

TRAVELING WITH YOUR WESTIE

by Ineke Rühland

Here are a few helpful hints on traveling with your Westie:

Each airline has different rules, so you need to check the specifics before traveling. You can usually find the pet rules on each airline's website.



What you generally need to fly abroad, or even domestically, is a health certificate from your vet less dated than 30 days before your flight. It is a standard form that your vet will have, and it indicates that your Westie's rabies vaccination is current.

We would never let Fritz fly in cargo because way too many animals die that way. There are sometimes pressure and temperature problems in cargo, particularly with older planes, and it's just not worth the risk. We would only ever take Fritz in cabin.

The most common pet carrier allowed in cabin is the "Sherpa" bag. A Westie should have the largest size. Fritz is a big boy at 23 lbs. and he only just fits in the bag. The dogs need to be able to turn around in the bag, although we've never been asked to prove this. Actually, Fritz *can* turn around in the bag. Westies are lucky that they're short and long, just like the Sherpa bag and the space under an airplane seat.

Make sure you get a Sherpa bag with windows (vents). We got ours online and a quick Google search on "Sherpa dog carrier" lists dozens of websites that sell them.

It's important to train your Westie to be comfortable in a Sherpa bag before you travel. We put good treats in it and carried Fritz around in it at home and then in the car.

The airlines have a maximum weight, sometimes 20 lbs. (United) and sometimes 15 lbs. In six flights or so, they've never asked to weigh Fritz, which is a good thing since we're a few pounds over the limit. They seem to go by the bag size only at check-in.



There is a limit to the number of dogs in the cabin so it is important to reserve early. The cost for the doggie ticket runs from \$75 each way (domestic) to \$150 each way (international).

We try to take Fritz only on direct flights, although he once managed a 16-hour flight with a connection. The key is not to feed him or let him drink too much water directly before the flight. We had a bathroom problem on one flight and were glad that we had brought an extra fleece for the Sherpa bag.



The seats in economy can be awfully tight, so business class or first is of course much better for your Westie if you can manage it. Save your upgrade certificates for when you have your Westie! The flight attendants in business and first tend to be more accommodating as well. We've generally had good luck with flight crews but we once had a dragon lady that would not let Fritz stick his head out of the bag. All the other times he's been allowed to stick his head out, and I've generally been allowed to put the bag on my lap after take-off, which is a much less stressful place for a Westie than on the floor.

Fritz actually doesn't like flying very much, and gets frightened by the cabin pressure changes during take-off. He's normally a very courageous dog, even macho I would say ;-), so it's a bit out of character for him to be scared but it's something you should be ready for. Once Fritz even started hyperventilating, which was quite scary. We made him breathe into a paper bag (just like for humans), and that worked well, believe it or not. They say that you shouldn't tranquilize dogs before a flight, but my (holistic) vet suggested giving Bach's Rescue Remedy before the next flight, saying it should work just like "a stiff martini" in calming him down. I've bought it and have it ready to go for next time.

Beware that some countries, particularly islands, have quarantine rules for dogs, so they need to be avoided. England has currently relaxed its quarantine rules, but dogs going to England have to come in cargo.

Fritz actually didn't like Paris that much because dogs aren't allowed in the parks and he's used to having grass under his feet everyday. We did take him to a couple of large parks in the outskirts of Paris that do accept dogs. The Bois de Boulogne is particularly good for dogs. We also went to Normandy with Fritz, where he was much happier.

Although the flying isn't always a lot of fun, we figure Fritz would still prefer to come along since he hates to be separated from his pack, and we would also miss him far too much.



Happy travels with your Westies!

Ineke, Bill & Fritz (a 7-year-old Westie from San Francisco)