



2026

RULES & RISKS OF PET TRAVEL



The US Family's Pre-Move Checklist

Prepared by

**Starwood
Pet Travel**



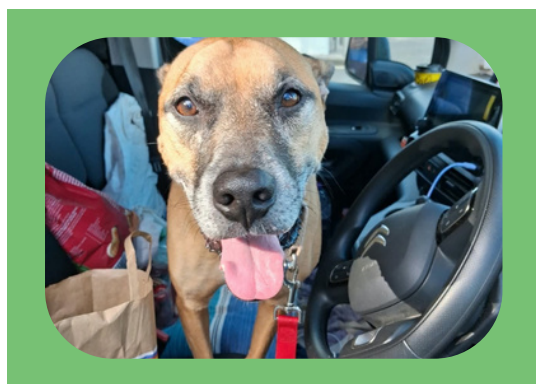
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THE SHORT ANSWER



Moving abroad with a pet means meeting three sets of rules at once: your destination country's import requirements, U.S. export paperwork endorsed by USDA APHIS, and your airline's own pet policy. The risks are what happens when one piece is late or wrong: a refused boarding, a quarantine stay, or a pet sent back to where it started at your expense.

Nearly every one of those risks is preventable with an early start, official sources, and a clear timeline. This guide walks first-time movers through the rules that change most often, the hidden costs of going it alone, and a checklist you can print and follow.

What's Inside

1. The Rules That Trip People Up
2. The Risks of Going It Alone
3. A Timeline You Can Actually Follow
4. If This Feels Overwhelming
5. Your Printable Pre-Move Checklist
6. Talk to a Pet Travel Specialist



1. The Rules That Trip People Up

New EU Health Certificates

What changed: new EU non-commercial pet health certificates took effect October 1, 2026, under EU 2026/131 and EU 2026/848. Forms already in process had to be endorsed by September 30, 2026. A new commercial certificate took effect October 17, 2026.

Do this:

Ask your vet which EU certificate version they are issuing.

Tight EU Certificate Windows

Non-commercial (you, or a designated person within 5 days of you on the same flight(s), with five or fewer pets): valid 30 days after your vet issues it, and USDA must endorse it within 10 days of EU arrival.

Commercial moves need a vet inspection within 48 hours of departure. This applies if you have more than 5 pets or no one is on the same plane as your pet.

Do this:

Count backward from arrival day to schedule the vet visit and USDA endorsement.

USDA-Accredited Vet Required

The rule: only a USDA-accredited vet can issue the export health certificate, and only after every destination requirement is met. Your vet submits it through APHIS's VEHCS system. There's no in-person drop-off, and only your vet can check endorsement status.

Do this:

Book an accredited vet as soon as you have a travel date in mind.

ISO Microchip Before Rabies

The rule: use an ISO 11784/11785 microchip, usually 15 digits, implanted before the rabies vaccine or the vaccine won't count. A non-ISO chip, like a 9-digit AVID chip, means traveling with a reader or adding a second chip. The EU also sets a 21-day wait after a primary rabies vaccine.

Do this:

Ask your vet to scan the chip first at every visit.



2. THE RISKS OF GOING IT ALONE

- A microchip that can't be read on arrival
- A rabies vaccine given before the microchip
- A titer test drawn too late for the waiting period
- A crate that's too small, or a soft-sided, collapsible, or plastic-door model the airline rejects
- Heat or cold limits at any airport on the route
- A cargo booking that confirms only about 7 days out, after your certificate clock has started



Is DIY legal? Yes. No U.S. federal rule requires a professional shipper, but you carry the full cost of any error, including a return flight if your pet is denied entry.



Unpredictable costs: the USDA endorsement fee alone runs \$101 to \$275 per certificate, before vet fees.

DIY vs. Professional Shipper

Vet visits and USDA endorsement: your accredited vet, either way.

Flights, crate fit, and airline acceptance: you in a DIY move, the shipper with a pro.

Customs and arrival: you, or the shipper and a destination partner.

Waiting periods and entry rules: the same for everyone. Nobody can shorten them.



