

Flying Without Dying



Excuse me if I'm not very enthusiastic about the idea of dogs venturing into the wild blue yonder. Let's face it: Humans have a pretty bad record when it comes to dogs and flight.

Take the example of Laika, the dog the American press nicknamed "Muttник." Laika (which means Barker in Russian) went into space on Sputnik 2 in 1957, giving her dubious distinction of being the first dog in earth orbit. Scientists failed to tell Laika that she was going to boldly go where no dog had gone before—and she wasn't coming back.

Lots of Humans were upset at Laika's mission, not that their sympathy did her any good. As the batteries operating her life-support system failed and Sputnik 2 ran out of air, people around the planet mourned. Although monitors showed that Laika died several days into her journey, it wasn't until more than five months later that Sputnik 2 fell back into earth's atmosphere and burned. Russian scientists called Sputnik 2 "a great success." I seriously doubt that Laika agreed.

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Fortunately, few dogs are doomed to die in space as poor Laika did. Still, flying—especially in “the belly” of a plane—can be a dangerous ordeal. If we’re little and you can carry us onboard, that’s one thing; our Humans will be there to protect us. If we’re traveling as baggage or cargo, forget about it.

The situation isn’t that easy for Humans either. If you don’t take lots of precautions, and follow airline and immigration rules to the letter, travel can be a nightmare—maybe even the last nightmare your dog ever has. And even if you Humans get the rules down pat, consider the effects of flight on us dogs. Flying, especially in the belly, is a major stress.

Your vet may give the okay for travel, but only you can decide if flying is in your dog’s best interest. If your best friend is old or sick or a nervous Nellie, or doesn’t seem to be feeling up to snuff, she’d be safer at home with a friend or dogsitter.

You’re probably thinking: why not just use a tranquilizer to take the edge off? Inside the cabin, with your vet’s okay, that might be fine. In the belly, it’s probably not. Even though we’d love to zone out for the whole flight, you shouldn’t consider any kind of medication for a dog flying as baggage unless your vet specifically okays it. If the poor thing should suffer a bad reaction, no one will be there to help her.

Good Let’s say your dog passed the health and psychological hurdles and **To Go** is all decked out in her Snoopy flying suit, ready to go. Now the real hassles begin. You need to:

- **Confirm that your airline accepts pets and reserve space well in advance for your dog and yourself.** Reconfirm 24-48 hours before travel.
- **Get a health certificate from your vet.** This certificate has to be current within a week to 10 days of each leg of the trip, with proof of rabies vaccination. Some airlines require vaccination within the year (the very thought of which raises my hackles). Fortunately, most will accept a vet’s letter of exemption in lieu of the shot.

- **Calculate how your dog's weight and size affect travel methods.** Check with your airline to see if your dog can go inside the cabin, or has to fly as accompanied baggage, or as cargo. (Note: cargo doesn't have to travel on any particular flight.)
- **Make sure your pet carrier conforms to your particular airline's regulations.** Visit the website of every airline on your itinerary, or call them for information. Select the wrong pet carrier and they'll send us back home.
- **If you're flying outside the U.S. (or are going to aloha-land),** you'll need to follow agricultural and immigration rules exactly. Contact every carrier on your itinerary (boats and trains, too). Also check The International Air Travel Association (www.IATA.org) and www.pettravel.com. Double check everything; policies change. If you mess up, your dog may be quarantined for months—at your expense and your dog's physical and emotional peril. If your itinerary is complicated, and especially if your dog is traveling as cargo, consider a pet travel agency like www.puppytravel.com or www.airanimal.com.

IATA suggests that you feed your dog lightly the day before your flight. Gayle Martz, CEO and Founder of Sherpa's Pet Trading Company, the woman responsible for getting dogs comfortable in-cabin carriers, says you should feed your dog six hours before flight time and offer water two hours before. (One exception: dogs traveling as baggage or cargo must get both food and water within *four* hours of flight time.)

Let your dog pee and poop before leaving for the airport, and again just before entering the airport, picking an inconspicuous spot where people who don't like dogs (I call them mutants) won't see her and make trouble. Mom also carries a disposable pee pad—most pet stores have them—so we can discretely pee in a stall in a Human restroom in case of a delay. Unfortunately, dogs

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checked as baggage or cargo don't have this option and may have to wallow in pee the entire flight.

Sharing Lucky little canines like Jigs and me can ride inside the cabin with
Space our folks. To qualify for this privilege, dogs must be smaller than
with Your 18" long, 11" high, and weigh less than 22 pounds. For some dogs
Feet out there, this could be the incentive to diet.



To keep us from freaking out and being subjected to x-rays, politely inform the agent at the security checkpoint that you have your best friend in your carrier and she should be checked by a hand-held detector, not passed through that claustrophobic tunnel x-ray machine.

We have to stay in our carriers through the airport and for the whole darn flight! That means no playing ring around the gate agent, no chatting with the other passengers, no running up and down the aisle to stretch our legs.

