

Driving to Disney With Your Dog: Tail-Waggin Travel Tips That Give Your Dog a Vacation, Too!

by Jennifer Marx, PassPorter Guidebooks Author

Last August we welcomed a Golden Retriever/Lab mix rescue puppy to our home. He's a Pluto -- a mixed-breed, cheerful, adventurous, and loyal dog. We call him Hunter, as he's always on the hunt for treats, toys, and his people.

Fast forward to February. It's time for our 10-day trip to Walt Disney World for the runDisney Princess 5k run. Hunter is now 8 months old. At first we thought we'd leave him at our local doggie camp while we were gone, but then I got to thinking. Disney has their own on-site kennel, Best Friends Pet Care, which has been described as a doggie resort. I've heard good things about Disney's kennel. And we are driving down to Florida, so we could bring our dog along with us. If Hunter were at the Disney kennel, we'd be able to visit him -- he's never been away from his people for so long before, and this could be better for him at this stage in his development. Oh -- and bonus! -- it would cost about the same for Hunter to stay at the niftier Disney kennel as it would cost to stay at the local camp because he'd be boarded for less time. So after some rumination, we decided to take our dog with us to Disney!

We learned a lot about traveling with a dog and boarding him at the Disney kennel on our trip. Here are our top 10 tips for a happy dog vacation!

1. Get Your Dog Car-Ready Not all dogs enjoy car trips, so it's important that your dog is already good in cars or becomes so before your trip. Our trip was 18 hours down and back up, so this is a particularly big deal for us. Hunter had been on car trips and done reasonably well, so we took the plunge. But if you have a car-shy dog or one that gets motion sickness, consider training him before you go with short and happy car trips. Start with slow trips and reward your dog with affection and toys (avoid treats, especially if your dog gets motion sick). As your dog comes to associate the car with happy times and rewards, go on longer trips to reinforce this.

2. Get Your Car Dog-Ready Dogs should be secured safely in the car, not left to roam about as that is a safety hazard. Consider a harness or special seat buckle. We chose to put our dog's crate in the car. Not only did this ensure our dog had his own space without encroachment from falling luggage or fast-food bags, but it was a

familiar space for him. We clipped his brush, leash, and travel bowl to the side of the crate with carabiner clips. We put a well-loved dog bed and familiar chew toys in his crate, too. But do yourself a favor and avoid the squeaky toys in the car. Other things to put in the car include bottles of water, pre-measured portions of dog food, small treats, and something to clean up the mess in case your dog gets motion sick.

3. Call the Disney Kennel in Advance The [Best Friends Pet Care](#) kennel on Disney property is popular, so you'll want to call as soon as you know you're traveling for reservations. I was able to get in about one month in advance, but I understand it can fill up completely over busy travel times like holidays. And the special suites -- the Vacation Villas and VIP Suites -- book up two years in advance, according to a manager (but we're told they're expanding to double their suites!). We booked a "Indoor-Outdoor 2-Room Accommodation," which is a climate-controlled indoor bedroom with a pet cot, and an outdoor patio which is protected from the elements (\$44/night for Disney resort guests). This gave Hunter unlimited access to his patio during the daytime. We also added on a Play & Stay package (\$22/night) which gave him a four-hour playgroup with other dogs. Note also that at the time of writing, reservations for Best Friends Pet Care needs to be done over the phone, not online like their other locations. You can call them at 407-203-9496.

4. Prepare Your Dog for Boarding If you're not familiar with boarding, it's important to work up to a long stay, just like a long car trip. Let your dog experience positive interactions away from you at another kennel before you have him stay for a long time. Our dog goes to a dog camp every few weeks, and this has made a huge difference -- he LOVES to go to the kennel now because it means playtime with other dogs, which he enjoys. It's also important that your dog has all the necessary vaccinations. And if your dog will be joining a playgroup at the Best Friends Pet Care at Disney, he or she will need to be neutered -- we had to have this done well in advance with Hunter and we planned for it. I should note that if you accidentally show up without the vaccination records, you may still be able to have your dog stay -- Best Friends Pet Care has special kennels in a separate area for such a contingency, but they are isolated from other dogs and playgroups are not an option.

