

Moving my Animals Overseas

By Sarah Thexton

During the course of 2004 my husband's company approached us with a view to moving us to The United States of America for a 2 – 3 year work assignment. Our initial response was "what about the animals". It would not be an option for us to take a transfer unless the pets could accompany us. We have two large dogs and four cats and they are all very much part of the family. We started investigating what the process would be and were pleasantly surprised. Despite the impression that people, who leave their pets behind, like to give the immigration process for pets is neither lengthy nor is quarantine always a necessity. With this in mind we started looking into our options. We were to be based in Florida which would entail a 40 hour trip via Johannesburg and Atlanta with plane changes in each of these destinations.

The majority of popular destination countries do not have quarantine requirements for animals coming in from South Africa. Countries that offer immigration without quarantine include the entire United States and most of Europe. Exceptions to the rule are the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Where there is no quarantine the pet is able to fly on the same flight as its owners and to go straight home with the minimum of stress.

It was decided that hubby would go ahead of me and the animals would travel with him. That way I could stay behind to pack up the house, and the animals would leave a fully furnished house without the stress of watching all our possessions being packed up.

Prior to leaving there are a number of medical requirements that must be adhered to but if you use a reputable pet transport agency they will assist

you in arranging these. During the 12 months and not less than a month prior to departure the animals must all receive up to date vaccines and rabies inoculations. All animals moving out of the country are to be micro-chipped and dogs should receive Kennel cough immunization. Their inoculation books are then given to the transport company in order for flights to be booked. Simone Masters of Move A Pet assisted us and also arranged for an American agency to transfer the pets once they landed in America. During the ten days before leaving the animals are given a full medical to make certain that they are fit to fly and their immigrations forms are then certified by a state veterinarian. We arranged for our vet, Dr Dean Sim, to do the medicals at our home which again eliminated unnecessary stress and time away from home. With all of this in place our zoo was ready for an epic trip across the Atlantic.

On the morning of departure Move A Pet collected the animals 2 hours before their departure time and delivered them to the airport. As Chris was on the same flight he was able to watch them being unloaded at Johannesburg airport and transferred to their holding facility. The flight across the Atlantic took 18 hours with a short refueling stop at Isle de Sol. During that time there is no contact with the animals but they do have water available in their carriers. On arriving in Atlanta the animals were transported through immigration, checked by an American State Vet and then taken to a holding facility away from the airport. They were held there for 4 hours and were fed and watered. The dogs were exercised and everyone was given time out of their carriers. Then it was back to the airport for the final leg of their journey. Once they reached Florida airport they were collected by the American agent and delivered to our



Photo by Sarah Thexton



home. They arrived none the worse for wear and nobody seemed particularly stressed by the whole experience. In all they took the move a lot easier than we did.

I would urge anyone who pets and is thinking of leaving the country to consider taking their animals with them. No one will look after your animals as well as you do and if you give them away you can never be sure of the future you are providing them with. If you have the means and the ability having them with you will assist you in settling in your new environment and will make your new house feel like a home. Right now three of the cats are asleep on the bed, one is asleep on the new scratching post and both dogs are asleep at my feet. I don't think that I ever would have forgiven myself if we had left even one of them behind. They have made the move a lot easier. It is almost like bringing a few friends with you to help you settle in.

A few things to consider when moving your pets

1. Use a reputable pet removal agency as they will provide you with invaluable assistance.
2. Have the animals crated delivered a week or two early so that your animals can see them around the home. However never shut your animals in the crates prior to departure.
3. Do not tranquilize your pets as medication can have strange

side effects at altitude. Once sedated an animal may have trouble balancing.

4. Make sure all your pet's documentation is up to date well prior to the trip.
5. Make sure that you can find a rental property that will accept animals. This is not always easy but they are out there.
6. Put an old T-Shirt and a toy in each cage so that the animals have something from home with them.
7. The animals can have water in their crates so it may be an idea to freeze a bowl of water for them as this will defrost during the flight and will not spill over.
8. Make sure that you have a cell number for the person collecting the animals while they are in transit. That way you can receive confirmation once they are through customs. It is always better to have an approved agency do customs for you as they are familiar with the process and know what is required.
9. Keep all animals confined to the house upon arrival. They will not know the area or the smells and should not be allowed outside. Always take your dogs out on leads.
10. Keep the credit card out of reach when you visit one of the pet supermarkets in America. They tend to be addictive. You can take your pet shopping with you here and they get to pick their own toys!