



www.expatlogistics.com

International Pet Travel

Many people worry when the time comes to transport their pets to or from a new country and stories of poor treatment, complex processes and difficult staff / officials abound.

Unsurprisingly, pet travel can be incredibly complex, but that is due to the number of international laws and requirements designed to protect your furry family during travel, so we have some advice for you to help your international move go smoothly.

First and foremost, it is very safe for pets to travel on a plane, provided they are in reasonable health. There are requirements in place to make sure pets are 'fit for travel' and airlines which accept pets have strict protocols to ensure pets are stowed safely during the flight. Considering the thousands of pets who fly every day across the world I am only aware of a couple of cases of pet mortality during transit in the 15 years I have been handling pets.

So, what do you need to know and how do you prepare?

Cargo or Baggage?

There are two ways of shipping pets by air, 'manifested cargo' and 'accompanied travel'. Not all airlines provide both services so your choice may be limited depending on your origin / destination.

Accompanied Travel

This is where your pet is travelling on the same flight as you, booked on your ticket as excess baggage. Most airlines that offer this service require you to check your pet in as hold baggage (don't worry, your pet will be stowed in a pressurised environment rather than with the general baggage). Very few airlines allow your pet to travel with you in the cabin and if they do there will be restrictions on size and weight of the carrier.

Pros and Cons of Accompanied Travel

- Often a cheaper option but beware of hidden or unplanned costs
- Acceptance of your pet will be subject to availability on the day, so if you have a non-refundable ticket and the airline changes the aircraft type you may find your pet is not accepted but your flight booking cannot be changed
- The owner is responsible for all export and import documentation, and any vet certification prior to travel. Again, if your pet is rejected at the check-in counter due to documentation errors your own flight booking will not automatically be changed
- Isn't possible to all destinations or with all airlines so this can limit your own flight booking options (for example accompanied travel is not permitted directly to or from the UK, but you could book on Lufthansa to Germany and then book separate travel by road / train to the UK)
- The owner is responsible for confirming the booking directly with an airline, agents cannot book this for you
- You need to ensure you have suitable connecting travel arrangements (car, train, boat, etc.)

Manifested Cargo

This is where your pet travels as cargo through an agent. You may be travelling on the same flight, but the two bookings are unconnected.

As a cargo agent, we understand pet travel is very expensive, but a lot of these costs are due to the service providers involved in the safe and professional handling of pets. Whilst we would provide rates for services, we can also advise if certain tasks can be completed by the owner themselves and what needs to be completed by an agent or third party.

Subject to countries we & our partners are usually able to offer a selection of services including export documents, inspections, collections and travel, clearance and onward travel at destination. Sometimes these services must be included but ultimately you are paying for someone to look after your pet.

Pros and Cons of Manifested Cargo

- May appear more expensive but will include all costs.... you are paying someone else to handle the stress!
- You can choose from a range of services by professional organisations
- Your agent will advise on the document and certification requirements at origin and destination and check documents before travel
- All connections to your destination can be pre-booked via your agent
- Your pet can be boarded before travel to give you time to arrive in your new home before your pet arrives
- Sometimes the only option!

How do I find out what import and export regulations need to be followed?

Unfortunately, there is not a single source of information. Each country has its own rules and they can be subject to change without notice. Not only are import & export regulations complex and often difficult to understand, they can change frequently and without notice. If you are booking your pet as manifested cargo, or are using an agent for your documentation, then your agent will be responsible for ensuring your documents are correct at time of shipping, but if you are booking accompanied travel and are managing the documents yourself you will need to check with the relevant authorities at the time.

Do I need an agent to complete the export and import documentation?

At origin, you will need to complete a set of specific documents that will allow travel or are required for export purposes. In most countries, these can be completed by the owner however an agent or specialist document service provider may be able to provide the service very quickly for a fee. As an owner you need to consider the risk of document error, time frames for completion and your own availability to carry out these requirements.

Remember, some countries require payment to a vet or government office to receive documentation, inspections or certification so it may not be free or much cheaper than a service provider. You need to check first!

You need to be aware if there is an issue with the documents, they are delayed or simply an error, your pet could be refused travel. As this isn't deemed an airline error, they have no responsibility to refund or rebook your flight should you chose not to travel with your pet.

On arrival to your destination country, you need to navigate customs and import process and documents. Again, this is something the traveller needs to ensure is in order otherwise pets can be rejected and sent back to destination at the owner's cost.

What if I want my pets to travel on a specific flight?

Please remember that not aircraft are equipped to accept pets and not all airlines will take them by your chosen method. Smaller aircraft often have limited space and are not able to accept larger pet carriers.

I am flying from A to B, why can't my pets?

In airline travel there is a code share system to allow the travel of passengers with 2 or more airlines under one booking. Unfortunately, due to the complexities of pet travel and the fact most airlines have different requirements for pet travel, it is very rare for airlines to allow pet transfer to an alternate airline under the same booking. This is the case for accompanied and manifest cargo in about 99% of transit cases.

I have booked with ABC airline to destination why can't you!

As above this will often be the case that it is code share. Only routes that are operated by one airline are normally available to both agents and passengers when travelling with pets. Some airports may not be able to handle international pet imports

Why does the pet carrier have to be so large?

Airlines have a set minimum requirement for pet carriers, these are governed by IATA regulations to ensure your pet is secure and comfortable during travel. A few airlines have additional requirements over and above the IATA standards. The majority of owners use 'off the shelf' plastic pet carriers, these obviously aren't made to measure so will often appear to be too large as the smaller size was not acceptable.

Why won't you accept my pet carrier?

IATA publish a very comprehensive list of requirements, which are then taken by the airlines and refined for their own standards. As such there can be many reasons a pet carrier may not be suitable, including:

No holes exceeding certain size, subject to size of

Locking mechanism must be of a secure locking type

Percentage of the entire box must be given to ventilation

My pet has used this box and loves it...

Unfortunately, what pets like and the fact they may have travelled before in it doesn't matter to the airlines. We have minimum requirements and they must be met. Whilst this is upsetting to some owners and can lead to additional cost these must be met to ensure acceptance. Failure to use an appropriate carrier will result in refusal at time of submission of pets to the airline. This will often result in additional costs, re-booking, boarding and associated costs along with delays.

What happens if the box isn't suitable?

If you are lucky it will be noticed and rejected pre-travel. This is the cheapest mistake an owner can make. Should they be accepted, and the pet carrier is found to be non-compliant on arrival to destination it will normally be reported to IATA as animal cruelty. This can lead to serious fines with one airline recently being fined \$100,000 for a dog in a box that was too small for travel. Any such fines and court action would be passed to the owner. This is why pet measurements are so important!