

AIRLINE TRAVEL WITH YOUR CAT

I'm planning to travel and would like to take my cat with me. What are some of the factors I need to consider before taking my cat on an airplane?

Having your cat along may add enjoyment to your trip. It's important to keep your cat's health and safety in mind when traveling, so be sure to check with the airline well in advance of your trip. Familiarize yourself with the airline's pet requirements so that you can avoid any last minute problems. Here are some basic tips for airline travel with your cat:

1. Take direct flights and try to avoid connections and layovers. This eliminates missed baggage connections and the chance that your cat will be left in extreme weather.
2. Many airlines will allow one pet in coach and one in first class, with some provisions. Some airlines limit the number of pets traveling within the cabin area so be sure to notify the airline that your cat will be traveling with you. Your cat must be in a standard cage that will fit under the seat and must not disturb your fellow travelers.
3. Seek the advice of your veterinarian before traveling. Update all vaccinations and take all necessary health papers with you. A health certificate for your cat will be required for all interstate, and many intrastate, flights. If you are traveling to a foreign country, be aware that many countries require a specific health certificate. It may take several days or even weeks for your veterinarian to acquire the form so plan well in advance. The USDA website has valuable links to information regarding travel with pet inside and outside the United States, including a comprehensive list of individual country requirements.

USDA Animal Health: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/pet_travel/pet_travel.shtml

4. If possible, use airlines that hand carry your cat (inside the cage) to and from the aircraft. Otherwise, the cage could simply be placed on a conveyor belt.
5. Do not feed your cat for six hours before the flight; allow water until flight time. Water should be available in the cage. Give the cat fresh water as soon as it arrives at the destination.
6. Avoid the busiest travel times so airline personnel will have extra time to handle your cat.
7. Do not tranquilize your cat without first discussing it with your veterinarian.
8. Make sure the cage has specific feeding and identification labels permanently attached.
9. Baggage liability limitations apply to your cat. Check your ticket for liability limits or, better yet, speak directly with the airline. If you are sending an economically valuable pet, you may want to purchase additional liability insurance.
10. Be aware that airline travel may pose a risk for cats with a pre-existing medical problem. For example, you should give serious thought to traveling by plane with a cat who has kidney disease or heart disease. Also, one study has shown that short-faced breeds of cats (Persians, Exotic Shorthairs) do not travel well in certain situations. Discuss these issues with your veterinarian prior to travel.

What do I need to consider when buying a travel carrier or cage?

Your cat's travel cage will be its "home" for much of your trip. It's important to choose the right cage. Here are some helpful guidelines:

1. The cage should be large enough for your cat to stand up and turn around freely.
2. The walls of the carrier should be strong and waterproof. This will prevent crushing and waste (urine) leakage.
3. There must be adequate ventilation on at least three sides of the cage.
4. The cage must have sturdy handles for baggage personnel to use.
5. The cage should have a water tray which is accessible from the outside so that water can be added if needed.
6. Cover the bottom of the cage with an absorptive covering or underpad. Check with a pharmacy for the flat absorbent underpads that are designed for bedridden people with bladder control problems.

Pet stores, breeders, and kennels usually sell cages that meet these requirements. Some airlines also sell cages that they prefer to use. Check with the airline to see if they have other requirements.

Try to familiarize your cat with the travel cage before you leave for your trip. Let your cat play inside with the door both open and closed. This will help eliminate some of your cat's stress during the trip.

Is there any other advice that might be useful as I prepare for my trip?

By applying a few common sense rules, you can keep your traveling cat safe and sound.

1. Arrange ahead of time to stay in a hotel that allows pets. Many bookstores carry travel guidebooks with this type of information.
2. Have your pet micro chipped prior to travel. Make sure to keep the microchip registration service information on hand so that they may be contacted if your pet escapes or is missing. If your cat is not micro chipped, make sure that your cat wears a collar with an identification tag securely fastened. It should have your name, address, and telephone number.
3. If you leave your cat unattended in lodging rooms, make sure that there is no opportunity for escape. Leave the cat in the cage or in the bathroom. Be sure to inform housekeeping personnel of your cat and ask that they wait until you return before entering the room. Use the "Do Not Disturb" sign.
4. Should your pet get lost, contact the local animal control officer.

Remember, advance planning is vital to making the trip an enjoyable experience for both you and your cat.