

# Traveling With Ferrets

By Meredith Harper



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Traveling with your pet ferrets can be an interesting experience—you're talking to an expert. My job as a software trainer is highly travel-intensive—I travel all over the Northeast, and am usually on the road every week. Most often, I drive wherever I can. My 2 pet ferrets have been to 11 states besides our home state of Massachusetts, and probably have about 100,000 miles on them over the last 3 years. That's more than most people!

I love having my babies with me wherever I go. There's nothing nicer than coming back to a warm nose and kisses when you're away from home in a strange town. It's a huge part of the reason I haven't gone crazy yet! But as much as I love having them with me, there is a *lot* of work and responsibility involved in traveling with them.

## PACKING

First, I have to pack. As much as I travel, I have two of each of the toiletry items I use for myself—and the same goes for them. They have a duffel bag that is perpetually packed with vaccine records, harnesses, treats, an airtight container of kibble, toys, extra hammocks, bottled water and Gatorade, FerretLax, medications and syringes, nail clippers, Q-tips, a brush, newspapers (easier than packing litter boxes and litter), and an extra water bottle and food dish. I also keep a small travel cage in the trunk of my car, in case I need to separate them if one is injured or ill. This means everywhere I go, I have my suitcase and briefcase, and their cage and their suitcase. Two trips from the house to the car, two trips from the car to the hotel room, and the same coming home.

I have to be prepared for every emergency. I found out just how important this was one night a few months ago. I always have Pepto-Bismol handy in case of a stomach problem. About midnight one night in a hotel room, Sneakers (my male ferret) was acting a little funny. He hid in the closet and I heard him yacking. So I opened the door, and sure enough, he was throwing up. A *lot*. So I went for my handy-dandy bottle of Pepto-Bismol. *It wasn't there.* Silly me, I had run out at home and borrowed that bottle and not replaced it. So here it was, midnight, and I was getting redressed and trying to find someplace still open to buy Pepto-Bismol. My point? You can never be too prepared or pack too much stuff.

## RESEARCH

Second, there is a good amount of research involved before a trip. You should always make sure your ferrets are *legal* where you are traveling. Even though most states allow ferrets, some towns/cities ban them—so you could be in a ferret-safe state, but a non-ferret-friendly city or town. Also, you should have the name and number of a local ferret-knowledgeable vet in case of emergencies. Many ferrets get ill or injured while traveling. I also have a printed copy of the AFA's shelter list with me at all times. If you run into a problem, shelters are great resources.

If you are planning to stay in a hotel, check on their pet policy. If you book over the Internet, call and ask someone in person. I have often found the pet policy information on hotel Web sites to be incomplete or incorrect. Some hotels allow pets but charge a fee. The fee can be flat rate,

per night, or a refundable or non-refundable deposit. My first trip with the ferrets in tow, I reserved at a Marriott Residence Inn. They listed the pet policy as small pets allowed, \$10 per pet, per night. I booked a room over the Internet as I usually do. But when I arrived, they required a \$150 *nonrefundable* pet deposit. The deposit is a set rate no matter how long you are there—I was only there for two nights.

## CAR TRAVEL

Traveling in cars can be a trip (sorry, I had to!). Your ferret(s) should *always* be caged in the car. *No exceptions or excuses.* There is absolutely no reason not to do this. You are putting yourself and your ferret(s) in danger if you let them run loose. They should be in a comfortable travel cage, buckled in securely (you never know when some jerk will cut you off and you'll have to slam the brakes—I've forgotten to buckle once or twice and had the cage go flying and food everywhere!—not to mention very shaken-up ferrets). A tiny airline pet carrier is not big enough for comfortable car travel. If they are going to be in a travel cage, they need all the amenities of home. I recommend a medium-sized pet kennel. I also recommend the kind which opens from the top and the front. In the cage, they should have a litter box or newspapers, food and water, and a hammock. If it's winter, make sure it's a cozy hammock or give them a small blanket. Be aware that,

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whatever bottle you choose, all water bottles will drip. For this reason, I fasten mine to the door, and place a clip-on dish on the door underneath it to catch any drips. I don't put any water in the dish, because it will get some from the drippings.

Also, please drive carefully. Your little ones in the car can't defend themselves or tell you to slow down. Whenever I get a little too eager to get somewhere and find myself driving a little too fast, I think how devastated I would be if I did something that resulted in an accident and my babies were hurt. Also, make sure emergency numbers are easily accessible in case of an accident, including their regular vet and a friend or relative who can take the ferrets if you are incapacitated.

### AIRPLANE TRAVEL

I have only traveled with my ferrets on the airplane once. I planned very far ahead and very meticulously, so it wasn't too bad. Before making travel arrangements, check with the airline on the following points. Do they allow animals in the cabin? If so, how many carriers and/or how many pets? Can you have more than one pet per carrier? What is the size

limit for the carrier? What are the associated fees? Do they require any documentation, such as vaccine records or health certificates? Must the pet have a reservation (usually they do, since they only allow so many pets or carriers per flight)?

