



Planning a Trip?

Tips from experienced travelers

by Pamela Price with Sonny and Vito Rosato

Taking a cross-country road trip between Palm Springs, California, and Washington, D.C., with Sonny and Vito, our travel-savvy Maltese brothers, was going to be a fun adventure. It was 2019, pre-COVID, and we had reserved rooms at pet-friendly hotels across the country. We were ready, and we were excited.

Our excitement quickly turned into frustration, however, as we realized we'd made one crucial mistake. We assumed we knew the meaning of that oft-used phrase, "pet friendly." Our dream trip started to become a nightmare when we discovered that "pet-friendly" service can mean very different things to the different hotels who claim to offer it. We learned the hard way that you have to make sure you know the rules of your pet-friendly hotel—*before* you arrive with your pet!

We thought we'd planned well and understood the pet policies of the hotel chains we'd chosen to stay in on our trip. But when we arrived at our various destinations, we found that many of the hotels were independently operated and did not have the same pet policies. It made for some unexpected, unpleasant complications at check-in time.

For example, we knew we'd be paying a hefty pet charge at one hotel; we figured this was to cover the cost of deep cleaning the room once any guest with a pet checked out. Imagine our surprise when both Sonny and Vito started itching uncontrollably shortly after we checked into our room. We were horrified to see they were infested with fleas, from toe to tail. Clearly, the room had not been deep cleaned after the last guest with a pet checked out. Our long-awaited tour of Mount Vernon, George Washington's gracious Virginia home, had to be canceled. What should have been a memorable, historic afternoon ended up with flea baths for Sonny and Vito and the prospect of having



Sonny and Vito enjoying their stay at the Rowan in Palm Springs, CA. Kimpton Hotels has a generous pet policy—they "invite you to bring your hairy, feathery or scaly family member with you for your stay — no matter their size, weight, or breed, all at no extra charge. If your pet fits through the door, we'll welcome them in."

PHOTO COURTESY PAM PRICE



Hotel Reservation Tips

Some questions to ask before you book your stay:

- What is the pet fee?
- Is the fee per pet, per day, or per stay?
- Is there a weight limit or a number of pets limit?
- Is there a breed or type of animal policy?
- Is there an incidental fee? If so, what does it cover?
- Is there an authorization hold? How much is it, what does it cover, and are you going to be charged and then credited back?
- How are the rooms cleaned between pet stays?
- Can a pet be left in the room alone? If so, does it need to be crated?
- Do they have pet sitters available?
- What's the barking policy?
- Is there a nearby relief area?

Getting the policies in writing is always a good idea, especially if you want to avoid any unexpected additional charges.

to relocate, this time to a flea-free suite.

In Lake Juliet, Tennessee, we were charged a \$150 pet fee at a well-known hotel chain for an 8-hour overnight stay—during which Sonny and Vito ended up sleeping in our SUV. We knew that for the rest of our trip, we were going to have to rethink our assumptions about the term “pet friendly.”

Dog owner Rocky Randall loves a good trek with her pups, but she warns, “Traveling with your pets can be a guessing game at best or, in some cases, a disaster.” Randall solved this issue by transforming her 35-foot-long RV into a mobile hotel for Hennessey, her frisky German Shepherd, and Marty, her mini, albeit amusingly bossy, Maltese. “Traveling in an RV resolves the issue of surprise pet charges at hotels, as well as concerns about unexpected barking at 3 a.m.,” she adds.

But what if you don't have an RV?

Every hotel has a pet policy, so it's best to call the hotel directly to ensure you well understand their current policy on extending their hospitality to your pets. Keep in mind that pet fees vary considerably. Some hotels have a flat fee per stay and/or per pet, plus an “authorization hold” on your credit card for possible additional fees relating to any damages. If your hotel uses the term “authorization hold,” confirm precisely how much the “hold” fee will be on your credit card and what you may potentially be charged for. And before you check out, be sure to scan



PHOTO COURTESY PAM PRICE

your room bill for any mysterious pet charges, just in case.

Driving or Flying?

Another travel consideration is how you plan to get there. Our 2019 adventure was a road trip, so the car was set up with everyone's comfort and safety in mind. Leashes were within easy reach, as were water, treats, and pick-up bags. Sonny and Vito are micro-chipped, but they also wore their collars with current tags and IDs throughout the trip. We planned the route well and mapped out the rest stops to give our boys a chance to stretch their legs and use the facilities every few hours. When we stopped at an attraction along the way, we took turns going inside so the dogs



PHOTO COURTESY DESERT JET

An alternative to flying commercially is chartering a private jet for your trip. Jim and Diana McCool frequently fly with their two dogs, Penny and Winston, and their cat, Henry.



Driving? Keep your pet safe in your car. See the car safety article on page 21 for tips.

would never have to be locked in the car alone.

But if you plan to fly to your destination, particularly on a commercial airline, review the airline regulations, as some airlines are rethinking their policies on pets in the cabin. For those allowing pets on board, fees will apply, as well as strict rules about the size and type of pet. Reservations for your pet have to be made well in advance, as current guidelines limit the number of pets allowed on flights. In the cabin, pets have to remain in an airline-approved carrier that fits under the seat in front of you. Only small dogs and cats can fly in the cabin (unless the animal is a service dog); large dogs are required to fly in a special cargo area of the airplane, and it appears that soon other pets may be relegated to the cargo area, too. Make sure you understand the airline's policy before booking your flight so you aren't blindsided when you arrive at the airport.

An alternative to flying commercially is chartering a private jet for your trip. And it's not as outlandish as it sounds. Grace Robbins, a local author and ardent traveler, urges pet owners to "consider the ease of traveling with your pet aboard a private jet." Robbins, who often travels with her dog Luke, considers private airlines, such as Desert Jet or Gold Aviation Services, "game-changers." Jim and Diana McCool frequently fly with their two dogs, Penny and Winston, and their cat, Henry. As the owner of Desert Jet, Jim explains the experience of flying privately: "The convenience and the ease of driving your car up to the plane, having your pets hop on, and flying comfortably to your destination is about as simple and as wonderful an experience as you can describe! The pets are clearly relaxed, and just as important, the owners are even more relaxed knowing their pets are onboard safely with them."

Another option available for pet owners who want to transport their pet safely from one location to another is a pet transport company service. With new regulations limiting ESA animals traveling on commercial flights, having your pet by your side when you arrive at your destination can be difficult. Pet transport services will drive or fly your pet for you, so your pet companions don't need to be left behind. Animal Transportation Worldwide (ATW), for example, offers three types of pet transport services. Their PetConomy service is comparable to a main cabin flights for pets. Pets are loaded in main cabin of the airplane, with Pet Assistance personnel on board to assist the pets with all their needs, just like when you fly. Flights are scheduled weekly. PetExpress is a ground transportation option that, includes door-to-door pick-up and delivery, as well as GPS tracking throughout the trip. PetFirst Class is their third service. It includes two Animal Transportation Specialists taking care of your family member during the door-to-door, non-stop travel.

On the Road Again

As for us, we look forward to traveling again. Perhaps it will be another road trip, or maybe we'll charter a jet and skip the overnight hotel stays between here and there. However we travel, we will definitely be taking Sonny and Vito along for the adventure.



Pam Price is the co-author of Fun with the Family in Southern California and The 100 Best Spas of The World. She has been the travel editor of The Malibu Times for thirty years and says she never misses an opportunity to take her two Malteses along on her travels.

