



“Over the river and through the woods, to Grandmother’s house we go...”

Holidays and travel go hand in hand. This might be a good time to review some travel tips that may make the trip a little safer for your TMs, a little easier on you, and a lot less stressful for all. I’m going to refer to TMs in the plural, because it has been so long since we’ve only had one, that I honestly can’t imagine it anymore. Here are my Top Ten Travel Tips for TMs:

- 1) **Before you go, have your TMs *micro-chipped* if they aren’t already.** If for some reason you and your dogs become separated, it may help to track them down, and you’ll be happy you did it. More traditional forms of ID, such as collars with tags, have not proved reliable for our TMs. A good leather collar chews as well as a bully stick. GPS trackers are also now available, such as Tagg GPS (<http://www.pettracker.com/>) and Petronix RomEO (<http://www.pettronix.com/>), but require that elusive collar.
- 2) **We always try to schedule our *annual vet exams* in late November or December.** It makes for a crazy expensive holiday season to add vet bills to the mix, but it’s a good idea to have your pet checked before travel, and depending on where you’re going, it may be a good idea to check if additional vaccines are necessary. Having lived north to south, east to west, as well as in between, we have come to realize that a vaccine that might not be recommended in one region of the country can be essential in another, and of course international destinations have their own requirements for pets. If you are planning a plane flight, you’re going to need a health certificate for the airlines anyway, so you may as well get it all done with one trip to the vet. Most airlines require the health certificate to be issued within 10 days of travel, and if vaccines are required, make your appointment 7-9 days ahead to allow for recovery time. Also check to see what parasites may be prevalent where you’re headed: If your TMs are not on heartworm preventative and you’re headed to some place warm where they might be exposed, get them started on medication before you go.
- 3) **Whether you are traveling by plane, train, or automobile, make sure your dogs are *securely contained*.** Commercial carriers require pets to be crated, but what about in the family car? Yes, they should be secured there as well, to decrease the risk of injury, escape, or even death in case of an accident. We installed a wooden platform and bolted kennels to it in our van. For something less permanent, just in case you may actually need to use your car, van, or truck for something other than transporting dogs, kennels can be strapped in place. There are a number of other products available that might also work, but we’ve had less success with these with our TMs. A pet safety harness that buckles the dog in like a seat belt may work, if your TMs are past the chewing stage. We have lost more than one back seat belt to a bored TM, so this would not be our choice, but you know your dog. Barriers that confine the dog to the back of a van or SUV are also available, but in case of an accident, they offer no real safety. Quilted seat protectors are also nice to protect your seats, but they don’t protect your dog.
- 4) **Please do not sedate your TMs prior to travel!** There is no way to predict how a dog will react to any medication, and many owners have reported that their TMs are hyper-sensitive to tranquilizers. If your dog has an adverse reaction while alone in the cargo hold of an airline, no one is going to know until the plane lands, and it quite literally may be too late. There are herbal remedies that can help to calm anxious pets if you feel it is absolutely necessary for your dog’s safety. We have had good luck with Bach’s Rescue Remedy, but there are many to choose from, such as Quiet Moments and Composure.

Many of the same herbs considered calming for humans can also be used for dogs, including chamomile, lemon balm, passion flower, and valerian. If you are unfamiliar with how to use herbs for your TM, consult a homeopathic vet. Even though these are “natural” remedies, don’t give them for the first time just before a trip. Administer at home a few times prior to travel so you can monitor your dog’s reaction. In addition, TM owners have reported success in stressful situations with the Thundershirt and DAP (dog appeasing pheromones).