This is what I found to be the case when I traveled in August 2003, though you should be sure and verify all information prior to making your own arrangements. I cannot guarantee the continued accuracy of this information. Delta is the only U.S. airline that allows ferrets to travel in the cabin. They allow two carriers in coach on each domestic flight, one carrier if it's one of the really little planes.

You can have multiple animals in a carrier. The size limit is 12 x 17 x 8 inches, which is *very* small. My normal travel cage is a little bigger than that, so I had to invest in a smaller one. There are at least two different companies that make carriers to these exact specifications (see the sidebar for more info). Be sure and check the measurements before you purchase the cage. Some cages are listed as "airline approved," but that means for cargo, not in the cabin. If you take a chance and try and fit a bigger carrier on the plane and it can't fit under the seat in front of you, you will be forced to check the ferrets. Delta charged me \$75 each way to bring the ferrets on the cabin, payable at the time of flight. That \$75 covers you all the way to your final destination, even if you have one or more layovers.

Once I had the answers to all these questions, I called well in advance of my anticipated travel dates to make my reservation. Delta did require me to reserve a spot for my ferrets to insure that they would be able to travel in the cabin. In fact, I was surprised to find that, five months before my flight, a lot of flights al-

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ready had animals booked on them. I tried to get flights with fairly short layovers, so that the overall travel time would be as short as possible. Also, if possible, try not to get one of the last flights of the evening. If your flight is delayed or canceled, you might not be able to get another flight out, and may have a hard time finding ferret-friendly lodging at the last minute.

I packed my carry-on bag with the ferrets in mind. I used a backpack, even though I prefer a roll-aboard, so I would have my hands free. I brought plenty of extra food and bottled water, in case we had a delay and I couldn't access my suitcase. I also packed lots of extra newspapers. One of the most important things I brought with me was Benadryl. Check with your vet for the proper dosing and the OK to give Benadryl, but I found it to be very helpful on my flight. I gave them the vet-approved dose about an hour prior to our first flight, and another dose at our layover (again, check with a vet on the dosage and timing). While this didn't put them completely to sleep as I had hoped, it did keep them fairly calm. It minimized stress on them because they were more relaxed. It also was less stressful on me, because they weren't scratching to get out or otherwise driving me crazy.

In my suitcase, I packed a medium-sized collapsible cage. Nylabone makes these cages (they also make an airplane-sized one); they open from the top or the front, and fold flat if needed. It worked out wonderfully for me because I folded the medium cage and packed it in the bottom of my suitcase for use when we arrived at our destination.

At the airport, I arrived even earlier than the recommended arrival time to account for any delays or problems. I checked in at the desk in-



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stead of the curb and told the agent I had the ferrets with me. She said she did see their reservation (I had called about a week ahead to double-check, just in case). She gave me the option of paying for both directions or just one. She also gave me a tag to put on their cage. It said they were approved for cabin travel, and it listed my seat numbers for both my connections. I did not have to do anything else at my layover.

I had also called ahead to find out how to go through the security checkpoint with them. I had been told I could either have the cage hand-searched with the pets in it, or I could send the cage through the X-ray machine and carry the pets through. I had brought all plastic and nylon harnesses, so I took one ferret out at a time and snapped on the harnesses before carrying them through, and I put their cage through the X-ray machine. I didn't want to chance one squirming away in the airport! The screening was entirely uneventful. I made sure that their tag was in plain view while boarding, and was given no hassle by anyone. While I was walking around the airport terminal, I removed the water bottle from the cage to prevent excess dripping and a possible overflow.

On my layover, I had enough time and had planned to change out the newspapers in their cage and freshen their water. Luckily, most airline bathrooms have a big, open counter for baby changing. Once again I took them out one at a time and snapped their harnesses on to prevent escape. I let them stand on the counter next to the cage and held the leashes *very* short while I changed papers with one hand, wiped out the cage, put clean papers in, and rinsed their water dish. Tricky, but I managed. As I put each one back in the cage, they got

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## AIRLINE-APPROVED TRAVEL CARRIERS

There are many soft-sided carriers that are approved for airline travel. However, I prefer the hard-sided carriers because it's easier to attach a water bottle and food dish. These are two that I found that meet airline requirements for travel in the cabin (double check with the airline). Both cages are 12 x 17 x 8 inches.

### NYLABONE X

#### Small Fold-Away Pet Carrier

This is a collapsible cage which is slightly barn-shaped. The top opens almost fully on a hinge, and the front has a door with the "squeeze" type latch on each side—this means it can be opened in either direction. The barn shape makes it a little bit smaller overall than the Petmate, but the hinged top and bidirectional door are great added conveniences. It also tends to be slightly more expensive than the Petmate.

#### According to the manufacturer:

"No detail was overlooked in the design of the Fold-Away Carriers. Durable carrier goes from fully loaded to fully folded in seconds.