5. Make a Dog-Friendly Route. We're all used to just following our GPS or smartphones at this point, but when you're traveling with a dog it's a good idea to check your route for its friendliness. Are there places to stop for potty breaks? Are there places you can eat that's not always a drive-through? If your trip is a multi-day journey, is there a pet-friendly hotel that accepts your size/breed of dog? How about dog parks along the way where your dog can really stretch his or her legs? Research this all in advance. I used

DogFriendly.com to find a dog-friendly hotel. Speaking of which, we stayed at the Ramada Limited in Adairsville (866-676-3077) and had a great experience -- we had a big, ground-floor room at a good rate, and it was only \$10 extra for Hunter to stay with us.

¶6. Stop Often for Dog Breaks Just like traveling with a small child, traveling with a dog required frequent breaks. We tended to stop every two hours to allow Hunter the chance to get out, stretch his legs, and go potty. When possible, we preferred to stop at rest areas along I-75, as they all had designated pet-walking areas. But when that wasn't available, we would find a gas station with a nice, grassy area and let Hunter stretch his legs there. The fresh air and movement really helped him, and us! So factor in the extra time you'll need for the breaks along your trip.

¶7. Have a Happy Drop-Off at the Kennel Once we made it to Florida, our first stop was Best Friends Pet Care. We arrived in the early evening, which as it turns out was a good time as there were no lines like earlier in the day. We brought in two toys with us, which he was allowed to have -- but no bedding, as that is provided. Once he was all checked in, we made sure we said a cheerful, prompt goodbye. Clingy hugs and sad voices get noticed by our dogs, and this isn't good for any dog with separation anxiety. And if your dog does seem distraught, keep in mind the research shows that while our dogs miss us, it doesn't go up exponentially after a long while. Your dog will miss you as much after two hours as it does after 24 or more hours.

¶8. Visit Your Dog at Disney One of the great benefits of using Best Friends Dog Kennel at Disney is that you can visit your dog! We visited Hunter four times while we were at Disney for the week. And Best Friends Dog Kennel has its own dog park and nature walk, so we enjoyed our time with our dog and vice versa. Best Friends Pet Care is open an hour before the parks open and stays open for an hour after the parks close, but it's recommended you come between 9 and 7 to avoid interrupting your dog's schedule. It should also be noted that if you signed up for a playgroup, you'll want to visit before or after it because if you come during, he won't go back to it to avoid upsetting the group.

¶9. Take Your Dog to the Ft. Wilderness Dog Park Another cool thing you can do during your dog's vacation is take him to the Waggin' Tails Dog Park at the Fort Wilderness Campground. It's a large, fenced in area with dog jungle gyms, water stations, and picnic tables for the humans to sit. Other dogs were playing during our visit, and Hunter had a great time running about off-leash with them. There are trees for shade, too. You can also take your leashed dog on walks around the resort -- dog-friendly trails are marked.

¶10. Next Time, Camp With Your Dog Speaking of Fort Wilderness, this is Disney's only pet-friendly resort. If you want to camp with your dog, you can -- request a pet-friendly loop, bring (or [rent](#)) an RV (pets

are not allowed in pop-ups or tents), and plan on paying an extra \$5 a night for your pet. You also need to consider how you will visit the parks when your pet needs to stay behind. If you leave your pet behind in the RV, ensure that the temperature stays comfortable for them. It's also a good idea to leave them in their crates while you're gone -- it's a familiar place and it means less stress because they can't look out the window and worry. Closing the blinds and leaving the TV on are also good ideas. I also recommend you limit your time away -- remember, dogs shouldn't be crated for longer than five hours without breaks. So plan on this when you plan your day! You'll need to slow down when you have a dog along, but that's really a good thing on a vacation, now isn't it?

About The Author: Jennifer is the co-founder of PassPorter.com, author of oodles of books, and lover of Disney!

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