

Do your homework before traveling with pets



Who says that flying with pets is easy? There's a lot of necessary research and preparation even before you make your travel plans. Paramount is choosing the right air carrier and getting your animal companions ready for that 30,000-foot experience. There are many airline rules and regulations regarding pet travel, and they vary from airline to airline. Do your homework in advance.

First, decide whether your pet *can* fly. There are age restrictions to consider. On domestic flights, Delta Airlines requires puppies and kittens to be older than ten weeks; United Continental won't allow pets under eight weeks to travel. Reptiles, amphibians, and fish are prohibited as carry-on or checked baggage on Delta but are accepted as air cargo. Snub-nosed or pug-nosed dogs and cats, such as Boston terriers and Persian cats, are no longer accepted as checked baggage by Delta due to their breathing issues.

There are also weather and seasonal restrictions to consider while making flight plans. Delta will not accept animals as checked baggage from May 15 through September 15 and from November 1 through March 31 on certain flights. Year-round restrictions apply if air temperatures exceed 85 degrees or fall below 10 degrees.

Most airlines provide three ways to fly pets: as carry-on luggage, checked baggage, and as air cargo. To fly as carry-on, the pet must be kept for the flight's duration, as well as during boarding and deplaning, in a carrier small enough to fit under the aircraft seat. United Continental allows hard-shelled kennel crates no larger than 17.5 inches by 12 inches by 7.5 inches; and soft-shelled kennels no larger than 18 inches by 11 inches by 11 inches. Certain types of aircraft, such as the Boeing 747 and 757, have limited storage space beneath some

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seats.

Delta charges \$125 one-way fees for in-cabin pet travel within the United States and Canada, but trained service and emotional-support animals of any size are allowed in the cabin uncaged with the passenger and fly at no cost. As of March 1, 2018, Delta has implemented tightened rules for transporting these animals owing to complaints and widespread abuse of emotional support verification.

Earlier this year the *New York Times* reported that Delta carries 250,000 service and emotional support animals a year, which is a surge of 150 percent since 2015. On-flight disturbances by untrained emotional support animals, ranging from urinating on plane carpeting to barking to dog bites, have pushed the carrier to require proof of health and vaccinations at least 48 hours before flights and signed documents stating the animal's good behavior or risk being prevented from boarding or removed from a plane.

For years airlines have required travelers with emotional support animals to provide a letter explaining why the animal needs to ride in the cabin, signed by a doctor or a licensed mental health professional. According to the *Times*, airlines have found it hard to verify the legitimacy of these letters and believe some travelers try to get around the carry-on fees by giving their pet a support animal designation. Unfortunately, these abuses are creating more hassle for disabled travelers with service dogs on Delta flights.

Airline websites post their detailed pet policies to help travelers make appropriate flight choices. Links to 29 international and domestic air carriers and their rules and regulations regarding flying with pets can be found on www.petswelcome.com.

One great perk is popping up at airports across the country. A 2016 federal regulation requires airports with more than 10,000 passengers a year to have at least one indoor pet relief area in each terminal. Airport pet "bathrooms" range from small indoor patches of artificial turf with sprinklers to larger fenced-in grass or mulch yards outside.

Miami International Airport has three wheelchair-accessible outdoor rest stops near parking areas and baggage claim that are pre-security-check locations, and four indoor rest stops located beyond security checkpoints. You can research pet relief locations at U.S. airports at

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www.petfriendlytravel.com/airports.

Travel planning doesn't end at the airport destination. It's smart to look into hotels that accept pets. Some hotels provide concierge dog-walking services and on-site dog parks. Hotel information can also be found at www.petswelcome.com.

Packing for your pet is important, too. Be sure to include poop bags, paper towels, wet wipes, pee pads, toys, chews, bowl, leash, and health papers. ID tags with your address and cell number should be on the dog's collar or harness at all times. Have your pet microchipped before you travel, and keep vaccines current. Weeks before you fly, familiarize your pet with his travel kennel. Practice at length with him inside the kennel, carrying or wheeling him around. You'll both enjoy a calmer trip if he's accustomed to his ride.

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