

What you need to know about traveling with dogs on a plane, including where they can sit and how much it costs

(Courtesy of Caroline Tanner, The Points Guy)

Traveling these days can be complicated at best between navigating [pandemic protocols](#) and increased [flight delays and cancellations](#) for human passengers. Adding a dog to the mix has the potential to add frustrations to an already stressful situation.

Whether you [travel with your four-legged friend](#) frequently or are considering doing so for the first time, here's everything you need to know.

As you might suspect, not all dogs are allowed on planes, and those that are allowed are restricted to certain spots on a plane. Think of it like pet classes, if you will.

The right to fly primarily depends on a dog's weight, breed and the airline you intend to fly.

Where in the plane can your dog sit?

"Your pet can travel in three ways: as hand luggage in the cabin with you, as excess luggage in the cargo hold of the aircraft or as cargo in the hold of the aircraft," according to [Zoo Logistics](#), a company based in the Netherlands that helps people coordinate travel with pets. "The options for your pet depend on a number of factors, such as the breed and size of your pet, the airline company, the type of aircraft, the destination and whether you will travel on the same flight as your pet."

Most airlines will allow pets to fly in the cabin as luggage or in the hold as excess luggage so long as you'll be flying on the same flight and they meet size and weight restrictions. However, some do require all pets to fly as cargo. You'll want to double-check the airline's policies on traveling with pets before you book your tickets.

If your pet is flying with you as luggage, you'll either be able to keep them in the cabin with you or they will be flown as excess luggage in the hold of the aircraft. Aircraft holds are ventilated and heated to help keep pets comfortable, according to Zoo Logistics. If your pet cannot accompany you (or if they are flying solo), they'll be treated as cargo. Flying with your pets as cargo is doable, but certainly not recommended by most pet owners.

Before you decide to bring your dog on board, make sure to "find a good pet carrier that's sturdy and small enough for all the airlines you fly," says TPG senior writer [Katie Genter](#).

Not only does it need to be the right size, but make sure it's also strong enough to weather flights, especially if your pup tends to chew through carriers.

"I've flown with Murray a handful of times and it's always been fairly easy, aside from the one time he tore his carrier case — we had to jury-rig it shut with a shoestring," TPG senior aviation business reporter David Slotnick recalled of his 4-year-old miniature goldendoodle. "He weighs 18 pounds, so we always fly pet-in-cabin following all of the airline's procedures, and we typically fly Delta."

Which dog breeds can fly?

Some dogs (and cats) are prohibited from flying altogether, including [snub-nosed breeds](#), brachycephalic breeds of dogs that include the French bulldog and Boston terrier and are prone to heavy breathing. These dogs are banned on certain airlines, including United and Delta, and restricted on others, including [Lufthansa](#), [Swiss Airlines](#) and [KLM](#).

To ensure your dog is eligible to fly with a commercial airline, double-check an airline's pet-in-cabin policy, says pet transport service [Pets2Fly](#), which also notes that "flying in-cabin is most likely the safest way to travel" for some breeds.

American Airlines, for example, [allows cats and dogs to be carried on](#) if they meet specific size, age and destination requirements, on most flights not exceeding 12 hours to and from select locations. The airline also charges \$125 as an extra carry-on pet fee, and the animal must stay in the kennel underneath the seat in front of you throughout the flight.

"If your pet is too large to fly in the cabin, it must travel with American Airlines Cargo," says AA, for which fees vary. Note that many people do not recommend flying your pet in cargo if you can avoid it, particularly during the summer months. Thanks to these breed restrictions, [TPG senior writer Vikkie Walker](#) usually takes [Amtrak](#) when traveling with her 4-year-old pug, [Migo Jameson Walker](#).

"Migo can't fly on some airlines, so we take Amtrak. He's a nervous traveler so I have to drug him, feed him peanut butter and have him in my sight on the train," Walker told me. "When we took Amtrak on Thanksgiving, he tried to make a run for it on the train. Generally, I do not enjoy traveling with him and will leave him with a sitter anytime I can."

Weight limits for flying with dogs

Some airlines have weight limits on pets traveling in the cabin, usually capped at 20 pounds.

"Traveling with my 24-pound dog Chilly Willy is super stressful," says TPG senior editor Clint Henderson. "I'm always worried Chilly won't be allowed to board, but fortunately, [Delta](#) and [Alaska](#) don't have official weight limits."

If you do have a larger dog, it may be harder to find an airline that will let you keep your dog in the cabin with you. But there are some options available.

Last week, [TPG senior aviation reporter Ethan Klapper](#) and his girlfriend flew with their Labrador rescue for the first time on [JSX](#), a semiprivate air carrier.

"For a forthcoming TPG review, my girlfriend and I took Patty from [Houston Hobby](#) (HOU) to Dallas Love Field (DAL). I was nervous about this flight because Patty can be a bit anxious — she hates going in the elevator and the noise from garbage trucks. But JSX has a great pet policy and accepts out-of-crate medium- and large-size dogs for the cost of a second seat — with just a very simple form to fill out. Every staffer we encountered, from the staff at Hobby to the flight attendant and the staff at Dallas Love, were wonderful with dogs and really into her. She even got a JSX pet bandana! While JSX has a somewhat limited (but growing) network, I highly recommend using them if you have a larger dog."

Keep an eye out for Klapper's full review of JSX coming soon.

Extra paperwork and fees

“The thing most people may not realize is that when you travel with your pet, some airlines require you to check in at the airport so they can collect your pet travel fee and check your paperwork,” said [TPG director of content Andrea Rotondo](#). “So you need to leave plenty of time to do that.”

[American](#), [Delta](#) and [Alaska](#) each state on their website that you’ll need to check in before boarding your flight to pay your pet fees, which range from \$100-\$125.

“The one hassle is that you can’t check in online, you need to go to a counter to pay the pet-in-cabin fee and get a tag for the carrier,” says Slotnick. “I will say it’s frustrating that we need to pay the fee since the pet is part of your regular checked bag allowance.”

Additionally, you’ll need to show [proper identification for your pet](#).

Increased scrutiny

If you’ve traveled with a pet recently, you may have experienced increased scrutiny of paid-for pets in carriers.

“Airlines have definitely cracked down on dogs being too big for carry-on since the pandemic,” says Mark Lindsay, a senior software engineer at TPG. “My wife was very nearly refused boarding (once on Delta, once on United) for transcontinental flights last fall. The dog was allowed to travel after a good amount of pleading, but we’re not taking the risk ever again!”

Bottom line

Only you can decide whether traveling with your pet is worth it. There are quite a few additional hoops you must jump through to ensure they can successfully board the plane.

If you’re nervous about traveling with your pup, Slotnick encourages talking to your vet.

“There are options for anti-anxiety medication or even just a dose of children’s Benadryl, that can help make the experience easier for your pup,” he said. “Another thing that makes the travel experience better for Murray — the in-cabin snacks. We’re always sure to share our Cheez-Its and pretzels by popping a couple into the carrier.”