

How do you go about making arrangements to get dogs to from the USA to Vietnam – and then what?

Firstly, you need to select an airline routing that provides for safe transfers between flights (there are no direct flights to Vietnam from the continental US that I know of). Airlines require at least 4-6 hours between flights to allow transfer time and many countries require a quarantine waiver fee (which could be \$1,000 or more, per pet), Should you experience any flight delays during your layover, your pet has the potential of being held in a lengthy quarantine restriction situation. Also to consider is the amount of time your dog will have to spend in their kennel without a break - usually 2-3 hours before the flight, flight time, any possible delays - plus time to disembark the plane and clear Customs - that's a long time without food or a restroom break!

We brought our dogs in to Ho Chi Minh City from Houston, Texas. I spoke to many airlines about traveling with the dogs. Several would not accept the dogs without a relocation company (which is very expensive and they usually send the pets as Cargo). I was advised that Frankfurt and Amsterdam have the best transit situation for pets. So, I chose to fly through Frankfurt, Germany on Lufthansa Airlines. Frankfurt has a "state-of-the-art" animal facility in the airport which is designed to care for pets in transit. There is a veterinarian on duty who oversees the care of all pets. Here is a link to the lounge website: <http://www.lufthansa-cargo.com/content.jsp;jsessionid=0A42CA48D63116B431916EA732876AD5?path=0,1,19200,19265,19280,90232&bhcp=1> While traveling this route added a 13 hour layover to our trip, it was the best route for the dogs. (We were able to get a day-room which allowed us to shower, sleep, relax and have a meal). The other benefits are the dogs got a little break too! They were walked, fed and their kennels were cleaned, as necessary. The connecting flight to Ho Chi Minh City was also with Lufthansa which had an added benefit of the dogs staying with one airline carrier who was responsible for their safety the entire way into Ho Chi Minh City. We had a one-hour layover in Bangkok, but did not have to change planes, so the dogs were left on the plane with their cargo area climate controlled. The cost for this routing was \$500 for our larger dog and \$250 for our small dog. Fees were based upon kennel size. Some airlines offer an option to bring your pet onboard, but it has to be a very small kennel. I would recommend checking with the airline and considering if your dogs temperament is suitable for the cabin.

I know you are asking yourself - was it really that easy? Well, yes and no!

- You will need an International Health Certificate (not to be confused with a general Health Certificate). The International Health Certificate is a multi-copy form which has to be signed by your Veterinarian first, then signed, approved and stamped by the USDA and it can only be obtained 10 days before travel, not any sooner! (I recommend getting it 8 or 9 days before travel in case you are delayed for some reason, it is still valid). This can be a tricky to coordination, especially since you will probably be in the middle of packing out your house when you need to get all this done!
- First - double check you have included your pet in the airline reservation, so you are sure you have the exact date of travel correct. The airline will need the dog's weight, plus the dimensions of the kennel. Pet's must travel in approved/certified pet carriers. Be sure to check that your carrier meets the airline's criteria. Airlines only fly a certain number of pets per flight, so spaces book up quickly. Lufthansa did not have to have the exact dimensions of the kennel sizes to hold the pet reservation - just a close estimate. They did ask me to call back with the exact dimensions before travel. I also called the day before travel to reconfirm the pet reservation and our flights - never a bad idea when travelling internationally - check with your carrier for their requirements.
- When you make your appointment with your veterinarian for your International health certificate, check that your veterinarian actually has the forms available in their office for the International health certificate - not all veterinarians have these forms. For some reason, they are given to only certain practices. I am not sure what the criteria are to qualify to have the forms.

- **Vaccinations:** Your pet will have to be up-to-date on all their vaccinations - especially Rabies. You will need to show proof of rabies vaccination (less than 1 year previous to entering the country) to accompany our international health certificate. My vet re-vaccinated my dogs because their rabies was a 3-year vaccine and some countries do not accept a 3-year vaccine. (Don't worry, it will not hurt to re-vaccinate under these circumstances.) Make sure you travel with extra copies of all your vaccination records.
- Your veterinarian will have to type up the health certificates which can take several hours, so plan on bringing your pets for their examination the day before and asking your vet to date the health certificate the following day when you come to pick them up!
- The USDA is the regulating agency for animal health certificates. (A bit of trivia for you: The USDA employs veterinarians to inspect US meat, as veterinarians are trained to recognize zoonotic diseases/organisms; i.e. bad things that can transfer from animals to people) So this is why your dog's health certificates have to pass through the USDA, in case you were wondering why?
- **You need to contact your local USDA office for instructions on processing the International health certificate - [http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_10B?navtype=MA&navid=HOME](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7_0_A/7_0_10B?navtype=MA&navid=HOME)**
- Since we were leaving from Houston, our closest office was in Austin, TX (about 2 1/2 hours away). I was instructed to send the completed International health certificate to the Austin office via overnight carrier (Fed Ex is who I used), along with a check (you have to get your veterinarian to make out the check - I paid \$35 per dog) and include a return Fed Ex envelope. They told me the turnaround time, once received was 24 to 48 hours. I put a note in with the health certificates stating when my flights were departing and was very pleased to have the certificates back in 2 days, but you cannot count on this!
- Be sure to include the Rabies Certificate in the envelope with the completed International Health Certificate when you send to the USDA.
- While you are at your vet's office - you will need to stock-up on heartworm preventative. If you have not lived in a tropical climate (Houston included), dogs need to be on heart worm preventative to avoid contamination from mosquitoes who infect dogs (and cats) when they bite them. The mosquitoes deposit larvae which find their way into the animal's heart and grow inside the heart causing catastrophic heart failure - not a pretty thing! I have used Sentinel in the past because it also protects from other parasites like whip worms, round worms and hook worms (hook worms are transmittable to humans and small children are especially vulnerable to infection). These parasites are in Texas and many places in the world, so it is not a problem specific to Vietnam.
- Be sure to pack extra dog food in your suitcases - see tip below about changing a pet's diet too quickly. I was told I could bring canned dog food in my carry-on. This went well in Houston and Bangkok, but not so well in Frankfurt... Let's just say I was able to keep the dog food, but I had to go through a lot of processing involving armed security guards - at which point I questioned how badly I really wanted the canned dog food and my sanity. In the end, I was extremely glad I kept the food because it took a week to get our air shipment. The reason I had some food in my carry on was in case they lost my luggage... I think that it would be less stress to go ahead and put the food in your checked baggage!
- The day of travel... I had a few discrepancies from what I was told on the phone by the Airline and what actually happened. What I learned from this experience and taking pets to Africa and London, is that you have to be proactive and ask questions. At check-in, the Agent treated my dogs like they were a piece of luggage. I had to ask about food, water, what would happen next, etc. **(BRING A WIDE SIZE PACKING TAPE - CLEAR - WITH**

