

A Guide for Traveling By Car With Your Pet

by petMD

Road trips are basically instilled into Americans as a birthright. We just get in the car, gas it up, turn on the tunes, and drive off into the beautiful sunset. But what if you're bringing your pet along? Besides packing your pet's favorite chew toys and a favorite blankie for them to cuddle with, what else should you bring? We've compiled this handy list of suggestions that will make your trip as safe, enjoyable, and trouble free as possible -- yes, that goes for Fido and Kitty, too.

1. The best prevention against accidental injuries is a pet carrier.

One of the most common injuries in pets is due to accidents inside cars. No matter what size your pet is (whether it's a dog, cat, or hamster), it will be better off in a travel crate. Of course you're a safe driver, but not everyone else is, and in a worst case scenario the last thing you want is for your pet to be thrown from the car. Even crates can be thrown through windows in the course of an accident, so make sure that you tie the crate down, either on the floor of the back seat or on the back seat with the seat belt.

Some carriers are specifically designed with seat belt guides fitted into the carrier, but any crate can be made to stay in place using ropes or bungee cords. This will not only lower the risk that the crate goes flying, it will also lessen the chances your pet suffers from motion sickness. Never let animals, especially cats, roam around a car freely. Cats have a tendency to crawl under feet, and excited dogs will move from one side of the car to the other to take in all the sights.

2. Keep your pet out of the front seat.

Yes, we know you love your little Fluffy-baby, but the front seat is no place for an animal. That means no holding your pet on your lap while you drive, and no pets on the passenger side seat. Even if your dog is big enough for the passenger side seatbelt to fit over him, he would still be at risk even in the smallest of accidents if the airbag should deploy, or if he slid over or under the belt. Seat belts and airbags are designed for the adult sized human body, after all, and dogs are not physically equipped for either of them. The results could be fatal. Yes, there are seat belts designed for dogs, but our money is still on the crate.

3. Attach a detailed travel tag with all of your contact information to your pet's collar.

Heaven forbid, but if you should lose your pet during a road trip, the best chance of having it returned to you may be that tag. We have heard stories of little dogs that had to run away to protect their lives because a big dog came at them at a rest stop (true story). Be prepared. In fact, if you are reading this in advance of a trip, you might consider having your pet micro-chipped or tattooed, to make identification foolproof. We also think microchips can be useful, just make sure you keep the contact information linked to the account updated. Otherwise, it's just a really expensive accessory that does nothing for your pet's fashion sense.

4. Bring sufficient pet food and water for the entire trip.

Road trips are not the time to try new foods -- at least as far as your pet is concerned. Remember, your pet is not accustomed to holding it in until the next rest stop, so a bad case of digestive upset can very quickly turn into the ugliest ride of your life. Make sure that you take enough food to last until you get home again, and stick to the treats your pet is already used to having. You might even want to think about filling a jug of water from home, to minimize any chance of digestive problems. Collapsible pet bowls are perfect for trips like this, as you can stash them in your pocket and fill them for rest stop breaks.

5. Make a “prepared for anything” travel kit.

Your emergency kit should include everything you need, of course, with the addition of pet first aid items:

- Roll of gauze
- Bandages that are specially made to stay on animals
- Pain reliever that has been pre-approved by your veterinarian for your pet's weight and age
- Hydrogen peroxide — both for cleaning wounds and for inducing vomiting
- Antibiotic ointment
- Anti-nausea medicine (again, pre-approved by your veterinarian)
- A current photo of your pet
- Plastic bags for picking up after your pet
- Manual can opener
- Proof of rabies shots (remember, you're prepared for anything)
- Extra toys
- Baby wipes — good for cleaning your pet, and yourself
- Cleaning wipes and paper towels, for cleaning the car
- Extra collar and leash
- A blanket or beach towel large enough to wrap around your pet if it needs to be constrained

This isn't the end all list for traveling by road with your pet. Let your instincts, and your pet, be your guide. But, above all else, be safe, and have fun on your adventure!