

A Dream Vacation With Your Pet Ferret

Recent industry changes and careful planning can help you enjoy a dream vacation with your pet ferret.

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Yes, your pet can have fun on vacation with you if you plan ahead.

Summertime brings warm weather, time spent outdoors and maybe even a vacation or two. Until fairly recently, going on vacation meant making arrangements to leave ferrets and other pets behind. As society continues to recognize animals as more than just pets, it's easier for our pet companions to participate in all family activities, including vacations.

"Because of the increasing trend in humanizing our pets, a significant number of organizations are doing whatever they can to make the traveling experience easier," said Bob Vetere, president of the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

The destinations accepting pets — from cabins in the woods to luxury resorts — have increased by leaps and bounds, causing the travel industry to take notice and accommodate today's travelers, whether on two legs or four.

In a New York Times article, published March 30, 2007, Derek Walsh, president of BringYourPet.com, stated, "There's easily been a 300 percent increase in the number of lodgings accepting pets in the last three years. The trend is definitely shifting toward higher-end hotels. In order to truly compete, they are going above and beyond with amenities, trying to one-up the competitor."

Amenities now available to pets were once only a dream for humans. Luxury resorts offer pets everything from room service to massages. "The hotel industry has noticed trends in response to an increase in pet travel. Particularly among luxury travelers, hotels have customized specialized programs for pets," said Joseph A. McInerney, CHA, president/CEO of the American Hotel and Lodging Association.

For those who don't find a luxury treatment for ferrets appealing, the good news is this shift is opening pet-friendly doors all across the board.

In 2006, the American Hotel and Lodging Association surveyed 42,407 hotels and received a response rate of 21 percent. The results indicated that hotels allowing pets to stay included the following by price segment: 40 percent of luxury hotels, 45 percent upscale, 57 percent mid-price, 65 percent economy and 77 percent budget. The results of the latest survey (2008) are expected late this summer.

Getting There

The lodging end of the travel industry isn't the only sector accommodating pet owners. Safely transporting pets has become easier than ever in the past decade. Pets traveling by vehicle have a number of devices to keep them and their owners safe.

"While pet safety during travel has become even more important — as evidenced by the proposed California legislation banning lapdogs while driving — the idea of human safety is also a factor," Vetere said. "It is bad enough to have a 50-pound flying object in your car upon impact in an accident, but it is even scarier if that object hits you or a family member in the head during the accident."

For this reason, many innovative carriers and restraint systems continue to hit the marketplace. "Besides the typical carriers, there are now seatbelts that can be used by larger pets," Vetere said. He also says that a series of items exist that block any access to the forward part of a vehicle.

While many of the advances involve larger animals such as dogs and cats, ferrets aren't being overlooked. According to Vetere, a number of carriers are appropriate for transporting ferrets, rabbits, gerbils and other small animals. "Honda is currently testing a new option for their cars where the glove compartment is replaced by a pet carrier for smaller dogs

and animals," he added.

Flying The Pet-Friendly Skies

Airlines have become very pet-friendly in recent decades. For an extra fee, many airlines now allow owners to bring small pets on board domestic flights.

Delta allows ferrets in the cabin, provided the animal is at least 8 weeks old. Continental permits small pets as long as they are carried in an approved in-cabin kennel that fits underneath the seat and the animal is able to move comfortably in the kennel.

Numerous airlines allow pets in the cabin. Different rules may apply, check with your airline or check out some of the numerous websites devoted to pet travel.

"At least one major airline is now offering frequent flyer miles for traveling pets," Vetere said.

Ferrets may also be shipped as cargo. Because of the Animal Welfare Act, strict standards have been put in place to ensure animal safety when using this method. Whether traveling in the cabin or on-board as cargo, pets will not be allowed to travel without the proper documentation.

Owners can obtain the specific documentation needed by researching airline and country requirements.

If this sounds daunting, consider an animal shipper. Members of the Independent Pet and Animal Transportation Association International have transported animals to their destinations since 1979.

Gay O'Brien, president of IPATA, said, "Using an animal shipper gives the customer an advantage in making sure all the proper documentation is in place." She cites examples of customers arriving at an airport with incorrect documentation or missing key documentation such as a USDA stamp if going overseas. This can cause delays or a canceled trip. "The pet shipper will know all the documentation. On a lot of international flights, companies have only let animal shippers do the shipment because of that reason," she said.

Shippers have contacts throughout the business, allowing care of animals in unforeseen circumstances. "If an animal is going from point to point and a plane diverts, an animal shipper can get that animal taken care of at another point ... kenneled, put back on airplane and back on its way," she said.

This situation, easily handled by a shipper, may be difficult for owners to do on their own. "If it's someone off the street doing it, they may get panicked and don't know what to do. Shippers have different points of direction they can go and know the documentation that has to accompany pets on every shipment. That's why it's preferable to use a pet shipper because we are registered in our own industry and experienced with services within."

Sites To Explore

www.pettravel.com
www.travelpets.com
www.tripswithpets.com
www.bringyourpet.com
www.petswelcome.com
www.pets-allowed-hotels.com

State & International Travel

Ferrets and animals cannot come and go between countries without meeting certain requirements, and these vary depending on the destination.

"Japan is very difficult to get into," O'Brien said. "If owners do all of the blood work and everything here and wait six months, they can get into Japan without quarantine, but it is required to wait six months." If owners don't know this before traveling, they could either not be allowed to bring their pet, or if they do get there, their pet is going to end up in Japan's quarantine for 180 days.

Traveling between the states is not as strict, but owners need to be aware of state restrictions. "Within the U.S., it's usually no problem," O'Brien said. "However, with ferrets, in some states they are banned. If you are coming [flying] in and out of California, you cannot check a ferret unless it is a research from university to university."



Other methods of travel also vary between countries. Trains running in the United States do not allow pets, with the exception of service animals, to travel onboard. However, many trains in Europe will.

For more specific information on location and traveling by car, train, plane, yacht, ship and public transportation, PetTravel.com has a comprehensive list.

Wherever the family may be going, plan ahead. By obtaining proper documentation, a safe mode of travel and a pet-friendly destination, everyone will enjoy a good vacation.