

Safe Airplane Travel With Rabbits

What is the safest way to travel by plane with a pet rabbit?

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Q: I live in Puerto Rico, and I have to move to Minnesota next year. I'm planning on taking my 5-year-old rabbit with me. I've read conflicting articles on the Internet, some saying that airplane travel is dangerous and others saying that a rabbit will be fine as long as it is kept in the cabin, in a safe carrier and properly hydrated. I have never before traveled with a pet, so I'm quite nervous and would like to know if it would be dangerous to take my rabbit with me. I'm very anxious, because I don't have anyone to leave him with, plus I practically raised this rabbit; I don't want to leave him behind. Another thing that concerns me is the climate. Because Minnesota is much colder, I'm worried about how the weather change might affect my rabbit. I would appreciate any advice you can give me.

A: I think it is very refreshing to hear that you are taking the time to find out how to take your rabbit with you when you move and to find the right way to do it.

The good news is that rabbits can travel. It is important to plan ahead so your rabbit can have a safe comfortable trip. Find an airline that allows you to take your rabbit on board with you. Once you have found one, ask them for the rules and regulations for traveling with your rabbit.

The airline will require that your rabbit be in an airline-approved carrier that fits under the seat in front of you. They also require a health certificate from a veterinarian. Get this from a rabbit-knowledgeable veterinarian so he or she can make sure your rabbit is in good health. When you go for the health certificate, use the same carrier your rabbit is going to travel in so you both get a feel for it.

Put the carrier out in your rabbit's living area a couple of weeks before you plan to travel. That way it will not seem strange to your rabbit. Put a towel in the bottom of it, and leave the door open so he can go in and out as he pleases. Some rabbits have open carriers as an everyday hidey-house and really enjoy them.

For the day of travel, put a large, folded towel in the bottom of the carrier so your rabbit feels safe and doesn't slide around. Make sure the towel is big enough that it does not slide around or bunch up. You can also use a pet bed. Depending on the size of your rabbit, there may or may not be room for a small litter box. If there is enough room, put it in the back of the carrier with safe litter and hay on top. Take a water bottle that can attach to the front door of the carrier. Make sure you test the water bottle for a few days before you travel to make sure it doesn't drip or leak. There won't be a lot of room in the carrier, so just have a small bowl for pellets that you can take in and out when it is pellet time.

What I have found works well for traveling is packing washed veggies in resealable bags with a little water. If you can, put these in a small cooler. The veggies stay fresh and crisp, and the water keeps them moist. Offer veggies throughout the entire trip. I have found that traveling rabbits tend to eat veggies more than anything else. Don't forget to pack extra pellets and hay.

Always handle the carrier with care. Every time you pick it up or move it, your bun will be wondering what is going on and might feel scared and unsafe. So even if people are rushing you, let them know you need to take your time as you have very precious cargo in your care.

As far as the weather change, just be sure to keep your rabbit indoors where it is safe. Outside not only can the weather be a problem but so can predators and even some people. The winters are cold in Minnesota, but your rabbit will adjust — he does have a fur coat on after all. Keep the heat on in your house so you are comfortable. Be sure not to let your rabbit's area get too hot. Rabbits do not do well at all with heat. Make sure that your rabbit has a nice cozy bed to sleep in at night, and that he is not in any drafts.

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