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Tips and Resources for Traveling With Your Pet *Suzanne Hetts, PhD and Daniel Estep, PhD*

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This article series is about travelling with pets. As we've observed families traveling with their pets, it's been our experience that too many of them have not done what they should to make the trip safe and enjoyable for their pet. Just on a recent day- outing, we saw dogs left tethered for too long in the hot sun without water, dogs stressed from being in crowds and their owners unaware of their dogs plight, and dogs either lagging behind or pulling on their leashes, making the whole experience unpleasant and distracting for the owners.

Topics in this article series are:

1. How to decide if it's best for Fido to go along or stay home
2. What to take in the pet travel kit
3. How to make the vehicle a safer and more comfortable place for your pet,
4. Resources for finding pet friendly lodging and emergency veterinary care on your trip.
5. Finding care when your pet stays at home – kennel, pet sitter, friend or neighbor?

Tip 1. Planning your trip – Should your pet go along?

Summer is a popular time for travel for many of us. Vacations, visits to relatives and friends, and even weekend outings should be fun for the whole family, pets included. Many of us will take our pets along, or at least consider doing so. But, these trips might not be so great from your pet's point of view. In this series we'll help you decide what's best for your pet, help you plan ahead, and give you some resources that will make the trip smoother and more fun for you and your pet.

The first thing to consider is: Should my pet go on this trip or not? The answer to the question will depend on several factors including where you are going, for how long, how you plan to spend your time, and who will look after your pet when she can't be with you. Certainly, some trips with your pet can be great fun, but there are times when

it might be best for Fido or Fluffy to stay at home (with a pet sitter, friend or relative or at a kennel).

If your plans include visits to attractions where pets are not allowed, it might be easier to leave Fido safely at home. We discovered this ourselves recently when we had our dog Coral on a trip with us and found ourselves at a nature park that didn't allow pets. One of us ended up staying in the parking lot with her while the other visited the park.

Lesson: Always check that the places that you want to go will take pets. Fortunately, many more places allow pets than in the past, but check ahead of time, to avoid having to make a last minute hard choice as we did.

If you are going on a very long trip, think about how the extended travel time will effect your pet. Is she comfortable travelling long distances in the car (or by plane or boat)? Does she seem to show minimal distress when travelling? If the answers to these questions are no, or you're not sure, it might be more distressing for her to travel with you than to be left at home. Lesson: Based on past experiences traveling with your pet, assess how the long trip will affect her welfare.

If your activities on the trip will involve a lot of time away from your pet such as evenings out with friends or day-long activities where your pet can't be with you, consider the effect on your pet. Fluffy may be quite comfortable spending many hours away from you when at home, but that same time in an unfamiliar motel room or kennel, or with an unfamiliar pet-sitter may be quite distressing. We experienced this ourselves when we took Coral on another trip and arranged ahead of time to leave her for a few hours at a very nice day care facility. When we picked her up, we learned she had been quite distressed about being left in this unfamiliar place. And most lodging places that allow pets do not permit them to be left alone in the room. Lesson: Some places you think would be good for your pet, may not be good from her point of view. Think about how your pet will react to being alone in unfamiliar places.

On a good note, we stayed at the most dog friendly motel we'd ever experienced in Ocean Beach CA. We were steps from a dog beach, the hotel had dog bathing facilities, and if you left your dog in the room to go to dinner, the hotel would call you on your cell phone if problems arose. That was a trip planned with Coral in mind.

So the bottom line is to consider what is best for your pet as well as the rest of your family. You may want your pet to be with you to share and enjoy new experiences, but she might be better off at home.

Tip 2. What To Take In the Pet's Travel Kit

When we travel with our pets, we all think of the basics to take along – food, medication, beds, leash and collars, food and water bowls, towels if they get dirty, and blankets if it will be cold. But there are other things you might want to consider as well, depending on the season, where you're going and what you'll be doing.

Living in the high altitude, dry conditions of Denver, we don't really have a problem with fleas and ticks, so when we travel, we have to think about getting flea and tick protection for our dog. If you're going to be in an area with lots of flies and mosquitos, getting repellants for those pests is also important. (With all these items, make sure they are designed specifically for your dog or cat. If in doubt, consult your veterinarian).

