

Fido Can the Go

by Jill Howard Church

Illustration by Nancy Nimoy

Until recently, the term “poop deck” had special meaning for a dozen select travelers on the Queen Elizabeth 2. The luxurious liner is designed to accommodate 1,890 passengers, 1,004 crew members—and up to 12 lucky companion animals.

Last summer, when Michelle Thew moved from England to the U.S. to assume her new job as CEO of the Animal Protection Institute, she chose to travel on the QE2 with her four-year-old dog, Chloe, rather than fly.

“I started to learn about what can happen to animals in airplanes,” Thew explains, referring to such dangers as heat stress and abnormal air pressure, “and I didn’t want any of those things happening to Chloe.” So she booked passage on a six-day transatlantic cruise, spending much of the time in the ship’s small but comfortable kennel area. “Whereas most people on the cruise were learning how to ballroom dance, I spent my cruise on the dog deck,” Thew says. She admits the cost was nearly triple what airfare would have been, but Chloe’s safety was paramount. Their arrival in New York was followed by a 10-day cross-country drive to California, which went smoothly thanks to animal-friendly hotels.

In 2004, unfortunately, the Cunard cruise line stopped booking animals on both the QE2 and its replacement ship, the Queen Mary 2, citing unspecified government regulations. It’s yet another example of the complications of traveling with pets. Both transport and lodging can be difficult

when animals are involved, as the health and safety of everyone must be considered.

First Things First

First, determine whether it’s in your pet’s best interest to travel with you at all, as most trips aren’t to move 6,000 miles like Chloe’s guardian.

Given the restrictions many hotels and tourist attractions place on the presence of animals, consider how much time you’ll be able to spend with your pet during the trip. Also think about how he or she reacts to new surroundings and unfamiliar people. It may be less stressful for your pet to stay home with a relative, a pet sitter or in a familiar kennel than to accompany you to a strange place.

If you decide that Fido can go, check with your veterinarian to make sure your pet is healthy and physically able to travel. Get a printout of vaccination records to bring with you in case hotels or other officials need proof of rabies or other inoculations. If your pet does not have a microchip implant, consider getting one. Unlike a collar, it can’t accidentally be removed, and most microchips can be traced nationwide.

Packing for your pet involves some key items. A collar and ID tag are essential; an extra tag with the address and phone number of your destination, as well as your cell phone number, is recommended as well. Leashes, a recent photo (in case your pet gets lost) and brushes and towels for grooming should be brought also. First aid kits with special amenities and instructions for animals are available in pet supply stores.

Bowls, food and bottled water must be packed, along with toys and treats. In case of accidents in the car or elsewhere, bring cleaning supplies and plenty of pooper-scooper bags. Disposable cat litter trays (complete with litter) make traveling with cats much more convenient.

Planes, Trains or Automobiles

Car travel is the easiest, since it’s the most personal and most versatile. Animals, like human passengers, should be comfortably restrained in case of an accident. Cats are best kept confined in carriers where they can lie down comfortably but still see out. Dogs should never be put in the back of an open pickup truck. Small dogs and those who like to ride sitting up can use special harnesses that fasten to the seat. Seat covers are made by a variety of manufacturers to keep muddy paws and pet hair from soiling the vehicle’s interior.

For elderly dogs or those with limited mobility, there are portable folding ramps that allow the dogs to walk up into the backs of trucks or SUVs without having to be lifted. Cats and dogs who seldom ride in the car for long periods should be taken for short rides a week or more before a trip to get them acclimated and to watch for any possible bad reactions.

While on the road, take frequent breaks for exercise and bathroom needs. It's generally not a good idea to leave pets unattended in a car, especially on warm days; even with the windows cracked, the temperature can rise to deadly levels in a matter of minutes. Either use the drive-through window at restaurants or pack a picnic so that you can stay with your companion animals at mealtimes.

If you are traveling with a bird, keep the nighttime cover on the cage to minimize stress. Special travel carriers are also available for hamsters, rats and other small creatures.

Choose Wisely

Hotel, motel and bed-and-breakfast policies can vary widely regarding the acceptance of pets. When making reservations, ask if animals are allowed and what fees or restrictions apply. Some lodgings charge extra for pets, and others limit the number or type of animals allowed. Don't assume that because a hotel had a certain policy last year that the same policy still applies. Choose a room on the ground floor, if possible, to make coming and going quicker and easier.

Under no circumstances should you try to sneak animals into accommodations where they are not allowed; that's just asking for trouble!

Many campgrounds and RV parks allow animals, but extra fees sometimes apply in addition to rules about leashing and leaving animals unattended. As with other lodgings, call ahead.

Report from the Road

Sheilla Dingus, a support representative for a software company, has taken her cat and as many as four dogs (including three Dobermans) with her on business trips up to 35 times a year. She learned a hard lesson two years ago while traveling to Athens, Georgia, with her Pomeranian

