

# American Airlines Pet-in-Cabin Policy: What Actually Gets You Through the Gate

**Short answer:** American Airlines lets small cats and dogs travel in the passenger cabin, inside one closed carrier per traveller that fits entirely under the seat in front of you, for a fee charged per kennel, each way. The animal stays in the carrier for the whole flight, seats are capped per aircraft, and the space has to be reserved in advance rather than claimed at the gate. To check availability on a specific date, add a pet to an existing booking, or price a route that allows cabin pets, call **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)**.

That's the compressed version. The details underneath it are where most people get tripped up, because "fits under the seat" is doing a lot of quiet work in that sentence, and because the rules change depending on whether a mainline jet or a regional aircraft is operating your flight number.

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## Which animals American Airlines accepts in the cabin

American Airlines restricts in-cabin pet travel to **cats and dogs**. Rabbits, birds, reptiles, ferrets and other household pets are not accepted as carry-on animals in the passenger cabin, which is a meaningful difference from carriers such as Frontier or Spirit that take a wider species list.

Two additional conditions apply:

- The animal must be at least **eight weeks old**.
- The animal must be able to **stand up and turn around** inside the closed carrier without pressing against the sides or having any part of the body protrude.

Sedated or tranquillised animals are not accepted. This is not a discretionary rule an agent can wave through — a sedated animal in a pressurised cabin is a documented veterinary risk, and gate staff will decline the animal if it appears drugged.

Trained service dogs travel under an entirely separate framework, at no charge, and are not counted against the pet limits described below. If you are travelling with a task-trained service animal, do not book it as a pet; the paperwork and the boarding process are different.

## What the carrier size limits really mean

This is the single most common reason a pet gets turned away, so it is worth being precise. American Airlines publishes different maximums depending on the kennel construction and the aircraft type:

| Kennel type              | Flights it applies to         | Published maximum                     |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Soft-sided (recommended) | All American Airlines flights | 18 x 11 x 11 inches (46 x 28 x 28 cm) |

| Kennel type | Flights it applies to               | Published maximum                    |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Hard-sided  | Mainline American Airlines aircraft | 19 x 13 x 9 inches (48 x 33 x 22 cm) |
| Hard-sided  | American Eagle regional aircraft    | 16 x 12 x 8 inches (40 x 30 x 20 cm) |

Notice the regional figure. If any segment of your itinerary is operated by an American Eagle partner — Envoy Air, Piedmont Airlines, PSA Airlines, Republic Airways, SkyWest Airlines — the under-seat space on a CRJ or Embraer aircraft is genuinely smaller than on an Airbus A321. A kennel that sailed under a mainline seat on the outbound can be refused on the connecting regional leg. Book with the tightest segment in mind, not the roomiest.

Soft-sided carriers are recommended for a practical reason: they compress. A soft carrier with a semi-rigid frame can lose an inch of height under mild pressure without distressing the animal, which is often the difference between fitting and not fitting. American Airlines is explicit that a soft carrier should still fit without having to be *excessively* collapsed, so this is not a licence to buy something two sizes too big and squash it.

Carrier construction requirements:

- Leak-proof floor
- Ventilation on **three or more sides** (mesh panels count)
- Secure, functioning zips or latches
- Water-repellent material for soft carriers
- Padded interior

## The under-seat measurement nobody checks

Published carrier maximums describe what the airline will accept in principle. The under-seat clearance on your specific aircraft, in your specific seat, is a separate question. Bulkhead rows have no seat in front and therefore no under-seat storage at all — you cannot sit there with a cabin pet. Some window seats on narrow-body aircraft have an in-flight entertainment box or a structural bracket that eats several inches of the footwell.

If you want to be certain before you buy a carrier, confirm the aircraft type on your itinerary and ask for the under-seat dimensions of the row you have been assigned. An agent on **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** can pull the seat map and the equipment type for your flight number and tell you which rows are viable.

## Fees and how the charge works

The carry-on pet fee on American Airlines is charged **per kennel, each way** — not per journey and not per animal. It is separate from the airfare and is not refundable once the animal has travelled.

Two mechanics catch people out:

- 1 **Connections longer than four hours.** The fee applies per destination when your connection is under four hours. If your itinerary includes a voluntary stopover or connection of **more than four hours**, the fee applies again for that segment. A deliberately long layover to break up the day can double the pet cost.
- 2 **Partner-operated segments.** American Airlines does not collect pet fees on behalf of another operating carrier, even when the flight carries an AA flight number. If your boarding pass says "operated by" a different airline, you check in and pay with that airline, under that airline's rules and dimensions. Codeshares are a frequent source of unpleasant surprises at the counter.

Baggage interaction is worth understanding too. The pet carrier occupies one of your cabin allowances. In practice you travel with the pet carrier plus a personal item, and you give up the standard overhead carry-on bag. Plan the packing accordingly — a full-size roller and a pet is not a combination that works.

## Which routes allow cabin pets

Carry-on pets are accepted within and between the **United States, Canada, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean**, subject to each destination's own import rules. Some Caribbean and Central American countries have entry requirements that override anything the airline permits, and a handful prohibit animal imports in cabin altogether.

Transatlantic and transpacific routes are not open to carry-on pets. Hawaii is a category of its own: the state operates a rabies-quarantine programme with its own documentation timeline that begins months before travel, and the airline cannot shortcut it.