**YOU TO THE AIRPORT!** The airline puts stickers on the kennels but they do not stick well at all. We taped the stickers and most importantly, the "luggage" tags, to the kennels to be sure they did not come off). We never travel without duct or packing tape, but that's another blog.....

- At the gate, (nicely, but firmly) alert the gate agent you are traveling with pet(s) and you want to confirm they are being brought to the plane (don't expect them to arrive until right when you are boarding, but go ahead and make yourself known to the agents). Once on board, ask to speak to the person in charge of the cabin and tell them you want a confirmation before take-off that the dogs are on board and to please also check with the Captain that the climate control is activated for their cargo area. I think the Lufthansa personnel were upset that I was questioning their ability to care for my pet, but my experience has taught me to never take for granted what is supposed to be done - especially when lots of people are involved and many things are happening at one time - better to ask questions. Be sure you are happy that everything is in order. You will have to do this at every plane change and departure. I specifically asked the Flight Attendant to radio to the tarmac crew to confirm the dogs were still onboard because some luggage had been taken off in Bangkok and I wanted to be sure there was no mistake in what they were doing with the dogs; i.e. going on to Ho Chi Minh City.
- There is a local veterinarian here in Ho Chi Minh City that will help you with the paperwork required upon arrival. Your pets will come off the plane on the luggage carousel and there should be a person meeting you to escort you through Customs. Before you arrive, you will have to provide scanned copies of photos of your pets, the completed international health certificate and your passports for this process. You will also need to have additional sets of these papers with you to claim your pet.
- When you bring your dogs through Customs at the airport here, they cannot get out of their kennels. You will have to re-x-ray your bags and put everything back on the carts. There is no one available to help you with this process, so it can be a little hectic when you have kennels and lots of suitcases. Just take your time and it will all work out! Congratulate yourself on a successful trip - the hardest part will be over and you will have many exciting days to look forward to!

Following are a few key points you need to consider:

- Stock-up on your current dog food to bring in your shipment. There are several good brands available here, but they are pricy. You probably won't be able to bring several years' worth of dog food, but you can transition into the new food. If you buy your food from PetCo, there is a significant discount (I think it was 20-25%) for purchasing over 200 lbs. of dog food. I had to go to four PetCo stores to get all the food I needed because they do not stock large quantities. You can have the Manager order in the food for you, but it can take a month to come in.
- I was not given clear information as to whether I would also need a regular Health Certificate (which the veterinarian said was redundant). I went ahead and got the certificate (\$15 each) to be sure I had one available if I needed it. I was not asked to produce this health certificate (but they did need the International Health Certificate). I took the view of better safe than sorry - \$15 is an inexpensive "insurance" policy.
- If you currently have pet insurance (I use Veterinary Pet Insurance) you can continue your coverage as long as you have a US address.
- Talk to your vet about getting an entire year's worth of medication for your pet. Also, see if they will be willing to consult with you via e-mail or phone if you have any questions or concerns. We have veterinarians here, but a second opinion is always a good option.

- **Bring an extra leash and collar. If you have your new address before you leave, have an identification tag made up (you can do this when you buy your food).**
- **Be sure to bring several days worth of food with you in your suitcases. You can supplement with the dog food here, but remember that changing a pet's diet more than 10% per day can cause stomach upset and our pet will already be slightly stressed from the plane ride.**
- **Also bring toys and food/water bowls in your suitcase or air shipment.**
- **If you get a house with a pool, check to see if the pool has steps. It's just an expected thing in the US, but here many pools do not have steps. You can purchase doggie steps for a pool. I have not purchased, but here is a website that shows what they look like (please check with BBB on website, etc. as I have not used this company and it is only an example of what you will want to bring.) <http://www.petclassics.com/Boat-Dock-Pool-Ramps/pool-pup-steps-for-dogs.45.html>**
- **Never give your pet tap water in Vietnam. They need to drink bottled water just like humans. You will most-likely have a water cooler at your house, so you can use that bottled water.**
- **If possible, bring your dog bed in your air shipment. Most houses have tile floors here and it is uncomfortable for the dogs not to have a soft place to sleep. I did see a few dog beds in the An Phu Supermarket this week, but did not price them.**
- **There is a dog groomer available here, so you can have your pet groomed.**
- **When you get into Ho Chi Minh City, carefully consider where you walk your dog. There is broken glass and many dogs are not vaccinated, which if your dog is old, sick or has any break in vaccination, could cause them to get very sick. Some diseases such as mange and ringworm are transferrable to humans. It is much more possible to become contaminated with these diseases in this environment. The motorcycles can be alarming to the dogs and you should walk against traffic, keeping our pet away from the street/close to you. Be aware of your surroundings - which is good advice in any city!**

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