If you're going to be hiking with your dog, or spending a lot of time outside at the lake, river or beach, consider taking sunscreen and doggie goggles with UV protection. For either very hot or very cold conditions consider dog booties to protect tender feet from the elements. Hot pavement or sand can burn sensitive toes. A coat in cold or wet conditions is equally important.

If you're planning water activities, consider a pet lifejacket or floatation vest. You never know when Rover or Fluffy may end up in the water. Also pack a waterless pet shampoo if your pet is likely to get dirty on your trip. Our dog Coral loves to swim in any stream or lake she comes to, and then roll in the dirt afterwards, so waterless shampoo has been a lifesaver for us on trips.

If you're going to take your dog someplace with lots of noise, like a rock concert, or one with lots of thunderstorms, or even if you're taking your dog flying in a small plane (which can be noisy) consider ear muffs made specifically for dogs. It will protect their hearing and reduce anxiety. Some dogs also do better around loud noises or other scary things when wrapped in a compression jacket like a Thunder Shirt. Also a Thunder Cap (aka Calming Cap) which reduces a dog's vision can reduce anxiety in some dogs.

The key to a low stress trip with your pet is planning. The better you can visualize what you are likely to do with your pet, and then take the things you need, the better the trip will be for everyone.

Tip 3. Making Your Vehicle More Pet Friendly and Pet Safe

Traveling with your pet in your car or truck can be a really wonderful experience or it can be really unpleasant. The accommodations you make for your pet can help determine whether it goes the one way or the other. A dog loose in the car hopping from back seat to front and barking at everything he sees is not only obnoxious and distracting, it's down-right dangerous. Safety experts tell us that distracted driving is a leading cause of auto accidents. There are few things more distracting than an out of control dog in the car.

So the first thing to consider is how you are going to restrain your pet. Your pet may ride very comfortably in a crate or travel carrier secured in the car or truck. Our Dalmatian Ashley was quite anxious riding in our car, moving back and forth, whining and barking. When we put her in her crate and threw a sheet over it, she calmed down and rode (mostly) quietly.

Our Irish Setter, Coral, rides well with a harness secured to a seat belt in the back seat of our van. We also put up sun shades on the sunny side of the car so she stays cool and out of the sun. Sun screens can also block the view to the outside, which can help dogs who become overly excited from what they see through the car's windows.

For many vehicles there are now screens or barriers available that can be attached between front and back seats or across the cargo areas to keep the pet confined to one area of the car. For smaller dogs, and cats, there are pet car seats, similar to baby car seats, that the pet can ride in that keeps them secure and gives them a better view of things.

There are also back seat bridges/extendors, seat covers, door protectors and seat fabric cleaners and deodorizers (for the inevitable accidents), to protect the inside of the car and make it more comfortable for the pet.

We previously mentioned the Thunder Cap (aka Calming Cap) and possible medications for car sickness (after talking with your veterinarian) both of which can contribute to your pet's comfort.

Would your dog or cat enjoy watching movies made for them? If you have video capability in your car, consider bringing along some DVDs made for pets. On the other hand, remember that your pet's hearing is much more sensitive than your own, so cranking the audio up with your favorite DVD or mp3 may be something you enjoy but likely sets any animal on edge.

Don't forget water containers and bowls and taking plenty of stops along the way to sniff the flowers, stretch stiff limbs and take potty walks.

And if you really want to indulge your pet, you could allow him to ride in the front seat for a stretch. We've done this with Coral – she rides shotgun and one of us rides in the back seat. Breaks the trip up for all of us.

We draw the line though at allowing Coral to ride with her head out the window. While she may like it, this practice puts the dog's eyes and nose at risk of irritation or injury, and should be avoided.

Tip 4. Resources for Finding Pet Friendly Lodging and Emergency Veterinary Care on Your Trip

Upon our arrival in Glenwood Springs several years ago during a weekend vacation, we took Coral for a walk in the park near our hotel. We'd been in the car several hours, and all of us needed to stretch our legs. Coral was happily trotting through the park, enjoying the smells and sights, when she suddenly pulled up short, lay down, and began chewing at a spot between her toes on her right front paw.