- Folds flat to one-third its original size for easy storage.
- Fully assembled. No parts. No tools required.
- Convenient front or top loading makes it easy to use for pets such as birds, cats, dogs, reptiles, and small mammals.
- Durable construction.
- Made of high-impact plastic and steel grates with full ventilation on all sides.
- Doors are fully removable and can be opened in either direction.
- Holds food and water dishes that can be filled from the outside.
- Meets domestic and international airline safety standards.
- Comes with belt for easy carrying under arm."

### Petmate Cabin Kennel

This cage has a small opening on top through which it can be a little tricky to get ferrets in and out. However, the side has locks that slide and the entire top of the cage can be opened on a hinge. This makes for extremely easy cleaning and "accessorising."

#### According to the manufacturer:

"The Cabin Kennel is approved by airlines for carry-on pet transportation. Fits conveniently under airplane seats to let your small animal ride with you in comfort—rather than in the luggage hold. Molded from high-density, luggage-grade plastic, the Cabin Kennel is an easy-to-clean, lightweight yet durable carrier. Hinge pin opening for strong lasting performance with heavy-duty luggage-type carrying handle. Positive sliding latch for a secure, easy-to-use fastening system. Perfect size for kittens, cats, puppies, and some toy breeds of dogs. Also makes a great carrier for birds and small animals. This model features a wire top. The Cabin Kennel pet carrier is perfect for small animals, ferrets, Chihuahuas, cats or similar sized pets. Features a wire top, carrying handle, and a top opening for easy access to your pet. Keeps pets safe and out of trouble during travel or vet visits. Airline approved. Measures: 17" x 12" x 8". Top opening is 8 inches."



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another dose of Benadryl (another reminder: check with your vet on the dosing!).

### HOTEL ROOMS

Hotel rooms can be dangerous places. It is never a good idea to leave your ferret unsupervised in an unfamiliar place, and hotel rooms are no exception. You should bring a playpen or plan to leave your ferret(s) caged if you have to leave them alone in the hotel room for any length of time. I recommend using the "do not disturb" sign and requesting that house-keeping staff not come in unless you are there to monitor.

Ferret proofing in hotel rooms is like ferret proofing your home—only harder. At home, you know the basic layout; hotel rooms are a mystery. Here are some of the most common places to find "problem areas."

should be used only when the ferret is safely confined.

**Heaters/air conditioners**—You'd be amazed at how many heat/AC units have large holes underneath that lead into the workings or the wall. One hotel room I was in had a plastic flap under the heater that hung half-way off and led directly outdoors. It was snowing that night, and the snow actually came into my room!

**Toilets**—Always keep the lid down and check the back of the toilet. I once found one with a big opening in back.

**Doors**—Make sure the crack between the bottom of any door and the floor isn't ferret-sized.

**Cabinets**—This goes for bathroom and kitchen cabinets. Any unit that goes all the way to the floor potentially (and, I've found, frequently) has an opening that goes into the nether regions of the woodwork. Get down on the floor in front of the bathroom sink and feel the entire underside of any cabinet network. Also, check inside the cabinet to see

if there's any exposed plumbing or openings—your ferret may be able to pry open the cabinet door.

**Kitchens**—If your hotel room comes with a full kitchen, then it comes with all the dangers of one. This is where the playpen comes in—ferrets should not be allowed to roam around the kitchen, period. There are just too many unknown dangers.

### EDITORS' NOTE:

Our best advice is to not let your ferret run loose in any hotel room. There are simply too many dangers and it isn't worth the risk. Use a playpen or wait until you are in a safer ferret-protected environment to let your ferrets run.

**Microfridges**—In lieu of a kitchen, your hotel may have a microwave/refrigerator combo unit. Check the back for exposed elements (like heating coils) that could be harmful.

**Cleanliness**—I often find hotel rooms are not very clean. If your ferret is going to be allowed to roam around the room, you need to look in all the places they will go. I'll spare you the gory details of all the gross and disgusting things I've found looking under beds and behind dressers. Just remember: what you don't find, your ferret will.

**Be prepared**—When you arrive from a long time traveling, by any mode of transportation, your ferret will be hyper. He/she will run around insanely and explore everything, usually dooking and war-dancing the whole time. This is the test of your ferret proofing—watch them closely in the first hour or so, because this is when they do most of their exploration and are most likely to find trouble.

### CLOSING THOUGHTS

Traveling with your ferret can be a wonderful and enjoyable experience. To minimize the stress of the experience for humans and ferrets, planning thoroughly and well ahead is a must. By the time you finish with your thoughtful preparations, packing, traveling, and ferret-proofing after your arrival, you will be exhausted! But then you can hug your fuzzy friend close and have your face licked—and it's suddenly all worthwhile.

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**Beds**—Many hotels have wooden bed frames that fill in the space between the box spring and the floor. Your ferret can probably squeeze in between the box spring and the top of the frame and end up in the space under the bed.

**Other furniture**—Check all other furniture to determine what they can and cannot get into. Then you'll know where to look for them when it suddenly gets "too quiet." If there is a couch, it's often a pull-out and