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TRAVEL WITH YOUR DOG

Today dogs can travel by air, rail, road or sea. Each form of travel presents its own unique set of problems. In order to smooth the way it may be helpful to consider the following points.

Airline travel.

An increasing number of dogs travel on internal flights today and although International Air Transport Association (IATA) regulations regarding carrier size and conditions do not apply to domestic flights it is worthwhile considering these since they apply to all international flights. Remember with air travel the container will be your pet's home for the length of the flight and also for an appreciable time prior to and after the flight after you have checked in and until he is collected after the flight.

Carrier

1. The carrier should be large enough for your dog to stand up and turn around freely. The IATA recommendations are that the height should be the height of the dog to the top of the head in a normal standing position. The length should be the length of the dog from the nose to the root of the tail plus half the length measured from the floor to the elbow. This is in order to ensure that he can lie down with his nose resting on his forelegs and his front feet protruding beyond the tip of his nose. The width of the container should be twice the width of the dog measured at the shoulders.
2. The carrier can be constructed of fibreglass, metal, rigid plastic, wickerwork, weldmesh, solid wood or plywood.
3. Ventilation must be adequate and usually involves a wire mesh front on one side or end of the container with ventilation holes over the whole of the opposite side and the upper third of the other two sides. Projecting handles which also act as spacers must be provided. These are essential for transportation of the crate and also ensure that air flow is maintained when the container is loaded into the aircraft which may have a fairly full hold.
4. Containers must be nose and paw proof, i.e. the ventilation apertures must be of such a size that it is impossible for the animal to protrude nose or paws outside the container. Fixed food and water containers must be provided and these must be accessible from the outside.

On many internal flights (and some international ones) small dogs may be carried in the passenger cabin in underseat containers. If allowed, the total weight of the dog plus the container must not exceed 4 kg.

Bedding

It is useful to use several thicknesses of newspaper plus an acrylic dog bed. A familiar article in the container helps to calm the animal.

Suitable carriers can be obtained from pet stores, breeders, kennels and often the airlines themselves. It is always worthwhile checking with the airline regarding their particular requirements.

Other useful tips

Tranquillisation of the dog before loading in the carrier is not recommended. Tranquillisers sometimes wear off in flight when it is impossible to either comfort the dog or to give any further medication. Therefore it is a good idea to try to familiarise your dog with the travel container before the trip is undertaken. Feeding him in the container, first with the door closed and then open helps to eliminate some of the apprehension that may be felt during the actual trip.

Car travel

Animals travelling in cars should be under control in vehicles and unable to distract you while you are driving. If you want your dog to be loose in the car he should be separated from you, and thus an estate vehicle or hatchback with a strong dog guard is ideal. Alternatively a crate or cage can be used, the dimensions of which should be comfortable for the animal. If the dog is not so separated from you he should be tethered so that he cannot act as a distraction. The easiest way of doing this is place him in the footwell in the back of the car, shutting the lead, attached to a properly adjusted collar, in the car door.

Travel, or more correctly motion sickness, is a condition which affects many dogs. It is due to the effect of the motion on the organs of balance located in the inner ear. Signs are usually excessive salivation, restlessness or excitement. Many of the "human" travel sickness remedies available from petrol stations, pharmacists and supermarkets are effective and an adult rather than a children's dose is usually necessary for a dog. If one particular brand does not work, try another since they all contain different combinations of drugs. Give the tablet/s at least half an hour before travelling is due. If the over-the-counter remedies are ineffective, consult your veterinary surgeon since there are several prescription only medicines that are extremely effective for this condition. Excitable dogs can be tranquillised but make sure you experiment beforehand so you do not give too much and have the animal off his legs for a while since the dose depends largely on the temperament and amount of excitement.

Rail Travel

Remember that even the most well behaved dog can take fright at the sight and noise associated with a railway station and trains. Make sure that the collar and lead are strong and correctly adjusted.

Today different State railways have varying conditions regarding the transport of pets and therefore you should enquire prior to your trip.

Sea Travel

Many ships and ferries today have permanent kennels into which your dog must be placed for the duration of the trip. Again the provision of a familiar blanket or toy helps to ease the tension. Mild tranquillisation is possible since you can visit the dog during the trip and ascertain its effect.

Hints on Travel with your dog

1. If you are going to stay in an hotel, ascertain beforehand that the hotel allows pets. There are publications available that list such hotels and boarding houses, e.g. Pets Welcome.
2. Make sure the dog wears a correctly adjusted collar and not a check chain. The collar should bear an identification tag with your name, address and telephone number. If the dog has been identichipped detail this with the accompanying information.
3. If he is travelling unaccompanied, check that his name appears on the container together with your name, address, telephone number and any other relevant details, e.g. where you are collecting him from and whether you wish to be telephoned first etc.
4. Remember that most hotels and boarding houses will not allow dogs in the public rooms, therefore if you leave him unattended in your room make sure there is no opportunity for escape and realise that you will be responsible for any damage caused. Again if practicable, i.e. size, a travelling cage or container is ideal. Even if the dog is extremely well behaved make sure that you place "Do Not Disturb" notices on the door if the dog is left unattended. In this way the possibility of confrontation with staff and escape is minimised.
5. Should your pet get lost, contact the local police, RSPCA, local council dog pound and veterinary surgeries.
6. Remember that advance planning is vital to make the trip an enjoyable experience for both you and your dog.