

Pet owners planning a trip or vacation have an important decision to make: whether to take their companion animals along, or leave them behind at home.

### What are your options?

It's tempting to want to bring your pet with you, but you have to consider that some animals aren't suited to travel due to temperament, illness or physical impairment.

Putting their interests first: The most humane approach is to think of the animal's (not your) needs first. You may think that your dog won't be able to tolerate separation from you and that taking him is a good idea. But if you are vacationing, will you have to leave him in a hotel room or strange kennel? That will make him more anxious than ever, so finding a pet-sitter and leaving him in his own home would probably be a better choice.

Cats do not enjoy change and taking them on trips is usually not a good idea. Unless you are moving or going away for an extended period, get a pet-sitter so that your cat will not have to experience the stress of riding for hours or days in a crate and adjust to a new, temporary living arrangement.

### Talk to your veterinarian

If you have any doubts about whether it's appropriate for your pet to travel, it's a good idea to talk to your veterinarian and make sure he or she is up to date on all vaccinations and in sound health before you leave. A veterinary examination is also a requisite for obtaining the legal documents

# Vacations and Pets: Should They Stay or Go?

*Courtesy of The Humane Society of the United States*

required for many forms of travel.

If your veterinarian thinks your pet is suited for travel, they may also prescribe a sedative or tranquilizer and recommend a trial run so you can observe the effects of the prescribed dosage. Do not give your pet any drug not prescribed or given to you by your veterinarian.

### If your pet's along for the ride

If you decide it's best for your pet to accompany you, you'll need to have all the supplies necessary to keep your pet comfortable while he's away from home. You'll also need to familiarize yourself with any pet-related restrictions or requirements set by airlines, destination countries or states, hotels, etc.

When traveling with your pet, you should keep a health certificate and medical records close at hand. If you and your pet will be traveling across state lines, you must obtain from your veterinarian a recent health certificate and a certificate of rabies vaccination.

Travel by air in the cargo hold of a plane is strongly discouraged; please visit [www.humanesociety.org](http://www.humanesociety.org) to read about the dangers to pets traveling in this way.

### If they stay behind

If, on the other hand, you decide your pet should not travel, consider the alternatives.

Arrange for a responsible friend or relative to look after your pet at your house or theirs, board your animal at a kennel or hire a pet sitter. Pet sitters who can stay overnight give your animal(s) more of a sense of security while you are away.

If you've decided to board your pet, get references and personally inspect the kennel. Your veterinarian or local shelter can help you find a good facility. If you're hiring a pet sitter, interview the candidates and check their references. Be sure your pet is microchipped before you leave your dog or cat anywhere unfamiliar to the animal.

A pet sitter may be preferable if your pet is timid, elderly, afraid of strangers and needs the comfort of familiar surroundings while you're gone.

### What to leave for the sitter

If you arrange for someone to care for your pet while you're away, give the caretaker your contact information, the name and telephone number of your veterinarian and your pet's medical or dietary needs. You should also make sure that your pet is comfortable with the person you've chosen by having him or her come to your home to visit a couple of times before you leave. ●



Photo by Jennifer Williams

Careful planning and a few basic supplies are key to making your trip a safe and happy one for both you and your pet. Here are a few tips to make your travels safe and comfortable for your best pal.

### What to pack

When packing, don't forget your pet's food, food and water dishes, bedding, litter and litter box, leash, collar and tags, grooming supplies, a first-aid kit (for dogs or cats), and any necessary medications. Always have a container of drinking water with you—pets get thirsty! Also pack a few of your pet's favorite toys so she'll have something familiar to play with and remind her of home.

Your pet should wear a sturdy collar with ID tags throughout the trip. The tags should have both your permanent address and telephone number and an address and telephone number where you or a contact can be reached during your travels.

Carry a current photograph of your pet with you. If your pet is lost during a trip, a photograph will make it easier for others (airline employees, the police, shelter

workers, and others) to help you find your pet.

### Travel carriers and harnesses

Travel carriers are useful when your pet is traveling by car and are mandatory when your pet is traveling by air. Your pet's carrier should be durable and smooth-edged with opaque sides, a grille door, and several ventilation holes on each of the four sides. Choose a carrier with a secure door and door latch.

Dogs who enjoy car travel need not be confined to a carrier if your vehicle has a restraining harness to restrain the animal. Most pet supply shops carry a wide range of doggie travel harnesses that buckle into most standard seat belts to secure your dog safely and securely. Visit [www.humanesociety.org](http://www.humanesociety.org) for more tips on car travel with your pets.

Because most cats are not as comfortable travelling in cars, for their own safety as well as yours, it is best to keep them in a carrier.

It's important to restrain these carriers in the car so that they don't bounce around and cause possible harm to the animal inside. You can do this by securing the seat belt around and over the front of the carrier.

If you're traveling by air, your carrier should have food and water dishes. Pet carriers are available at pet-supply stores, or you can pur-

# Packing for Pets

chase them directly from domestic airlines. Select a carrier that has enough room for your pet to sit and lie down but is not large enough to allow your pet to be tossed about during travel. You can make the carrier more comfortable by lining the interior with shredded newspaper, a towel, or a blanket.

### Familiar places

It is wise to acclimate your pet to the carrier in the months or weeks preceding your trip. Let your pet explore the carrier; place her food dish inside the carrier and confine her to the carrier for brief periods. Put her in the carrier and take short drives around the neighborhood. If properly introduced to car travel, most dogs and cats will quickly adjust to and even enjoy car trips.

### How to avoid motion sickness

Like humans, pets can experience motion sickness. Take along ice cubes, which are easier on your pet than large amounts of water. Keep feeding to a minimum during travel, and provide a light meal for your pet two to three hours before you leave (if traveling by car), or four to six hours before departure if traveling by air. Allow small amounts of water periodically in the hours before the trip. ●