

Here are some tips we have learned from traveling with our cat, Tuna, with shelter puppies and kittens and even with a couple of larger dogs.

This document mostly covers the process of traveling with a pet in the cabin, but the first part of this document applies to taking a larger crate for a pet that will go into the airplane's cargo hold as a checked pet. (No offense to boy pets, but we've chosen to use she/her in this document, and we may interchange terms like pet, puppy or kitten. Poetic license, you know.)

This document assumes you have read our checklists for in-cabin and crated pets; they list all the supplies and paperwork you will need.

And now, on with the trip:

If you aren't flying from Anguilla, we recommend that you take one of the ferries that go straight to the Dutch side. As part of the ferry service, Anguilla ferries almost always provide a taxi directly to the airport as part of the service. It is more direct and less stressful than taking a public ferry through Marigot and then having a long taxi ride to the airport. Plus, you avoid any potential hassles with the French government.

The Link, GB Express, Funtime, and Shauna are all pet friendly and do not charge for bringing a pet on the boat with you. You can hold her carrier on your lap (or put it next to you if there is room). We try and sit on the starboard (right side) going from Anguilla, as that is usually the leeward side. That will keep you and your pet drier.

Please tip the ferry and taxi drivers who will handle your larger luggage (and a larger crate) accordingly on both sides of the ferry ride.

When you get to the airport you will need to check in at the ticket counter. At this time you'll pay the pet fee. The agent may ask to see the puppy's health certificate. If so, they will look at it and then give it back to you. They often ask to see the pet; if you just hold up the carrier so they can see inside, that's usually all they care about. After checking in, you can take the puppy outside to see if she needs to relieve herself.

(Protip: always keep your pet forms in an easily accessible place and always know where they are.)

Crated pets

If you have a larger, crated pet, you'll need to go to a separate area so that they can examine and then take the crate to transport to the airplane's cargo hold.

You'll have to remove the pet in order to let them X-ray the empty crate. After that, you will re-install the pet back into her crate.

Then, make sure you affix the plastic tie wraps and that the food, water dishes and paperwork are properly attached to the crate.

Per our checklist, it is suggested you take at least a **dozen cable ties** with you per crate. Leave at least 4 of them in the taped-on baggie holding the paperwork; take the rest with you.

The reason for this is that you'll be taking your pet out of the crate many times, such as for Customs inspections – and maybe to let the pet go for a walk during a layover. Releasable/reusable ties (ones you can re-fasten) are the best, but if they aren't available, bring "regular" ones and one of those tiny nail clippers (they are allowed on planes as of this writing) so that you'll be able to cut them off.

Important

Make sure the crate you are taking is approved by the airline, especially in terms of height. As an example, a (large) 40" crate is usually 30 inches tall. As of May 2011, we learned American Airlines would not allow such crates on their 737 series aircraft, which they use on some routes (even from Sint Maarten). At any rate, airlines can change their equipment based on seasonality and economics. Contact your airline or visit its web site to make sure there won't be any problems

At each destination airport, your crate will almost always be sent to the oversized luggage area in baggage claim.

In-cabin pets

For those taking a pet in a small carrier on the plane:

When you pay for the pet's fare at the ticket counter, the agent will give you a receipt. Keep this handy because sometimes the gate agent will ask to see it before you board (their displays will show that you have a pet).

At the security checkpoint, if there are two or more of you traveling together, the following goes better because you can work as a team. (Plan on the pet not wanting to be part of your team.)

When you go through Security, you will have to take the pet out of the carrier and walk through the metal detector with her. The empty carrier will go through the X-ray machine with your other carry-on stuff. (Obviously, you cannot put the pet into the X-ray machine!) Follow this set of steps:

To start with, put your shoes, electronics, belts, etc. into the plastic bins, but **don't** put them or any of your other carry on luggage through X-ray just yet. This is just to speed things up later.

The critical step: remove your puppy and put her empty carrier into the X-ray machine. **And only the empty carrier!**

Now wait. Wait until it starts moving through the machine before walking through the metal detector with your pet.

