



MIDFOREST

veterinary practice

Travelling with Pets

When the cold wind blows, thoughts of warm holidays in sunny places are difficult to ignore. Many people are choosing to include their furry family members in their holiday plans. Having pets along for holidays can be extremely enjoyable and rewarding for both pet and owner, but the journey can be a challenge, so here are a few pointers to ensure "happy trails".

If staying within the UK, you will most likely be travelling by car. Both dogs and cats can become good car travellers. Both dogs and cats should be restrained when travelling, cats are most safe in a carrier or basket, and dogs can be contained with a specially designed seat belt. These are available at most pet retailers, and interface with your car's seat belt to keep Fido in place. Being properly restrained is a very important safety measure, both for you and your pet as a crash will cause your animal to act as a projectile, with serious repercussions for your pet and any human in its way. Also, unless air bags have an "off" switch, pets should be kept in the back seat only to prevent injury should they go off. . Remember, if it isn't safe for a small child, it isn't safe for your pet! Taking your pet for "mini" trips before setting out on a long journey to get them used to car travel is an excellent idea. Most animals will overcome car sickness and fear if introduced slowly to the car's motion - and setting out on an empty stomach is also helpful. Remember to stop frequently for toilet breaks, and cats should be given the opportunity to use a litter tray. Cats may adjust best to long trips if transported in a crate large enough to have a sleeping area at one end and a litter tray in the other. While it is tempting to consider sedating pets when travelling, it is much safer to get pets used to travelling the natural way; however herbal calmers (such as Bach flower rescue remedy) can be helpful, and should be introduced a few days prior to your trip.

Travelling abroad is a bit more complicated. Due to the UK's rabies-free status, pets must have passports that prove their immunity to this disease. These passports give pets the opportunity to travel to certain passport scheme approved countries without requiring a 6 month quarantine prior to their return home. Most European countries (but not all), are included in the scheme, as well as several long-haul destinations such as Canada and the United States. Arranging a pet passport can take 7-9 months from beginning to end, so planning well ahead is essential. The process requires placing a microchip, vaccinating your pet against rabies and a blood test to confirm immunity. Definitely discuss the process with your vet well ahead of any anticipated travel to ensure your pet's paperwork can be completed in time. It is also important to ensure that the countries you wish to visit and the ferry or airline you wish to travel with are included in the scheme. Government officials at entry points to the UK take the rules very seriously, and you could risk your pet being licensed into quarantine if all regulations are not complied with. Currently only dogs and cats are eligible for this scheme, but ferret fans take heart - DEFRA is currently working on passports for our favourite weasels.

I hope the above information will inspire you to include your furry friends in your next holiday. Stay tuned to next month's article for some helpful hints about finding pet friendly lodging, keeping your pets healthy on holiday and more.

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