Some people sneak their dogs out of their crates and attach them to their bodies with a belly pack of some sort, or hide them under a blanket (that they keep talking to). They don't realize that we're more comfortable in our carriers (where we can turn around and

stretch out to sleep) than *they* are in their seats. Okay, we can't see the in-flight movie, but that could be the *good* news. Besides, Ms. Martz warned us that taking us out is against airline rules and can lead to a loss of privileges for everyone. Hey, I don't know about you but I don't relish the idea of being off-loaded in Timbuktu.

In flight, dehydration can be a problem. You know how thirsty you get on airplanes? Well, we do too. Like you, we'll fare better if we stay hydrated. Slurping up water causes a gotta-pee problem, so just syringe a little water into our mouths from time to time (with a needle-less syringe).

Because some of us can't hold our pee no matter how hard we try, airlines require our carriers to have absorbent liners. We think it's a great idea to use a PoochPad crate pad, or to wrap your carrier's pad with one of their pee pads. PoochPants are great, too, if Fifi suffers from incontinence. These products absorb liquids and keep tootsies and bottoms dry while also reducing odor and bacterial growth. (Find a link at *dogs4dogs*.)

More and more companies are making carriers for your dog. Select something well-ventilated, durable and soft-sided so you can use a generous size and squeeze it into place. Our carriers have wheels which Mom says is a life-saver in big airports. An eight-pounder like Jiggy can feel like a twenty-pounder by the time you reach the plane. (Find links to carriers at *dogs4dogs*.)

By the way, don't assume that the carrier you used last year, or one you used on another airline, will be acceptable this year on this flight. Check it out. Airline executives like to keep us guessing.

One more thing: don't forget to book ahead. Canines per pet carrier, per cabin and per plane are limited. Jiggy and I can't even ride together in one carrier, says the mean ol' USDA Animal Welfare Act. They think we'll go berserk and eat each other or something. I can't even bring Jiggy along unless both Mom and Dad fly, or at least buy two tickets. They also have to make advance reservations for us and pay a special fee. But at least we're in the cabin with our Humans, not stuck in the belly with a bunch of no-nothing

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suitcases, a nonstop barker of a Beagle and a hungry-looking Akita trying to break out of his crate.

In the Belly of the Beast If you're thinking of transporting your dog in the airplane's belly, please be aware that the Air Transport Association reports that approximately 1% of all pets flown on commercial aircraft (that's about 5,000 animals yearly) are lost, injured or killed. That's *lost, injured or killed!* What Human would fly with odds like that? (Starting in July of 2005, the Department of Transportation began reporting on pet safety by airline. You'll find a link at [dogs4dogs](#).) Think of animal transport as baggage transport, because that's what it is. Bags don't need temperature control, ventilation or pleasant flying conditions. They don't care if they're thrown



around, or if they're stranded in cargo holding areas or on unsheltered carts. Bags don't get panicky or lonely. They don't need to poop or pee. Bags don't even care if you lose them.

Dogs are *not* bags. Don't subject us to this torture if there's any way you can avoid it. If you have absolutely no alternative, please take as many precautions as you can, starting with your vet's absolute approval (not just a quick signature on the health certificate). Take special measures during hot or cold weather. Airlines have rules about flying at such times, but delays may put your dog in deplorable conditions on the plane and in holding areas. Also, if you have a snub-nosed breed, like a Pug or Pekinese, he shouldn't fly in the belly at all as he may have difficulty breathing. The same goes for the aged or health-compromised.

If you're considering shipping (or receiving) a puppy via air cargo, don't. Many behaviorists believe that stressing an infant during the Fear Imprint Period (between roughly 8 and 11 weeks of age) can have long-lasting consequences. The psychological trauma a pup might experience while trapped in an unfamiliar situation for a long period of time might do irreversible damage, and result in her being neurotic. If your puppy must fly, please go get her and fly with her on board where you can comfort her and keep her from harm.

If we haven't talked you out of shipping your dog, and you really have to do it, please go to *dogs4dogs*. You'll find a number of very important tips and suggestions regarding taking your dog into the sky.

Bon voyage? Here's your treat.

Chiclet's Trivia Treat: *Before there was glasnost and perestroika, before there was any détente between the United States and Russia, a dog helped bridge peace between the world's two superpowers. Yes, the Cold War was threatening to put an end to Humanity, but a dog saved the day. I love it when that happens!*

Strelka (Little Arrow in Russian) and Belka (Squirrel) were the first animals to orbit the earth (aboard Sputnik 5) and actually live to bark

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about it. Later, Strelka had a litter of six puppies, one of which was given to President John F. Kennedy's daughter Caroline. The gift of a puppy made it that much harder for Humans to go to war. Countries might disagree, but Humans love their dogs.

And now a moment of silence for the five space dogs who gave their all for space exploration: Laika, Bars, Lisichka, Pchelka, and Mushka. The Russian government remembered Laika's sacrifice in their monument to fallen cosmonauts in Star City just outside Moscow. Behind the cosmonauts' statues, just peeking out, is Laika.