- 5) **Be sure you understand hotel and airline pet policies.** Many hotels that are “pet-friendly” only welcome one pet per room that is under 25 lbs, or have similar restrictions. Even if you ply the manager with some good spiked eggnog and convince him that he’s seeing double, he’ll never believe those 2 TMs he’s seeing are under 25 lbs. Call the hotel directly; pet policies posted online are not always up to date or accurate. We love Drury Inns; they consistently welcome dogs of all shapes and sizes. As far as airlines, every airline is different. Pet policies are easy to find on the individual airline websites. What you might not realize, however, is that if you change carriers during the course of a trip, you are subject to the new carrier’s policies and restrictions. While the airline you start with may accept TMs, when you change planes, the new carrier may have a policy that forbids mastiffs of any kind, and you may find your TMs denied boarding. Sure, the ticket agent should catch this when you make your dogs’ reservations, but we’ve run into a situation where the agent overlooked the fact that the model of plane we were booked on did not allow pets in the cargo hold at all. Fortunately, we called to confirm a couple of days ahead, just to be sure, and it was caught at that time and we were re-booked. Check, check, and double check all policies!
- 6) **This is not the time to be experimenting with something new, whether medication or food.** Changing foods can cause digestive upset. Take your TMs usual food with you, and take more than you think you’ll need in case your trip gets unexpectedly extended due to road conditions, illness, or some other unforeseen delay, or know where you can buy your brand at your destination. You can pack dry in a case or frozen in a cooler. If your TMs tend to have digestive upsets when traveling, ginger root may be helpful. Ginger helps to settle the stomach. We have also found probiotics to be helpful, such as Dogzymes Digestive Enhancer. Start your probiotics several days ahead of travel. While most people might think to bring food, not everyone thinks to bring water from home, yet it’s a good idea. Even public water systems vary from town to town, and well water may not be treated at all. Municipal water systems are only required to have “acceptable” levels of bacteria, not be sterile. We’ve all laughed at stories of “Montezuma’s revenge”, but it’s no joking matter, and your dog is as susceptible as you. Bring a couple of gallons of water from home, and gradually dilute with water from the new source.
- 7) **Keep an eye on what your TMs are eating other than their food.** Well meaning family members may try to sneak your dog a treat that could be potentially harmful—such as chocolate, macadamia nuts, raisins, bones, etc. Educate everyone your TMs will be spending time with! Many household plants can also be toxic. When staying with family or friends, scope out the house for plants that may need to be moved out of your dogs’ reach. The lovely poinsettia plants that are so popular around Christmas time come immediately to mind. The ASPCA offers a comprehensive list of toxic plants on their website: http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxicplants?field_toxicity_value%5B%5D=01&=Apply. If your dog digests something that is toxic, or if you have any doubts as to whether the substance is toxic, you can call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, (<http://www.asPCapro.org/poison>) or the Pet Poison Helpline (<http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/>) for information and advice. These services may charge a fee, so be prepared and have your credit card handy to avoid critical time delays. Carrying Syrup of Ipecac and

activated charcoal in your dog case may save time, and ultimately may save a life, but make sure you know when and how to use them appropriately!

- 8) **Going hand in hand with ingestion of poisons, is ingestion of foreign objects.** Your TMs may be in unfamiliar territory and the home you are visiting may not be “doggy-proof”. Toys, socks, gloves, belts and buckles, and other items may prove irresistible to TMs. They may also prove fatal if they cause an intestinal tear or blockage. Think a TM would never swallow a sock whole? Think again.
- 9) **Provide a place of peace and rest for your TMs to retreat.** New experiences are an important part of socialization, but don’t let them get overwhelmed. TMs’ natural guardian instincts are to protect their property. When away from home, their people can become their “property”. Bring a favorite toy, blanket, throw, or other item. If things start to get hectic with lots of people coming and going, talking and laughing, remove your TMs from the chaos. A slap on the back from an old friend might look like an attack to a displaced and confused TM.
- 10) **Scout out parks and recreation areas along your route and at your destination ahead of time.**
When taking car trips with our TMs, we have found it helpful to plan potty stops and overnight stays to coincide with state and local parks or national recreation areas rather than leaving it to chance to find an appropriate place for the dogs. Check town/county websites for off-leash dog parks and try to utilize them during off hours. Most people exercise their dogs early in the morning or in the evening when they get home from work, so in the middle of the day, you may have a dog park all to yourself. If you’re staying with friends or relatives, ask ahead of time whether their yard is securely fenced and plan accordingly.

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