departure; small amounts of water can be given, but do not put them in the kennel with a full water bowl.
- Try to avoid heavy travel times such as summer and holidays, your pet is more likely to get mishandled and misplaced during these busy seasons.
- Carry a current photo of your dog, this will make it easier for staff to locate them in the event they are lost.
- Open your pet's carrier as soon as you are in a safe place and examine your pet for any signs of injury or discomfort. Seek medical attention immediately and file a report with the airline.