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writes...

Travelling overseas with a pet

ABSTRACT: Overseas travel with a pet is increasingly common among British owners. The introduction of the EU Pet Passport in 2001 made it easier for owners to travel between member countries with their pets and removed the need for lengthy quarantining in many cases. The Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) is frequently updated and currently allows UK owners to take pet cats, dogs and ferrets to any country and bring them back into the UK without quarantine, providing certain conditions are met.

Basics of overseas pet travel

Cats and dogs are the pets most frequently taken overseas and similar rules apply to both. All cats and dogs must be microchipped and vaccinated against rabies. The microchip needs to be inserted before the rabies vaccination is given. At least 21 days must pass after the vaccination before the pet can travel overseas between EU countries.

Pets must also have a valid Pet Passport, provided by the animal's vet, or an official veterinary certificate if travel is commencing outside the EU. The pet's microchip number must be recorded on the Pet Passport or veterinary certificate.

For most international travel, dogs will require tapeworm treatment. This treatment needs to be given between one and five days before travel and the vet must record the details of the treatment in the animal's Pet Passport or on their veterinary certificate. Animals should have had all necessary vaccinations well ahead of travelling, and all booster vaccinations should be up-to-date and recorded in the Pet Passport or veterinary certificate.

There are currently no restrictions on bringing pet rabbits, rodents, reptiles and birds into the UK from EU states, but most animals entering the UK from outside the EU require a four-month stay in quarantine. Full information can be obtained from the C:\Users\Sue\Documents\Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency at www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/

imports-exports/pets and Gov.UK at www.gov.uk

Travelling with multiple pets

Those intending to travel with five or more pets must obtain a separate health certificate from their vet for the entire group of animals. The certificate must be obtained at least 10 days before the date of travel and is required in addition to any other documentation needed for the journey.

Flying with pets

Where possible, owners should contact their chosen airline as far ahead as possible. Most airlines have limited capacity for animal passengers, so it is important to book well in advance.

Many carriers require owners to use a designated pet travel agent when travelling with animals to minimise problems and delays. Two companies that provide this service are Jets4Pets www.jets4pets.com and Airpets Oceanic www.airpets.com who are based at Heathrow Airport. Although this approach will increase costs for the owner, dealing with experts can reduce stress to both human and pet and ensure a smoother journey.

Animals will almost always travel in the plane's hold meaning owners won't have access to their pet until arrival. Some airlines allow guide and assistance dogs to travel in the cabin with their owner, although this varies between carriers. Owners should be aware that pug or snub nose breeds – such as Persian cats or Pekingese dogs – are not accepted by

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some airlines because their physical characteristics mean they are far more likely to suffer breathing problems at altitude.

Cruises and ferry crossings

Travelling by boat is preferable to flying for many pet owners because the stress is likely to be less for both owner and animal. Pet owners on self-drive holidays will find ferry crossings relatively straightforward. Companies, such as P&O, will provide information on their websites www.poferies.com but coach passengers and foot passengers will generally find they're unable to travel with animals.

There has been an increase in the number of cruise operators accepting pets in recent years and many owners find taking their pets with them preferable to leaving them in boarding kennels. Taking pets on a domestic cruise is unlikely to carry any legal requirements but each cruise company will have its own set of guidelines and rules.

Where cruises travel internationally, all pets will be subject to the same rules and regulations as if they travel overseas by air or any other mode of transport. Many cruise companies work alongside the Pets Travel Scheme; although owners should check with the company directly for additional requirements. Cruise accommodation for pets can either be in the owner's cabin or in designated pet areas and kennels.

Travelling by rail

It is not possible currently for owners to leave the UK by rail with their pets, as only guide dogs or assistance dogs are allowed on Eurostar rail Channel crossings. For those wishing to travel internationally by rail with their pet, leaving the UK by ferry is probably the best option.

Pets are welcome on most European trains for free or for a small charge. Small animals should be kept in a secure carrier on journeys.

Travelling by car

Overseas travel with pets is often easiest when the owner drives. This allows pets to stay with their owners at all times and reduces stress. It is possible to travel by ferry or Eurotunnel with pets and, as charges are usually per vehicle, animals effectively travel for free a lot of the time.

Travelling by car means the owner can choose where and when to stop and how often to let their pet exercise, eat and go to the toilet.

Tips for owners travelling with pets

As well as the UK's legal requirements for travelling pets, owners should be aware that destination countries will have their own set of regulations that should be checked before finalising travel plans. Carriers – whether airlines, rail companies, cruise ships or ferries – will all also have their own set of guidelines. Failure to adhere to these might see pets refused carriage, so owners should check with each individual carrier well in advance.

Travel organisations such as ABTA <http://abta.com/go-travel/before-you-travel/travel-tips/travelling-with-pets> have a basic

list of what UK owners travelling internationally with pets need to know.

International travel – especially by air – is highly likely to cause stress and fear in most animals, so steps should be taken to minimise any discomfort. Pets used to loud noises and busy environments are likely to find travelling less stressful than timid animals.

The veterinary nurse is ideally placed within the context of nurse clinics to provide advice to owners contemplating travelling with their pets. This will include the requirement for sedation if the pet is likely to find the experience very stressful, in which case an appointment should also be made with the veterinary surgeon.

Steps such as ensuring plenty of exercise before travelling can tire out an animal and encourage sleep during the journey. Vets generally advise against sedating pets before air travel as it can increase the risk of breathing difficulties, but sedation may be appropriate for other forms of transport.

Conclusion

Owners increasingly expect to take their pets with them when they travel abroad but it is critical that they are well informed regarding the relevant legislation – both here and in the destination country – as failure to comply can prove expensive as well as stressful for both owner and pet. 