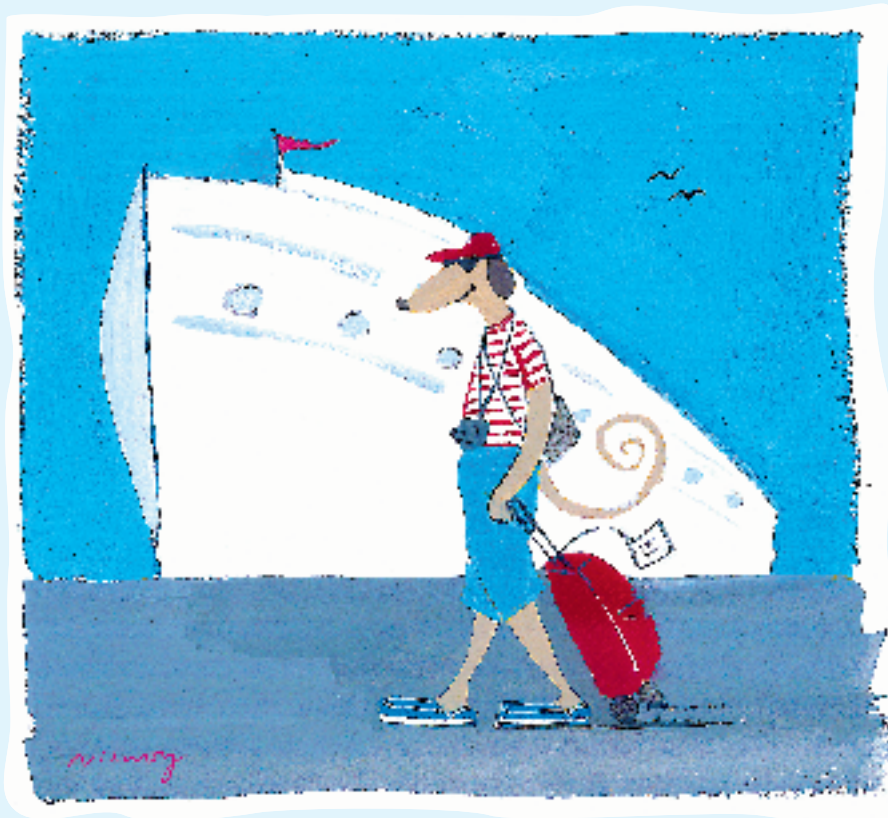
mix, Champ. She left Champ in the car with the window rolled down a few inches while she went inside a hotel to check in. When she returned to her car, Champ was gone. After a frantic search near a busy street, she found him a half hour later, thanks to passersby who saw Champ running loose.

This and other experiences have made her a more savvy traveler. Now when she must leave her animals in the car, Dingus carries two sets of keys: one to keep in the ignition so the air conditioning can stay running, and another that lets her back into the locked car. She has tips for hotel stays as well.

"I try very hard to be a good guest," Dingus says. She brings along a small broom vacuum cleaner so she can sweep up any spilled litter or loose dog hair. She keeps her animals crated when she leaves the hotel room, to avoid any chance of them slipping out when the door opens. She also declines maid service, to reduce the chance of strangers coming into contact with the dogs. She also makes sure her dogs don't soil the hotel grounds.

All of her preparations pay off on the road. "I would be very lonely if I had to travel without them," Dingus says. "It's really not that hard once you get used to it."

Traveling by plane is trickier. Jessica MacLeod tells how, in 1993, she and her family moved to the U.S. from England with Bonnie, their newly rescued mixed-breed puppy. Bonnie was put into a bare crate in the baggage compartment of the plane, where she was without food, water and attention for nearly half a day during the long flight. "When we picked her up at the end of our trip, we were greeted with a pet carrier that was now lying on its side, obviously bashed up by loose baggage, and a terrified puppy covered in her own urine and feces," MacLeod says. "Mass transportation takes little notice of the animals being



shipped, so it is up to you to make sure your pet will be safe." (For more information see "The Hazards of Air Travel with Animals," on page 15.)

As for train travel, Amtrak allows only "trained service animals accompanying guests with disabilities." Likewise, few boats or ships permit companion animals.

Pet supply and specialty stores sell all sorts of convenience and safety items designed to make mobile mutts happy. Outward Hound's numerous products include the Doggie Weekender Bag—a zippered pack designed for carrying food, bowls and water—and the Pet Lookout Car Booster Seat, which attaches to a car's headrest and lets small dogs ride safely while still being able to look out the window. Pet Zone's Pack-n-Play Travel Set case comes with a flying disc, a dish, water bottle and other goodies.

With the right provisions and careful preparation, traveling with pets can indeed be smooth sailing. 🐾

Whereas most people on the cruise were learning how to ballroom dance, I spent my cruise on the dog deck.

Know Before You Go

Compassionate Travel

The Compassionate Traveler, a project of the International Wildlife Coalition, provides travelers with information on animal-friendly travel. Their Web site features a searchable database offering information on animal-welfare issues around the world along with travel hints, vacation ideas and monthly email alerts on animals in need and what you can do to help them. For more information, visit www.compassionatetraveler.org.

The following books and Web sites are among many offering information, advice and products specifically for traveling with pets:

Hotels/Motels

Traveling with Your Pet: The AAA Pet Book, produced by the American Automobile Association (see page 19)

Fodor's Road Guide USA: Where to Stay with Your Pet

The Pet Travel and Fun Authority of Best-of-State Places to Play, Stay and Have Fun Along the Way, by M.E. Nelson

www.petswelcome.com

U.S., Canadian and international lodgings, including a route planning feature and a discussion board

www.petfriendlytravel.com

List or find U.S. and Canadian properties that allow animals, including hotels, inns, cabins and condos

U.S. National Parks

www.nps.gov

Choose park, then go to "Plan Your Visit" for rules regarding pets

Pet Sitting

www.petsit.com

www.petsitters.org

Miscellaneous

The USDA's Web site page on traveling with your animal includes both their own publications as well as other links:

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ac/publications.html#pettravel>

The American Veterinary Medical Association

www.avma.org

Enter "Traveling With Pets" into the Search box to access information

www.pettravel.com

Database of airlines regulations, plus a newsletter

www.takeyourpet.com

Free newsletter; extra benefits and discounts with paid membership

www.petsonthego.com

International resources and many tips

www.kyjen.com

Sells pet travel products made by Outward Hound

