



BIANCA LUNDIEN KENNEDY

SUMMER VACAY OR STAY

Can My Cat Handle the Trip, or Should He Stay Home?

Summer is upon us — prime time for vacation getaways. But what about your kitty? Can he come along and enjoy the family vacation, too? Or would he be better off staying at home?

While your cat may love to be with you, traveling to strange new places can stress him out, possibly resulting in illness or behavior problems during and after the trip.

If you are traveling for a week or less, leaving him at home and having a pet sitter visit daily would be better for him. However, if you are going away for a few weeks or perhaps for the entire summer, then of course you would want to bring your beloved feline friend along. Here are some tips to keep in mind when considering cat travel.

Assess your cat's personality

Kittens are bold by nature, and

young adult cats are adaptable. So if you have a kitten or young cat, you may have a minimal amount of kitty stress to worry about. Adult cats that tend to be naturally playful and inquisitive may also handle the trip well.

However, if you have a cat who is the socially awkward type, jumpy about everything and shy around new people or who tends to act aggressive when under stress, then taking him along on a trip would likely be difficult.

Prepare for the journey

Before embarking on any long trip with your cat, get him used

to being in his carrier and to the movement of a car ride. Short car rides can help your cat feel less anxious about being inside the carrier, once he sees he will eventually be let out of it. Label the carrier with your name and cell number, in case your cat gets lost during your journey. This is especially important if you are flying and get separated at the security checkpoint or baggage area.

If your cat hasn't already been microchipped, now is the time to consider it. Also, get him used to wearing a collar and tag if he doesn't already do so. Like the carrier, the tag should include your name and cell number, making you immediately reachable should your kitty become separated from you during the trip or run off once you get to your destination. You might

also want to get your kitty used to wearing a harness and walking on a leash. Some cats really enjoy this, and it is a great way to let kitty stretch his legs during a long car trip.

Take your cat to his veterinarian for a checkup shortly before your vacation. At that time, obtain a set of his medical records to bring along on your travels.

During the trip

While you're driving or flying to your vacation destination, feed your cat only in the evenings, after you finish traveling for the day. This cuts down on potential motion sickness issues, and it shouldn't hurt him to miss breakfast for a day or two. See that your cat drinks water and stays hydrated. Adding some herbal calming essences to his water may help him stay relaxed. Use of a pheromone spray or plug-in while at your evening resting place and at your final destination may also help keep kitty calm.

While traveling, keep the cat carrier closed and secure at all times. If you're driving and need to open the carrier to snap on a leash, clean up a mess, or give kitty some reassurance, do so with all the car doors shut and locked and all the windows rolled up to prevent an accidental cat escape.

If you are flying, use an airline-approved carrier, and confirm with your airline ahead of time that it allows pets to travel aboard the plane stowed under your seat. Avoid putting your cat in the luggage area under the plane if at all possible.

At your destination

Hurrah! You have finally arrived at your vacation spot, and the hardest part is over. It's time to get your cat acquainted with his new "home away from home," so he can begin to enjoy his vacation.

Start by putting his carrier in a small room, such as a bathroom, to get him used to the new sights and smells slowly without feeling overwhelmed. Check for potential escape hazards, such as loose screens and open windows or doors. Encourage kitty to come out of the carrier by speaking calmly and offering some of his most favorite goodies. Let him explore at his own pace.

If you were able to pack some of your cat's own things, such as his cat bed, toys, and cat dishes, this can help him acclimate to his new surroundings quicker. Things from home already smell like him, providing him with a sense of security. Offer him the same brand of cat food you feed him at home, and if your cat has a sensitive tummy, consider giving him bottled water or using a filtered water pitcher.

It won't take long before your kitty is blissfully snoozing in your lap, happy to be sharing this special time with you. Cats like to be wherever you are. As long as you're together, that's enough to make your cat purr with joy.



Have a burning behavior question that you'd like answered in this column? Send it to Rita at questions@thecatanalyst.com (subject: New Cattitude Question).



Rita Reimers' cat behavior counseling sessions have helped many kitties remain happy in their forever homes. Visit her website, thecatanalyst.com, to learn more about her services and to read her cat behavior blog. Rita is also owner/CEO of Just For Cats Pet Sitting; justforcatspetsitting.com. Connect with Rita on Facebook at *The Cat Analyst*, and on Twitter at *@thecatanalyst*.



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