



PETS

TIPS FOR TRAVELING WITHOUT YOUR PUP

Because, unfortunately, you can't always take him on vacation with you

BY DANA McMAHAN

Before You Go

First up: Find the right sitter. Lean on friends or family if possible, suggests Whitney Miller, DVM, chief veterinarian at Petco. You already know and trust them—and, most likely, so does your dog. If no one is available or up to the task, Miller says to ask your vet. “They may be able to recommend someone or even have staff who pet-sit.” Or ask your neighbors who they like. Definitely check references for someone new, and in addition to holding a meet and greet, consider doing a trial run, like an overnight, says Trish McMillan, a certified animal behavior professional in Mars Hill, North Carolina. “Don’t start with a two-week trip to Africa,” she wisely points out.

While we never like to think about something bad happening, it’s critical to prepare for the worst. Experts agree that your dog’s microchip registration and collar identification tags need to be up to date, should Howldini get loose. And in the event that your pup becomes sick or injured, make sure there’s a credit card on file at the vet. “You don’t want to put it on your sitter to cover the cost,” Miller says. But what if the sitter has their own emergency? Have a backup who can step in if absolutely necessary, she adds.

Next, provide instructions, and don’t worry about going overboard. “It’s way better to have too much detail than not enough,” McMillan says. List emergency contacts and write out your pet’s schedule, Miller suggests. “It’s all about trying to keep their routine as routine as possible,” she says,

which can alleviate anxiety. Include notes on food and meds, and stock up on more than they'll need. If the sitter is staying in your home, don't forget to give the Wi-Fi information and explain any quirks of the space.

Finally, if you anticipate that Captain Clingy will have separation anxiety, give your vet a call, says Lindsay Hamrick, director of shelter outreach and engagement for the Humane Society of the United States. "They can decide if a prescription calming aid would be helpful," she says.

When It's Time to Leave

Before you hit the road, you have to do the hard thing: Look into Doggie Howser's sweet, sad eyes and say you're leaving—without him! "Be sure he's had a good walk or lots of exercise that morning," Hamrick says, explaining that the more tired pets are, the less anxiety they tend to have. To minimize the anxiety even more, wait to bring out the suitcases until it's almost time to go. And though you'll want to smother him with sorrowful nuzzles, dogs feed off that, Hamrick says, so try not to make your departure a big deal. Give him a quick hug and "pretend you're just leaving to go grocery shopping."

If you're using a prescription calming aid, let it kick in before you go. Otherwise, toss him a favorite toy to distract him while you step out, Miller says. And if you're not doing an immediate handoff to the sitter, consider putting on some classical music, McMillan suggests, or running a fan for white noise to help mask any outside sounds he may react to. With that last hug, double-check that his collar is secure.

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While You're Away

When it comes to *your* separation anxiety, be clear about your communication expectations, Hamrick says. The sitter may think they'll disturb your vacation with a photo of a sleeping Lick Jagger when really you're on the edge of your seat waiting for the next missive. "With someone new, it's appropriate to ask for morning and evening updates," Hamrick says. Beyond that, she adds, tell them what kinds of things are important to tell you, such as eating habits, poop happenings or not-happenings, and any atypical behaviors.

When You (Finally!) Reunite

Yay! You're about to be together again! You're overjoyed, but as with your departure, McMillan advises trying to stay even-keeled. Can't? Hamrick recommends taking it outside. "It's confusing for dogs if you usually don't want them to go wild when people come into the house, but then you encourage it on this occasion," she explains.

If you're feeling guilty about leaving your furry BFF behind, remember that fun vacations help recharge us, Miller says. That old saying about filling your cup before you can pour it out for others applies to your pet too. "If we're our best selves when we come back," Miller notes, "we'll have a renewed energy that will for sure be felt by our pet." ■

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