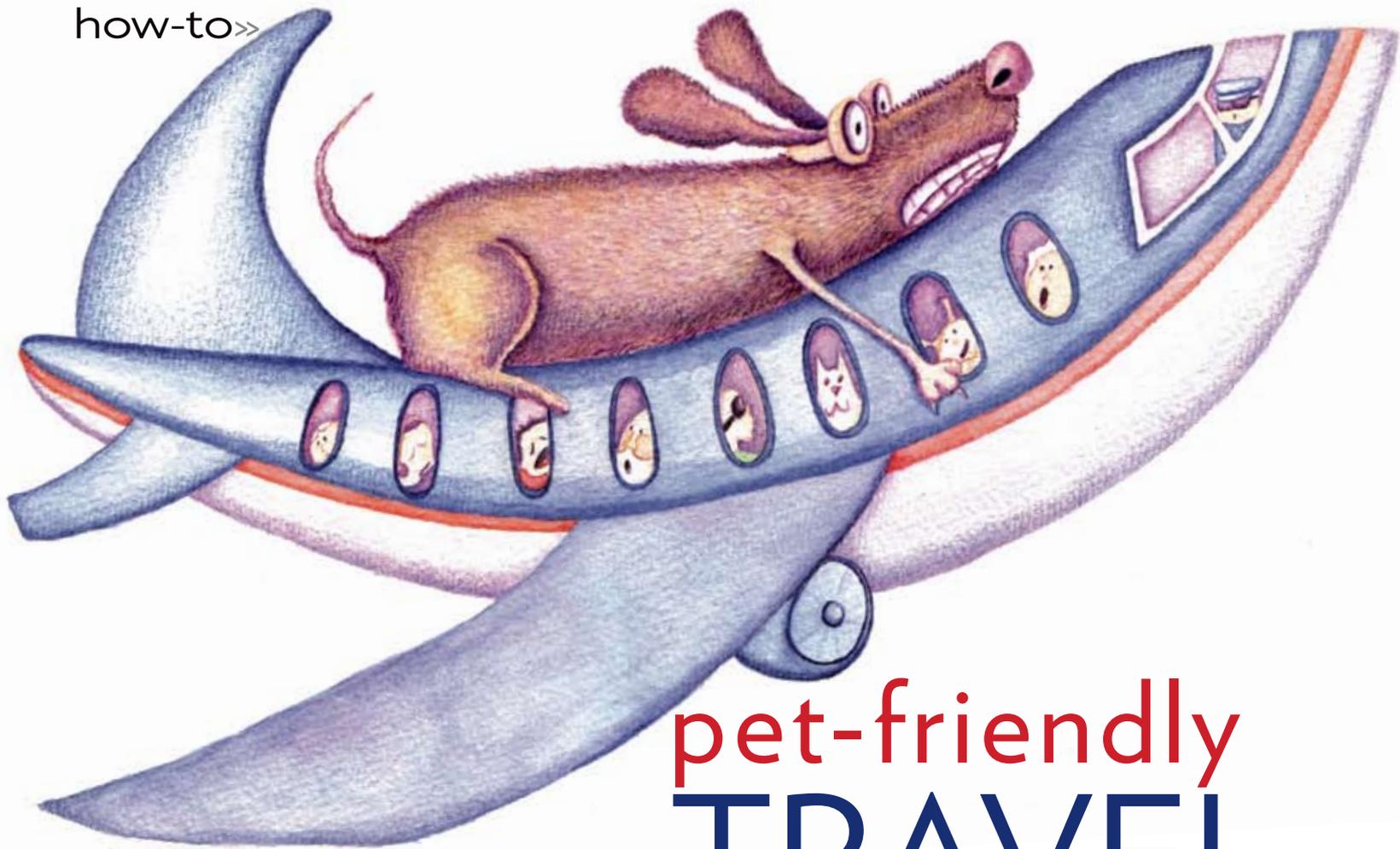


how-to>>



pet-friendly TRAVEL

How to vacation with (or without) the four-legged members of your family

BY AUDREY MCDONALD

In one one of the many episodes of my figmental life of glamour and leisure, I have just landed at Charles de Gaulle International Airport in Paris looking nothing short of fabulous in ginormous dark glasses, four-inch spike heels and a full-length mink coat with a teeny, tiny teacup Yorkie peering out of my Louis Vuitton tote. After all, what screams “Superstar” more than international travel with your beloved canis familia? In reality, however, my four-legged friends are two seventy-plus-pound quivering masses of excitement, slobber and fur — and any designer handbag in my closet is a “Prado.” Still, that dream of traveling with my pets just won’t die. Here’s what you need to know for pet-friendly jet-setting.