It's critical to let the empty carrier get completely through the machine and come out on the other side all by itself. Why? Because if something *else* goes through the X-ray machine that makes the inspector stop the conveyor belt, stare at the screen, move the belt forward, stop it, back it back up, call for a supervisor to have a look, you know what happens? Everything comes to a halt, for what seems like an hour. And all that time, you will be standing there with a squirming puppy, or a really excited cat, who will be clawing holes in your shirt – and you. This particularly goes if you have items you know will trigger an inspection. Such as kitty litter for the overnight stay at the hotel.

Ask us how we know this...

Assuming none of the above happened and your carrier is now through or almost through the X-ray machine, you may now walk through the metal detector with your pet in your arms. We suggest you keep a firm grip on her collar, hold her close to your chest and have your boarding pass/documentation in the other hand.

Usually, the TSA people and other passengers are very accommodating. Our cat is still very nervous about being out of her carrier with all of the noise and people and wants the whole thing over and done with *right now*. Puppies are usually much easier than cats, but since your pet has never been in an airport, you don't know how she will react.

Once on the other side, quickly put your pet into the empty carrier (worry about re-arranging towels and pads later). Our experience is that the kitten/cat/puppy will be only too happy to get back inside.

Now have your companion put the rest of your things through the X-ray machine (bins, carry on luggage, lap top, electronics, liquids and gels, etc.).

If you are traveling alone, reverse this process: Before taking her out of the carrier, put all of your other things through the X-ray machine. Make sure all those bins and other stuff make it all the way through the X-ray machine.

Then take the puppy out of the carrier, put the carrier into the X-ray machine, and carry her through with you.

When we left SXM once recently, every single passenger was checked again before boarding (possibly due to some heightened terrorist threat level). Some luggage was inspected and they put the wand over us all. I told the officer that I had a cat in the carrier and she just smiled and said fine, I didn't have to take her out, but you never know.

Once on the plane, the rule is that you have to keep pets inside the carrier at all times. During takeoff and landing, the carrier must be under the seat in front of you (that's why bulkhead and exit row seats cannot be used). The rest of the time you can pull the carrier out, reach in and pet her, or whatever. Hopefully she will curl up and sleep the whole trip. We usually just leave Tuna under the seat the entire time so as to not disturb her – she seems to go into her zone and is quiet but if we play with her she tries to get out of the carrier. Some travelers tell us that they keep the carrier on their lap much of the trip and some have even been able to take the puppy/kitten out on their laps. We don't advise this; some flight crew and passengers may take exception to it. Some people are allergic to pets or just may not like animals.

Since this will be her first trip and she will be a bit nervous/unsure, we do think she will enjoy if you reach in and pet her now and then.

As you approach your port of entry, you should verify your documents are correctly filled out. When you fill out the US Immigration/Customs form, there is a place to mark if you have live animals. We check that box "yes" and write in "pet cat".

When you get to Customs, the officer will probably have you go to the special agricultural check area (the webmaster calls this the “Group W” bench, which only fans of “Alice’s Restaurant” will recognize). Most people there have to put their luggage through another X-ray machine or have an officer thoroughly go through it.

In any event, this is *another* line to stand in and a long one at that, so make sure there is plenty of time to make any connecting flight when you book your trip!

When you (finally) get to the front of the line, just tell the officer that the other officer sent you there because you have a pet puppy or kitten – and they will probably wave you through. Only twice in all of our trips with Tuna has an officer asked to see her health certificate, but you should have it handy just in case. You’ll have plenty of time waiting in line to have that ready.

Here are the things we take along (again, please refer to our checklists on the aarf.ai web site, specifically on the Adopting a Pet page):

- Health certificate prepared by Morlens – 2 copies
- Contact information and itinerary, airline reservation number – put a copy in the pet carrier pocket just in case
- Food in baggie for after you arrive in the States
- One or two small plastic bowls for food and water
- Paper towels for accident clean up
- Absorbent pads – one in carrier plus an extra
- Towel or other soft material inside carrier for comfort and to hide under
- Plastic bags to contain any accident clean up
- You may also need the CDC Rabies Confinement Agreement form (get from the shelter, the AARF web site or from the CDC website (www.cdc.gov))

That’s it. Let us know how this document worked for you. Use the Contact Us page on www.aarf.ai and then the General feedback or Webmaster links.