

Traveling With a Dog? Plan Ahead

American Humane Association offers tips for dog-owning holiday travelers.

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For many pet owners, a family vacation isn't complete without the family dog or cat. Traveling with a companion animal, especially during the holidays, poses several challenges that can be dealt with by being prepared, according to the American Humane Association.

While some pets enjoy riding in the car and taking trips with their families, many find it stressful. American Humane offers the following tips to ensure holiday trips, by air or land, are safe for the entire family.

Properly identify pets with I.D. tags and microchips. Make sure pets have I.D. and current rabies tags and are microchipped. To be extra cautious, give pets an extra tag with the address and phone number of where you will be staying during the trip, in case they get lost after arrival.

Train pets to travel in crates. Whether heading to a holiday destination by plane, train, or automobile, getting pets used to their crates will make the traveling experience less stressful. Even when not at home, pets view their crates as a safe haven from stressful situations.

With a crate, size matters. Crates should be large enough for pets to stand and turn around in comfortably. Remember to keep water inside the crate or allow for breaks every three hours so your pet can drink and stretch. Stainless-steel water containers that hook onto wire crates are easy to use and clean.

Never leave pets unattended. Just as you would never leave a child unattended, never leave pets alone in a car.

Take their health records. Take your pet's health records just in case he needs to see a veterinarian during the trip. Be sure to check with your veterinarian to see if they recommend heartworm prevention or treatment for fleas or ticks for the area you are visiting.

To fly or not to fly? As a rule, puppies and kittens, sick animals, animals in heat, and frail or pregnant animals should not travel by air. Animals that are "snub-nosed," like Pugs, Boxers, and Persian cats, should not fly in a plane's cargo area. In addition, plan ahead because many airlines have restrictions regarding pets and your pet may need a health certificate to fly.

Tranquilizing pets is not recommended. Sedatives are not encouraged when flying as it's difficult to monitor the animal's breathing, which can be impaired by the combination of sedatives and high altitude.

Boarding is an option. If a dog is too large to fly in the cabin, a stay at a boarding kennel may be a safer choice. Or a licensed pet sitter could be hired to take care of the pet in the comfort of its own home.

Try to keep pets on the same schedule. When driving, stop when you would normally let pets out at home and at feeding times.

Plan lodging ahead. Research routes, make reservations, and carry a list of pet-friendly lodging along the way. Also, ask for a room on the ground floor so it's easier to go for walks. Don't let pets stay in the car.

Be prepared for emergencies or delays. Keep pet dishes in the car, as well as extra water and pet food, in case of car trouble or bad weather.