FLYING HIGH

First, you must figure out if your pet is capable of making a trip, international or otherwise. As a general rule of thumb, cats and dogs are good to go. Birds, reptiles, exotic creatures and livestock are usually better left at home, as are sick, injured or expectant animals. After all, would you want to be stuck in a crate with only a chew toy and your Giardia to keep you company? I don’t think so.

Many countries have strict regulations requiring that animals be quarantined upon entry (sometimes for up to six months), as well as requiring myriad permits, health certificates and, as in Britain, microchipping. These are just a few of the many hoops that you and your pet must jump through, and the benefit of a European vacation to

the pet is not, as much as we may hate it, enough to make it worth your while and may even be detrimental to the animal.

Within the continental United States, you may fly the pet-friendly skies as long as you abide by the airlines’ rules, which are readily accessible via the Internet. In some cases, you and your creature companion can both fly in high style. If Fido weighs less than 15 pounds, you can fit a small, airline-approved carrier underneath the seat in front of you. (Provided you don’t mind the risk of offending your seatmates.) The alternative (and the only option for larger dogs), a trip in the cargo hold of the airplane, may not be entirely comfortable for a crated animal and not entirely clean (if you get my drift).

**Websites with suggestions for
pet-friendly vacations:**
www.petswelcome.com
www.pettravel.com
www.sherpapet.com
www.dogfriendly.com

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

Should you decide to leave your pet at home, by all means, turn to trustworthy friends or family first. This service will probably cost you no more than a phone call, but for the sake of remaining friends when the pet sitting is done, it would be a nice gesture to surprise Fido's caretaker with a souvenir from your trip, a bottle of wine or dinner out to show your appreciation.

If you've worn out your welcome with the relatives, there are several locally-owned and operated pet sitting services that will come to your home during your holiday and mind your critters for prices ranging from \$15 for one visit per day to \$70 for an overnight stay.

If one-on-one attention is not a requirement, many vets provide boarding services that come with the added benefit of familiarity with your pet and its medical needs (which is ideal for the ailing or elderly pet). Just like in the human world, fees can vary widely depending on how luxurious the accommodations, and reservations may be required well in advance.

Before you decide on any particular boarding or in-home service, ask these questions to ensure that your pet will receive the best care available.

- What services are included with the fee and what costs extra?
- Is the sitter insured and bonded?
- Does the provider have references you may contact?
- How will a medical emergency be handled?
- How much time will be spent with your pet?
- How often will your pet be exercised?
- What immunization or other medical records are required?
- May you leave special toys and/or blankets with your pet?

Also, tour the boarding facilities, noting the cleanliness of the accommodations, whether the animals are housed in cages or runs and the general well-being of the current boarders.

THE OPEN ROAD

If leaving your pet behind is out of the question, and your destination doesn't require a flight, you can always take Fido on a good, old-fashioned road trip. With a sturdy crate, a supply of food and water, identification tags and leashes, you and your pets can be on the road to adventure. Traveling with pets is a lot like traveling with children in that nature calls often and urgently, and auto travel offers the advantage of as-needed pit stops. (You might even find a way to see the world's largest skillet and walk the dog all at the same time.) However, make sure not to get distracted by all of the collectible thimbles in the gift shop — it can be dangerous to leave your pet in the car for even a small amount of time, especially on a warm day.

Many national hotel chains allow pets and usually charge only a small fee or deposit. Of course, it should go without saying that you should be a responsible pet owner and clean up anything your pet may leave behind whether indoors or out. Additionally, and out of respect for your fellow vacationers, it would be considerate to request a room at the end of the hall or where noise will make the least impact if your animal barks, howls or is otherwise prone to causing a ruckus. Resorts and bed-and-breakfasts may be more restrictive. A call ahead to the local Convention and Visitors Bureau can steer you in the direction of acceptable lodging as well as recommend activities that will be enjoyable for you and your pet, such as local dog parks and walking trails.

Traveling, or not traveling as the case may be, with pets requires a great deal of consideration, planning, and research to ensure that all parties have a good experience during vacation time. While I may never get to St. Tropez and walk a prissy poodle on the star-studded Riviera of my dreams, I can certainly manage to get my mongrels to the La Quinta Inn at Panama City. And when I have a lap full of 140 combined pounds of sandy mutts licking my face with unconditional love and pure joy, well then, I'm truly making the most of my vacation.

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