When we stopped to look, we saw a twig caught between Coral's toes. Suzanne tried to remove it, thinking it was just caught on some fur. When tugging failed to dislodge the twig, and Coral becoming more frantic pawing at it, we thought (wrongly it turned out) the twig had actually embedded itself and punctured the skin.

It was a little after 7 pm on a Friday night and we figured our chances for finding a veterinary clinic open were slim and none. We'd luckily seen a sign for a practice a few blocks away and rushed Coral over. The clinic had already closed, but a staff member heard us pounding on the door and was gracious enough to let us in. Long story short, the twig was only stuck to Coral's skin with a big glob of sap, which was why it didn't easily come loose in response to Suzanne's tugging.

We were lucky in many respects. First, Coral's "injury" turned out not to be one at all, and it was incredibly fortunate that not only was a veterinary clinic close by, but the veterinarian was willing to see us even though the clinic was closed. That taught us the importance of planning ahead. What if things had been more serious – say Coral's leash had broken and she'd run out in the street and been hit by a car? What if the veterinarian had already left for the day? We'd be frantically searching for an emergency clinic, perhaps with Coral's life in the balance.

If you'll be traveling with your pet, we recommend looking online and finding a few general practice clinics, and one emergency veterinarian in all the cities you'll be visiting. The websites of state veterinary associations usually have searchable databases to locate a veterinarian within each state. Or ask your regular veterinarian for a referral – veterinarians meet colleagues from all over at professional meetings, so you might be surprised who your veterinarian might know.

Googling the term "pet friendly lodging" reveals quite a few websites listing accommodations accepting pets. We've used the www.BringFido.com site several times with good results. The site www.DogFriendly.com has a number of categories in addition to lodging including hikes, beaches, camping and more. PetsWelcome.com is another multi-category site, although we have no personal experience with this or the Dog Friendly site.

Tip 5. Finding Care When Your Pet Stays At Home

Finding someone to care for your pet when you are traveling isn't always an easy process. If you have a favorite caretaker who has taken good care of your pet in the past, then using that person or facility for this trip is a good choice. But what if your

regular caretaker isn't available or you are new to the area or you have a new pet who hasn't been left before? Who ya gonna call?

Your options might include family, friends or neighbors, a professional petsitter/pet walker, or boarding kennel. Your decision will depend on a number of factors including:

1. Cost – family members may be cheaper than a boarding kennel
2. Accessibility – professional sitters often service only limited areas, your family may not be nearby, and/or boarding kennels usually fill up months in advance for holidays or summer travel
3. Location - Do you need someone to stay in your home or can your pet go elsewhere? Some pet sitters care for pets in their homes rather than yours. We are registered with Rover.com and have taken care of some wonderful pets whose owners found us through that site.
4. Think about how your pet responds to unfamiliar environments, people or animals. Would your pet be happier in your familiar home environment or does he or she thrive on new experiences and is a social butterfly?

If your pet will be boarding at another location, it's a good idea to do a test visit of several hours or perhaps overnight before deciding to leave your pet for several days or a week. If your pet doesn't do well, you want to know before your hundreds or thousands of miles away. Professional pet sitters always come to your house to meet you and your pet prior to the start of a sitting assignment. If you'll be using non-professionals, be sure in your own mind they are sufficiently trustworthy to care for your four-legged family member(s). Just because a neighbor child can be trusted to mow your yard doesn't necessarily mean he or she can be trusted to care for a pet.

Regardless of the caretaker you use, be sure to give the individual or facility the name and contact information of your veterinarian (and a local emergency clinic) as well as a friend, neighbor or relative the caretaker can call in an emergency. Let your friend/neighbor/relative and your veterinarian know who is caring for your pet when you are gone. We make sure our veterinarian knows we'll pay for any necessary medical expenses in the event our pets need emergency care while we are gone.

One final thing – don't wait till the last minute to make your pet care arrangements. Start planning for your pet's care - whether you take her with you or leave her at home – as soon as you make your travel plans. The longer you wait, the fewer options you will have, resulting in choices that may not be best for you or your pet.

We hope this series will help make summer – or any season of travel – a better experience for you and your pet.

There are many sources for the items we've mentioned. Check out Chewy.com as a source of many of these travel accessories.