

Traveling With Your Cat

- Bring enough of your cat's regular food and medication for the duration of the trip.
- If you plan to travel with your pet, let your veterinarian know ahead of time; your cat may need a health certificate, or there may be other health issues to address.

How Can I Make the Travel Experience Better for My Cat?

Our pets share so much of our lives that many of us don't want to consider traveling without them. Whether you are flying, driving a car, or RVing, sharing a trip with a pet can add richness to the experience. Proper planning can make the travel experience better and less stressful for you and for your pet.

What Food and Medications Should I Bring When Traveling With My Cat?

There are many factors you can't control when you are on the road, but changing your cat's food can cause vomiting, diarrhea, or other problems that can be difficult to deal with while traveling. Some cats may even refuse to eat a different food; if this refusal goes on for a few days, it can quickly turn into a problem. You can help avoid this problem by bringing enough of your cat's regular food for the duration of the trip. If your cat receives medication, bring enough for the trip and try to maintain your regular schedule.

If you are traveling by car or RV, set up a large cage or crate with your cat's litterbox, food, and water; bringing your cat's favorite bed, blanket, or toys can also help make the trip more relaxing and pleasant. If you are flying, you will need an airline-approved carrier for your cat; you should also request that your cat fly in a temperature-controlled cargo area.

Many people escape the snow by traveling with their pet to warmer climates. Although fleas and ticks may not be a problem during the winter where you live, your cat may be exposed to these parasites at your destination. Make sure you're prepared by asking your veterinarian for appropriate flea and tick control products.

How Should I Plan for Travel With My Cat?

Spontaneity and family emergencies aside, most of us wouldn't take a trip without planning some things ahead of time. The same thing applies when traveling with your cat:

- **Where to stay:** Many hotels and rental properties allow pets. Locating proper accommodations ahead of time and being clear about fees (some places charge an extra fee for pets) can help minimize anxiety when you arrive.
- **Travel requirements:** Most airlines require a health certificate for pets that will be flying. The health certificate generally states that the pet is in good health and free from any infectious or contagious diseases. Don't assume this document can be obtained from your veterinarian on the way to the airport! Your cat may need a physical examination, fecal exam, or other procedures before your veterinarian can sign a health certificate. Also, the certificate must be obtained within a certain window of time before you travel. Find out from your airline what their requirements are and plan to get the health certificate ahead of time.

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Some destinations (particularly island locations like England and Hawaii) may have quarantine regulations or rabies certification procedures. Clarify any of these requirements well in advance of your trip.

- **Medical care:** Do you have a plan in case your cat gets sick while you are traveling? If possible, find a veterinarian at your destination; your own veterinarian may be able to make some

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recommendations. This is particularly important if your cat has an existing medical problem or is on medication.

Should I Sedate My Cat for Travel?

Giving a tranquilizer to a cat before traveling has pros and cons. Some would argue that if your cat is tranquilized, then he or she is not sharing the travel experience with you—so what is the point of bringing your pet along? Sedation can also have side effects, including lowering body temperature (which could be an issue if your pet is flying in the cargo area of a plane), and causing hypotension (low blood pressure). Others may argue that a little light sedation can calm a cat that is overly stressed or excited while traveling and can therefore make the trip more pleasant for everyone involved. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to this question. Some cats do very well with a light sedative, but remember that sedation does not address all travel issues. If your cat has severe motion sickness or gets extremely stressed while traveling, it may be better to arrange for a pet sitter or board

him or her. Also, not every cat is a good candidate for a tranquilizer, so ask your veterinarian if sedation is a good idea for your cat.

If you have never given your cat a tranquilizer before, give a test dose ahead of your trip. Pick a day when you will be home with your pet for most of the day. That way, if the medication causes excessive sedation or other negative side effects, you will be there to intervene and call your veterinarian for help.

What Else Should I Know About Travelling With My Cat?

If you plan to travel with your pet, let your veterinarian know ahead of time. He or she may be able to advise you about parasite protection and other health considerations that may be different at your destination. If you decide to leave your cat at home, your veterinarian can likely recommend a good boarding facility or pet sitting service. Addressing any questions or concerns with your veterinarian ahead of time can save worry and stress while you are away.