



## Sit. Stay. Fly.

### Over the river and through the woofs...here's how to travel with your pet for the holidays.

By Lindsay Van Gelder

**YOUR DOGS AND CATS** are part of the family, so of course you want to bring them along when you celebrate the holidays. Just remember that peaceful, pleasant travel with pets requires some other “P” words, like preparation, planning and sometimes even paperwork.

“Make sure you meet the requirements of wherever you’re headed,” says Elizabeth Stelow, DVM, veterinary behaviorist at the University of California at Davis. Even neighboring states have different rules for vaccinations.

Although major airlines (as well as Amtrak) allow small pets to accompany their people in carriers that fit under the seat, the number of animals per cabin or train is limited. The holiday season is especially busy, so reserve your pet’s spot well in advance. But if Bella’s first exposure to the required carrier is on a six-hour flight to Cali, that’s a recipe for panic, howling...and barf.

“The most important element of pet travel is preparation,” says Kurt Venator, DVM, chief veterinary officer at Purina. He suggests getting your pet used to the carrier

weeks before the trip. Start by leaving it out without making the pet actually go inside, then progress to tossing a treat or a favorite toy into it, and eventually do short practice runs in your car.

On the day of the flight, make sure that your dog has had a long walk (or that your cat has had a stimulating game of laser catch). You will have to take your pet out of the carrier to go through airport security—a process that’s particularly upsetting to cats, according to Carlo Siracusa, DVM, associate professor of clinical animal behavior and welfare at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. He recommends a carrier with an easy-out top exit and a blanket inside that’s big enough to wrap around the cat (especially its claws).

You could ask your vet about anti-anxiety medications, but don’t medicate animals flying in the cargo hold, Stelow says. (You’d want to be nearby to monitor any side effects.) There have been several horror stories of cargo pet deaths, and some airlines simply do not transport pets in the cargo area, or have limitations based on season and weather. If you have the option of ground travel—or a kennel or pet sitter—seriously consider it.

Compared to flying, car travel is a piece of cake (or really, dog biscuit), but pets still need to be restrained, at least by leash if they’re not in crates. If they are (some cats are most comfortable shutting out what’s going on in a carrier with a blanket on top), make sure you have the AC on, Siracusa says, because the temperature will be hotter in there than what you’re feeling in the car. As tempting as it is to snuggle while driving, and as cute as your dog looks riding shotgun, keep pets out of the front seat.

Like you, your pets could get used to the vacation life. Dogs in particular may assume that all this quality time is the new normal, Siracusa says, and emotionally crash when you’re back at work. Increase their alone time gradually if you can, and help them re-acclimate with love, play and, of course, vacation photos.

#### CLICK (OR PAW)

Two hugely informative websites about rules and regulations for pet transport:

①

**CENTERS FOR  
DISEASE CONTROL  
AND PREVENTION**

[cdc.gov/importation/  
traveling-with-pets.html](http://cdc.gov/importation/traveling-with-pets.html)

②

**U.S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE**

[aphis.usda.gov/  
aphis/pet-travel](http://aphis.usda.gov/aphis/pet-travel)