Flying with Felines—Southwest Airlines Celebrates National Cat Day

As I deplaned from a recent Southwest Airlines flight, I thought about how easy it was to fly Southwest with a new kitten, and of the other many flights I have made in the last decade with my other cats. My hobby is traveling to cat shows hosted by clubs of the International Cat Association to compete with my Somalis and rescue kitties. I estimate that I have completed nearly 100 flights with my cats on Southwest.

Why I Travel on Southwest

I have always encountered friendly, helpful Southwest Employees throughout my travel journey, all the way from check-in to baggage claim. The cost to bring my feline friends is a substantial saving over other airlines. The Pet Fare each way per pet carrier is $95. Traveling with my carrier is easy, making it a seamless travel experience. Once I board, I place my pet carrier under the seat in front of me and relax, knowing my kittens are safe and comfortable. Check out the video above to learn more about why I travel on Southwest.

Tips for Traveling with Pets

Through my various flights, I have learned different ways to make traveling with pets easier for both my cats and myself. The most important piece of advice I have is to be prepared.

What kind of carrier should I use?

All pets (cats and dogs) must fly in a leak proof-, well-ventilated carrier. When traveling with pets, it is also important to make sure you have the correct size carrier. Southwest allows both soft-sided

and hard-sided pet carriers with the maximum dimensions of 18.5” long x 8.5” high x 13.5” wide. A great carrier feature to think about is one with a few pockets. This allows me to pack a few items for my cats in the carrier and makes it easy to access throughout my travel journey. It is important to remember that your cat or dog must be completely inside the pet carrier and be able to stand up and move around the carrier with ease. I like utilizing a soft-sided carrier with a little extra room on the top to allow the carrier to tuck nicely under the seat, while still giving my cat plenty of wiggle room.

Always check the carrier well for holes and tears, and check that the zippers work before traveling. If there is a double zipper, get something like a binder ring clip that can be placed through the base of each zipper pull to clip them together. This helps keep the zippers in place and keeps your furry friend safe in their carrier. If you are looking for a great pet carrier, you can purchase one for $58 (tax included) at any Southwest Airlines ticket counter or via the online Southwest merchandise store at SWAtheStore.com.

How do I make a reservation for my pet?

Since there can be no more than six scheduled pet carriers per scheduled flight, reservations must be made in advance by calling 1-800-I-FLY-SWA (1-800-435-9792). On the day of travel, Customers must bring their pet(s) to the airport in an approved pet carrier. Proceed to the airport ticket counter to check the pet(s) in and pay the Pet Fare before going to the departure gate.

What should I pack for my furry friend?

I like packing to be prepared, rather than under-packing. I like to line the carrier with an absorbent puppy pad or two to prevent moisture from seeping through. A towel can work, but if it becomes soiled, you may not want to travel with it. In addition, be sure to pack a few plastic bags, like those from a grocery store, as well as paper towels. I also like to pack a few gentle, preferably hypoallergenic and unscented, baby wipes for cleaning up any unexpected messes that may occur. When packing items, make sure that you are using TSA-approved items such as small liquid bottles of hand sanitizer.

I also like to travel with a small emergency pop-up crate (the kind that twists from a big box down to a small flat circle). You can check in the extra pet crate or collapsible cage and that does not count as one of the two free bags. This is great because I can take a bigger crate for my cats to be comfortable in their hotel room. Visit southwest.com to learn more about their Bags Fly Free® policy.

When it comes to kitty litter, I usually pack a folded small box and a clear sandwich bag of paper or pine for a makeshift litter box. If you decide to do this, make sure the improvised “kitty litter” is in a clear sandwich bag, as the density of clay litter will often cause TSA to search your carryon. Other helpful items to bring in your carryon are collapsible silicone bowls for food and water, as well as a few ounces of dry food.

What is the process for getting through TSA?

When passing through security, Customers will be asked to hold their cats (or dogs) and walk through the screening device while the carrier is x-rayed. Some items may need to be searched (as mentioned above), so I highly recommend packing items in clear sandwich bags to make the search more efficient for both parties. Visit the TSA’s website for more information on the TSA process and approved carryon items.

Can I travel internationally with my pet?

Pets are not allowed to travel in-cabin on international flights or any itinerary that includes an international flight. However, there are plenty of fun domestic locations to choose from.

Is there any reason my pet wouldn't be permitted onboard?

As long as your cats (or dogs) remain in their approved carriers, are harmless, not disruptive, odorless, accompanied by their owner, and require no attention during flight, they will be permitted onboard.

Frequent Southwest Flier

With just a little preparation and planning think you will see that Southwest Airlines makes it easy to travel with a favorite fur baby. Be sure to visit Southwest.com/pets and Southwest's Knowledge Base on Community for more information on traveling with your furry friend.