

Traveling With Your Cat

CatChannel expert Jeanne Adlon, professional cat sitter, discusses how to make your cat more comfortable in the car.

By Jeanne Adlon

Posted: Nov. 28, 2008, 3 a.m. EST

Q: What is the best way to travel by car with my cat for the holidays?

A: It is often the case that cats and cat carriers do not mix well and that is particularly true of Dennis, an orange-and-white kitty I have been cat-sitting for years. He is a wonderful cat and though I try not to play favorites, I cannot help but love him. However, he does not travel well. Even though his owners have experienced problems just taking Dennis to the vet, they once tried to include him on a weekend trip to Cape Cod — a five hour drive from New York City. After a solid half-hour of wailing in his carrier, Dennis got his way and was returned home.

Since most of us use the carrier to take our kitties to the vet, it is not surprising they associate it with a destination they would rather not visit. Before attempting to take your cat on a long car trip for the holidays, I suggest getting him used to the idea that a carrier can be a good place as well. Put his favorite treats or catnip in it and add something with your scent. I have even taken my carrier-shy kitties on a short car trip and then returned home, so they learn that the end result of a ride in the carrier can be good.

Once you are ready to travel with your cat, make sure she is safe and comfortable throughout the ride. Always keep her in the carrier when you are driving and secure it with a seat belt through the handle. Your carrier should be big enough for her to move around in, and some people actually have ones large enough to put a small litter pan inside. Sometimes I bring shredded newspaper on the trip for kitty bathroom breaks.

If your cat gets car sick, I suggest you remove all food by midnight before the journey and ask your vet if motion sickness medicine is right for her. Always have drinking water available and never leave your cat unattended except for a very short time — skip the inside meal in favor of take-out. If you need to get out briefly, please lock all the doors. You don't want someone disturbing your cat or worse, stealing them.

Jeanne Tip of the Week: If you have trouble getting your cat into a carrier to visit the vet, you may be able to find one that makes house calls. I have noticed that this service is becoming more common.