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3. A TIMELINE YOU CAN ACTUALLY FOLLOW

- The day you know you're moving:
 - Book a USDA-accredited vet, a fitness-to-fly exam, and look up your destination on APHIS.
- 4 to 6+ months out:
 - Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Taiwan add waiting periods after blood tests.
- Weeks (or months) ahead:
 - Buy the travel kennel and start crate training.
- 90 to 120 days:
 - Military families request Patriot Express pet space.
- Final 30 days:
 - Certificate, endorsement, and a weather check.
 - Cargo often confirms only about 7 days out.



Rule of thumb: plan backward from your flight date. Each vaccine, test, and certificate unlocks the next, so one late appointment moves everything behind it.



Travel Day and Layovers

At drop-off, U.S. rules bar carriers from accepting your pet more than 4 hours before departure, and a signed food and water note goes on the crate. In transit, pets get water every 12 hours, food every 24, and holding areas stay between 45°F and 85°F. Choose the fewest aircraft changes, check the layover city's weather, and avoid connections that force customs clearance.



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4. IF THIS FEELS OVERWHELMING

For military families:

- The PCS pet allowance covers one cat or dog: up to \$550 inside the continental U.S. and up to \$2,000 for overseas moves.
- Patriot Express allows two pets per family, booked through your TMO or ITO.
- Keep itemized receipts, plus a non-availability letter if you fly commercially.



Prefer to hear it out loud? Watch our on-demand live Q&A in the Rules & Risks of Pet Travel guide.

Feeling Anxious Is Normal

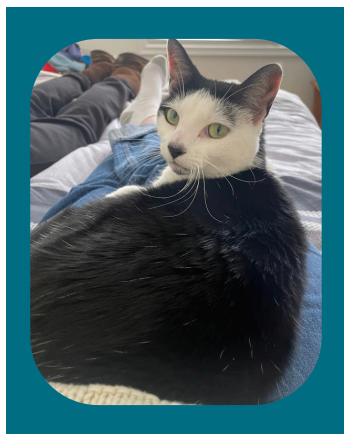
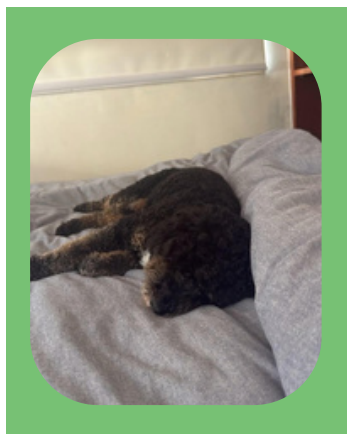
Overseas travel can cause stress to animals. What helps most is early of crate training in the real kennel: meals inside, short car rides, even airplane sounds. Skip sedation, since IATA discourages sedatives in the cabin or hold.





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YOUR PRE-MOVE CHECKLIST



- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Look up your destination on the USDA APHIS site | ☐ File a CDC Dog Import Form for any U.S. return |
| ☐ Measure your pet with the IATA crate formula | ☐ Check temperature limits at every airport |
| ☐ Confirm the exact kennel model for your airline (and pet's size) | ☐ Confirm you're using the correct health certificate |
| ☐ Find a USDA-accredited veterinarian | ☐ Get the health certificate issued and endorsed |
| ☐ Confirm an ISO 11784/11785 microchip | ☐ Label the kennel and attach the food and water note |
| ☐ Buy the real travel kennel early and crate train | ☐ Do NOT sedate your pet |
| ☐ Start any titer test and waiting period early | ☐ No solid food 6 hours before the flight |
| ☐ Schedule a fitness-to-fly vet exam | ☐ Pack original signed documents with your pet |



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"I DON'T THINK IT'S EVER TOO SOON TO START. I'VE NEVER HEARD OF SOMEONE PLANNING TOO FAR IN ADVANCE FOR AN INTERNATIONAL PET MOVE."

GEORGIANA STRAIT, MARKETING MANAGER, STARWOOD PET TRAVEL



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