



Road Trips and Vacations with Pets

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As the days get longer, class rooms get more anxious, dreams of family vacations are just around the corner. It is easy to pack up the kids, the car or RV and head off for the hills but there are some very important things to consider for your pets. Here are a few tips to keep the furry kids in your family happy on that next camping adventure or road trip.

Before setting off on any adventure it is important to make sure that your immunizations are current. This applies for dogs and cats as well. It is important to have strong defenses to disease exposure. Vaccines are one of many defenses in that arsenal. A trip to the veterinarian is often needed before any travel to assure your pet is fit for travel. Obtaining a health certificate allows pets to be transported across state lines and while not often checked, it is a good idea to make sure there are no undetected medical issues before leaving the comforts of home. Additionally your veterinarian can give the proper recommendations as to parasite control especially if you are leaving our high desert area. We see exposure to fleas, ticks and heartworm increase dramatically when animals travel. Then along comes Lyme's disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, salmon poisoning, giardiasis and a whole host of other conditions. Often premedicating with topical spot treatments, deworming on return and preventative medication can thwart hitchhikers from returning home with pets.

Remember that proper identification is imperative. Microchipping is a permanent ID solution which insures reuniting a lost pet with its family. Also a sturdy collar with tags including a mobile phone number and home address should be worn by your pets.

Travel for most pets can be stressful as you are putting them in new and unique situations. Plan in advance and make sure that hotels and campgrounds allow pets before you arrive. Call ahead and confirm the details. In National Parks animals are often restricted to specific areas like roadways and not permitted on trails or the back country. Leash your pet where necessary and always be courteous as they cannot pick up their own poop. Leave no trace is always the best mantra. No one likes noisy or anxious dogs in a camp. If your pet is not well socialized it is best to board him in a kennel or leave safely at home.

Seatbelts do save lives and it applies all family members. You would not take children without a child seat, so do not let your other kids free in the back of a truck while driving down the highway. Pets love to stick their head out of windows but dirt, debris and bugs can cause serious injuries to eyes, ears or nose. Also remember those airbag dangers and use proper restraint devices or harnesses at all times. Many pets can get car sick. Acclimatizing them with short car rides often helps but sometimes motion sickness medication is needed.

Carry a first aid kit and know the fitness level of your companion. Be sure your extreme adventure vacation does not turn into a nightmare of physical collapse or heat stroke for your pet. On extended trips, carry a copy of medical records and even extra medication. Hydration is so important for all of the family. Bring water from home if possible. Dogs need about one ounce of water per pound of body weight per day translating for your 60 pound Labrador Retriever into a half a gallon of water daily. Significantly more is needed when getting overheated as they cool off by panting thereby needing more water. Also proper nutrition must be considered. Don't succumb to Scruffy's urge for the triple cheese burger for this will only end badly. Bring enough of your pets own food for the trip and then some. Keep a regular feeding schedule and give the main meal when you reach your destination. Remember those car trips when dad just would not stop. Well have a little compassion on extended trips and stop frequently for your pets comfort at least every two hours for a little relief and exercise.

Before you fire up the engine to take off, remember it is not the destination, but the journey that is so important. A little forethought and preparation can turn your family vacation into a pleasant experience for everyone involved. Plan ahead and have a great summer.