

Dogs Traveling by Airplane

10 air travel tips for your dog's safety and comfort.

JoAnna Downey

Air travel with a pet can sometimes be unpredictable. With careful preparation, however, you can make your dog's travels go more smoothly.

1. Make sure you are using an airline-approved crate or carrier. Although most airlines will sell you a carrier at the airport, don't wait until the last minute to make your purchase. Look for a crate with enough room to allow your dog to stand and move around.
2. Get your pet used to its crate before you fly. Place a padded mat and favorite toy inside and, if your dog isn't already crate trained, encourage your pup to enter and exit freely.
3. Place bright decals that can be seen from a distance on the outside of your dog's crate. Your dog's name and identification should be clearly displayed.
4. A health certificate is required at check-in. Be sure to have your veterinarian do a thorough check up for health problems that may be aggravated in flight.
5. Most veterinarians caution against tranquilizing. It may take two to three days for your pet to recover. Instead, distract your dog. Scott Schimmel, DVM, recommends placing a plastic toy filled with spray cheese or peanut butter in your pet's crate. Trying to get at the yummy bits will occupy your dog for hours.
6. Remove any choke collars, muzzles, or leashes that might catch in the crate.
7. Don't fill the crate dishes with water. Instead, freeze water in the dishes the night before. This prevents spillage during loading, while still providing your pet some hydration.
8. Place soft cotton in your pet's ears or ask your veterinarian to recommend earplugs to help reduce engine noise.
9. Make sure your dog is exercised and relieved right before you place it in the crate.
10. Stay with your pet until boarding and, if possible, wait at the gate until you see your pet safely on the plane.