

Safe Travel Tips

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As the busiest travel day of the year approaches, The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) wants pet owners to be prepared before they begin their holiday journey. Whether the voyage is by plane or in an automobile, traveling can be stressful for both owners and their pets. But with some preparation, pet owners can ensure a safe and comfortable trip.

The ASPCA wants pet owners to think twice about flying their pets on commercial airlines, especially if they plan on checking them in as cargo. The Air Transport Association has reported in the past that approximately 5,000, or 1% of the companion animals that are flown on commercial planes have been injured, lost or killed during transport. Although Congress has passed a law that requires the airlines to establish a separate reporting system if an animal is lost, injured or killed and will investigate the circumstances surrounding the incident, the conditions in which animals are shipped have not changed. Animals continue to be shipped in cargo holds that are not temperature controlled. "Unless your animal is small enough to fit under your seat and you can bring them in the cabin, the ASPCA recommends pet owners to not fly their animal," says Lisa Weisberg, ASPCA Senior Vice President of Government Affairs and Public Policy. If pet owners have already committed to transporting their pets on commercial airlines this holiday season, the ASPCA is offering the following safety guidelines.

Make an appointment with your pet's veterinarian for a checkup and make sure all vaccinations are up-to-date. Obtain a health certificate from your veterinarian within 10 days of departure.

- Make sure your pet is wearing a collar and an identification tag. Breakaway collars are best for cats. The collar should also include destination information in case your pet escapes.
- Book a direct flight whenever possible. This will decrease the likelihood of your pet being left on the tarmac during extreme weather conditions or mishandling by baggage personnel.
- Purchase a USDA-approved shipping crate that is large enough for your pet to stand, sit and change position in comfortably. Shipping crates can be purchased from many pet supply stores and airlines.
- Write the words "Live Animal" in letters at least one inch tall on the top of the crate and on at least one side. Use arrows to prominently show the upright position of the crate.
- On the top of the crate, write the name, address and telephone number of your pet's destination point, whether you are traveling with them or someone else is picking up the animal.
- Affix a photograph of your pet to the top of the crate for identification purposes if the animal should escape from the carrier. Also carry a photograph of your pet.
- Line the crate bottom with some type of bedding - shredded paper or towels - to absorb accidents.
- Freeze water provided for your pet so that it will not spill during loading, and will melt by the time the animal is thirsty. Tape a small pouch (preferably made of cloth) of dried food outside the crate. This enables airline personnel to feed your pet in case it gets hungry on long-distance flights or a layover.
- Do not lock the door of the crate. Make sure it is securely closed, but not locked, so that airline personnel can open it in case of an emergency.
- Tranquilizing your pet is not generally recommended as it could hamper their breathing. Check with your veterinarian first.

Tell every airline employee you encounter, on the ground and in the air, that you are traveling with a pet in the cargo hold so that any additional considerations or attention can be provided. If the plane is delayed, or you have any concerns about the welfare of your pet, insist that airline personnel check the animal when feasible. In certain situations removing the animal from the cargo hold and deplaning may be warranted.

If you are planning a road trip, driving with a pet usually involves more than putting the animal in a car and driving off, especially if you will be driving long distances or will be away for a long time. The ASPCA offers the following tips to help you prepare for a safe and smooth car trip.

- Acclimate your pet for a long trip by taking him or her on a series of short drives first, gradually lengthening time spent in the car.
- Start your pet on a travel-feeding schedule with a light meal of kibble two to three hours prior to departure. Never feed your pet in a moving vehicle.
- In addition to travel papers, food, bowls, leashes, a waste scoop, plastic bags, grooming supplies, medication and a pet first aid kit, pack a favorite toy or pillow to give your pet a sense of familiarity.
- Make sure your dog has a flat (never a choke) collar with an ID tag imprinted with home address, as well as a temporary travel tag with your cell phone and a destination phone number (and any other relevant contact information).
- Harness, rather than leash, your dog inside the car. For smaller animals, a well-ventilated crate is recommended.
- Don't allow pets to ride with their heads outside the window as it subjects them to flying objects, inner ear damage and lung infections.
- If you travel frequently with your pet, consider cargo-area pet barriers, waterproof seat covers or rubberized floor liners sold by auto product retailers.