

Safe Summer Travel

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Dog shows, family visits, camping, hiking, and vacations are on many travel "to do" lists for people with dogs. If your dog travels well, your expectations for a fun and interesting trip are not clouded with anxiety about traveling with your canine companion. But even with a good traveler, there are a few things to do well-ahead of departure.

My worst nightmare when traveling with my dogs is losing them. That's why they are microchipped. Ask your veterinarian about this state-of-the-art identification implant; it is inexpensive, stays with the dog for life, and can be an instant rescue device if you and your dog ever become separated. Additionally, you should affix to the dog's collar current contact information relative to the trip. Make sure this includes a cell phone number or contact information for your destination address. The best method to ensure against losing your dog is the simplest and oldest method ever devised . . . the leash.

Rest stops. My suggestion is to not stop at designated rest stops. Imagine how many dogs have visited those rest stops and baptized the terrain as their personal territory. Instead, pull off onto a quiet road away from other people, other dogs, and traffic and allow your dog a little exercise and a place to relieve himself. There's less chance of unwanted canine encounters, and less opportunity for disease transmission.

First-aid kit. Take a kit along in case a minor medical problem arises. A few useful items include a thermometer, elastic and adhesive tape, an elastic bandage, scissors, tick removal forceps, antiseptic, sterile eyewash, cotton, cortisone cream, antibacterial cream, anti-diarrheal medication, pre-moistened hand wipes, and oral antihistamines. Hydrogen peroxide is an excellent skin wash and helps reduce bacteria in any abrasion or minor cut. Hot spots, skin abrasions, ticks and thorns, itchy paws from grasses, dust, and debris all are common causes of minor irritation for your dog. Be mindful, though, that if your dog squints or paws at his eye, you need to have a veterinarian check that out immediately. Be sure to talk about any medications with your veterinarian before your trip, though, so that precautions and dosages can be discussed.

Location. Before you leave on your trip, call an animal hospital at your destination for an update on health issues facing dogs in that area. Stephani Rhodes, referral coordinator for Mesa Veterinary Hospital, in Mesa, Ariz., says her pet peeve is seeing dogs walked on hot pavement. In your hometown this may not be a consideration, but at your destination it may be. Some areas of the country are "hot spots" for fleas, ticks, Lyme disease, heartworm, poisonous snakes, thorny plants, car traffic, and even predatory animals.