For larger animals that cannot fit under a seat, American Airlines handles transport through its cargo operation rather than as checked baggage for general passengers. Checked-pet acceptance is limited to active-duty U.S. military and State Department personnel on orders. If you have a 60-pound dog and no military orders, cargo is the route, and it is booked separately from your passenger reservation.

## Capacity limits — the part that decides everything

American Airlines caps the number of pet kennels per flight, with a smaller cap on regional American Eagle aircraft and a further restriction on premium cabins. Those slots are allocated first come, first served.

The practical consequence: **your pet's seat is not confirmed because your seat is confirmed.** Two people can buy tickets on the same flight in the same minute and only one of them can bring an animal. On a Friday afternoon out of a hub in summer, the pet slots on popular routes can be gone weeks ahead.

Book the animal at the same time you book the ticket, not afterwards. If you have already ticketed and want to add a pet, do it the same day — call **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** with the record locator

and the animal's approximate weight and carrier dimensions ready, and get the slot confirmed in the reservation rather than noted informally.

## Step by step: booking and travelling with a cabin pet

- 1 **Confirm the route is eligible.** Check the destination's animal import rules alongside the airline's route list.
- 2 **Reserve the pet slot with the ticket.** Cabin capacity is limited and allocated in order of request.
- 3 **Measure the animal, then buy the carrier.** Height at the shoulder while standing is the figure that matters most, because that determines whether the animal can stand inside a closed bag.
- 4 **Choose a seat with real under-seat space.** Avoid bulkheads and exit rows entirely.
- 5 **Acclimatise the animal to the carrier** over at least a week. A cat that has never been zipped into a bag will not learn to like it at 30,000 feet.
- 6 **Arrive early.** Pet check-in is handled at the counter, not through a kiosk or the app, and the agent will inspect the kennel.
- 7 **Walk and water the animal before security.** Once you are airside, options narrow considerably, though most large U.S. airports now have post-security relief areas.
- 8 **Keep the carrier closed and stowed.** The animal stays under the seat from boarding through to the gate at arrival — not on your lap, not on the seat beside you.

### At the security checkpoint

TSA will not screen the animal inside the carrier. You remove the pet, carry it through the metal detector while the empty carrier goes through the X-ray, then put it back. A harness and leash on the animal during this step is strongly advisable — a startled cat loose in a checkpoint is a genuinely bad afternoon for everyone.

## Common problems and how to head them off

**The kennel is judged too large at the counter.** Agents measure. If your carrier is 19 inches long and the soft-sided limit is 18, that is a refusal. Measure the bag yourself, at home, with a tape — manufacturer listings are frequently optimistic.

**The connecting flight is a regional jet.** Check the equipment type on every segment before you commit.

**The destination requires paperwork you don't have.** Health certificates, rabies documentation and microchip records have validity windows measured in days for some countries. Work backwards from the departure date.

**Snub-nosed breeds.** Brachycephalic dogs and cats — pugs, bulldogs, Persians and similar — face restrictions in cargo transport for respiratory-risk reasons and are subject to additional scrutiny generally. If your dog is one of these, confirm acceptance explicitly rather than assuming.

**The animal is anxious and vocal.** There is no rule requiring silence, but a distressed animal creates a difficult flight. A short trial run in a car, in the carrier, tells you a lot.

## Where to get help

| Contact                                       | Number                           | Best for                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Travel reservations and support               | <b>1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)</b> | Checking pet-slot availability, adding a pet to a booking, pricing pet-eligible routes, seat and aircraft-type questions |
| American Airlines reservations                | Published on aa.com              | Direct account and ticket servicing                                                                                      |
| American Airlines Cargo                       | Published on aacargo.com         | Animals too large for the cabin                                                                                          |
| Destination consulate or agriculture ministry | Varies by country                | Import permits and health certificate rules                                                                              |

Live agents are the right channel for pet travel generally. The online booking flow does not confirm cabin capacity, and an unanswered question at the counter on departure morning is the worst possible time to discover a problem.

## Frequently asked questions

**Can I buy an extra seat for my pet on American Airlines?** No. The animal travels under the seat in front of you regardless of how many seats you have paid for. Buying an adjacent seat does not create a place for a carrier.

**How many pets can I bring?** One kennel per ticketed traveller.

**Can two animals share one carrier?** Only if they are the same species, comparably sized, comfortable together and the combined weight stays within limits. Two adult cats in one bag rarely works well in practice.

**Is the pet fee refundable if my flight is cancelled?** Pet fees are non-refundable once travel has occurred. If the flight does not operate at all, ask specifically about the pet charge when the ticket is reaccommodated — it is handled separately from the fare and is easy for the system to overlook.

**Does the carrier count as my carry-on bag?** Yes. You travel with the carrier and a personal item, in place of a standard carry-on.

**Do emotional support animals fly free?** No. Since the U.S. Department of Transportation revised its rules, emotional support animals are handled as ordinary pets on American Airlines and pay the standard fee. Only task-trained service dogs travel free.

**Can my pet travel unaccompanied?** Not in the cabin. An animal travelling without its owner goes through cargo, booked separately.

## The takeaway

American Airlines is workable for cabin pet travel if the animal is genuinely small, the carrier genuinely fits, and you book the slot early. The three things that decide the outcome are the carrier dimensions against the tightest aircraft on your itinerary, the per-flight capacity cap, and the destination's own import rules — in that order of frequency.

Measure twice, book the pet with the ticket rather than after it, and confirm the aircraft type on every segment. For availability checks, adding an animal to a live reservation or working out which routing keeps you on mainline aircraft the whole way, **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** is the fastest way to get a definitive answer rather than a probable one.