



Travelling with your pet via air

Decided to take your pet with you on holidays? Fantastic! Taking your pet on holiday with you can be a great way to build your bond and a sure-fire way to ensure your break is spent with your best friend by your side. Still, it's important to take some time and prepare for your trip so that your holiday is safe and relaxing for both of you.

There are a number of important aspects to be aware of when considering transporting your pet by air, domestically and internationally. The following general principles can be applied to air transportation of pets.

Is air travel suitable for your particular pet?

Not all pets are suited to travel by air and owners should carefully consider whether their pet will be suitable for this type of transport. If not, owners should investigate other available modes of transport, preferably where the animal can be supervised directly throughout the transport process.

Your pet's health

Your pet should be fit and healthy and able to cope with being confined for an extended period. An airport is an unfamiliar and noisy environment that can cause some animals to become stressed and agitated.

It is advisable to consult with your Veterinarian before you consider transporting your pet by air. They will be able to check your pet's health and assess your pet for air travel. Air transport is not recommended for anxious or stressed animals and other alternative safer modes of transport, where direct supervision throughout the transport process is possible, should be chosen instead.

Preparing your pet

Your pet will be confined in its container from the time of lodgement until they are collected by you at the destination.

Before you place your pet in the container and lodge them, make sure they have had plenty of opportunities to go to the toilet and stretch and exercise. A light meal may be offered a few hours before travel.

Container type

Containers should comply with the current [IATA Live Animal Regulations](#).

The animal in the container must have enough space to turn about normally while standing, to stand and sit erect, and to lie in a natural position.

Choose a container that has a water container present within it, with outside access for filling. Food is usually not needed for domestic flights, for international flights check the IATA recommendations for food/food containers.

Containers must provide adequate ventilation (which is a causative factor in heat stress in addition to temperature) and adequate shelter/shade to provide protection from the weather and to allow the animal to feel protected and not exposed.

Containers made entirely of welded mesh or wire mesh are not suitable for air transport.

More details on suitable containers can be found [here](#).

Heat stress

Pet owners should be aware of heat stress and take steps to minimise the risk. Heat stress occurs when heat generation exceeds the body's ability to lose heat and it can be fatal. Environmental predisposing factors include a warm/hot humid environment, lack of adequate shade and ventilation and lack of water.

To minimise the risk of heat stress during air transport, choose a container that complies with the IATA regulations and book flights that will take place when the temperature is cooler, for example, avoid flying when it is hot, and avoid flights during the hot parts of the day. If the temperature will be high that day rescheduling the flight to another cooler day is recommended.

Any animal is susceptible to heat stress however some animals may be at increased risk including obese animals, brachycephalic breeds, heavy coated breeds, animals with respiratory, cardiovascular and/or brain disease and animals travelling from a cooler climate to a warmer climate. Very young or very old animals may also be more susceptible.

Brachycephalic breeds

While any dog or cat is susceptible to heat stress, Brachycephalic (short-faced) breeds are generally at greater risk of heat stress when compared to dogs and cats with a normal muzzle length. The characteristic flat face of brachycephalics generally affects their ability to breathe normally as soft tissue structures are squeezed into a smaller bony space thereby obstructing respiratory pathways. The ability of cats and dogs to maintain normal body temperature and thermo-regulate is closely related to the respiration process. Dogs for example, use panting (evaporative cooling) as a means of expelling heat from their bodies. Dogs rely on normal air flow through their respiratory tract to do this effectively. Abnormal brachycephalic anatomy makes it difficult for these animals to adequately thermo-regulate and oxygenate sometimes even under normal conditions. When placed under additional stressors such as being exercised, stressed/excited or placed in an environment with a high ambient temperature or inadequate ventilation they may be unable to adequately compensate and this can result in over-heating, collapse and in some cases, death.

Any brachycephalic breed, including British Bulldogs, French Bulldogs, Pugs, Pekingese and Himalayan and Persian cats etc are at greater risk of heat stress. Dogs and cats with heavy coats such as Newfoundlands, Malamutes, Siberian Huskies, Samoyeds and Persian cats are also more susceptible to heat stress. Some airlines prohibit carriage of certain brachycephalic breeds. Risks to brachycephalics are significant and therefore air transportation of brachycephalic animals should be avoided for their own health, safety and welfare. Owners should be aware of the increased risks associated with air transportation of these types of animals and other alternative safer modes of transport, where direct supervision throughout the transport process is possible, should be chosen instead.

Sedation

Sedation is generally not recommended for pets travelling by air due to health and safety concerns. Please see the [IATA regulations](#) which include the statement 'Sedation of animals, except under certain conditions and carried out under veterinary direction, is not recommended'.

Access to drinking water

A water container should be present within the container with outside access for filling. The water holder should remain in an upright position at all times and water holders need to be firmly attached to the cage. To ensure containment of any spills the container should have a spill tray installed lined with safe absorbent material. A light meal may be offered a few hours prior to travel.

Note that some types of animals are prohibited from air travel, some can only travel if a veterinary certificate is supplied certifying the animal is fit to travel and for some pets travel is not recommended.

Talk to the airline/airline freight company and pet transport company (if you have decided to organise your pets travel through a pet transport agency) for more information.

Check out our easy-to-follow checklist below to help ensure your adventure together is memorable for all the right reasons.

Before heading off

- Ensure that your pet's microchip and council registration details are up to date and they are wearing identification tags with contact details
- Pack a first aid kit for your animal
- Ensure any accommodation booked is pet friendly
- Be aware of any specific pest or health concerns related to your destination

When you arrive

- Ensure that in the excitement of your new destination you do not neglect or ignore your pet
- Spend some time reassuring your pet that everything will be fine in your new surrounds - play a game, or simply give them a little affection.
- Be sure that your pets are secured and supervised at all times.
- Check that all fences and gates are secure at your holiday destination.
- Do not leave your pets alone in a strange environment, or with unfamiliar people.

Checklist - what to pack

- > An appropriate carrier for transport
- > Any necessary paperwork or documentation for your animal, including vaccination history, veterinary records, and a 'pet passport' if required. Country-specific regulations can be found [here](#).
- > Your pet's regular food and treats (don't forget a can opener if your dog eats tinned food).
- > Familiar bedding and/or a travel crate to sleep in.
- > Food and water bowls. Always carry enough bottles of fresh water in case you can't find a tap.
- > Collar/harness and lead.
- > Your dog's favourite toy(s).
- > Grooming equipment including a towel in case your dog gets wet.
- > A 'pooper scooper' and plastic bags to clean up after your dog.
- > Any required medications and a first aid kit.