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Operational Guidelines for In-Cabin Pet Transport



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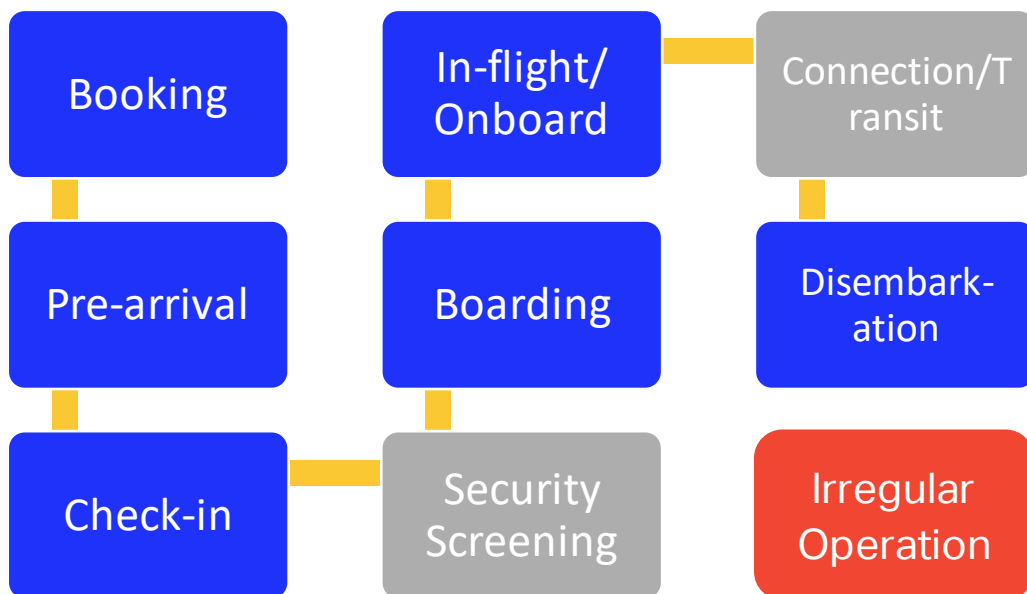
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Operational Guidelines for In-Cabin Pet Transport

To meet passenger expectations for traveling with pets in the aircraft cabin, airlines should implement clear, consistent procedures that prioritize safety, animal welfare and operational efficiency.

From booking at origin to customs at destination, passengers rely on airlines to provide visibility into a seamless experience. This document provides step-by-step guidance aligned with the passenger-facing stages outlined in the newly established journey map.

By considering the procedures outlined in this document, airlines can expect more efficient operations, improved customer satisfaction, and a more consistent and predictable in-cabin pet travel experience while also enabling clearer passenger communication, reducing service escalations, and minimizing process friction that can impact on-time performance. The guidelines enhance clarity without constraining airline policy decisions, ultimately supporting a smoother, more transparent experience for both passengers and staff.



* Blue indicates the journey steps where the associated procedures are the responsibility of the airline. Grey highlights portions of the journey which matter to the passenger but are managed by other stakeholders, such as the airport. Red is used for considerations which may arise and affect various journey steps during irregular operations.

1. Booking

1.1 Eligibility

Subject to airline policy, cats and dogs are permitted to travel in the cabin on commercial aircraft, provided they meet the criteria outlined in Container Requirement 1 of the IATA Live Animals Regulations (LAR). Other animals may be accepted, provided they still meet CR1 requirements.

The airline should ensure that its pet transportation policy is accessible and provides comprehensive detail on eligibility criteria and restrictions, compliant container requirements, and all applicable travel conditions. The policy should be harmonized with the regulatory requirements of the origin, transit, and destination states to prevent the dissemination of inconsistent or contradictory information to passengers.

Passengers should be informed of stowage limitations specific to the assigned aircraft type. Airlines should ensure this information is communicated during booking, that container specifications and welfare standards are enforced, and that compliance is verified at check-in.

1.2 Reservation Requirements

Airlines should indicate early reservation requirements, generally mandatory at least 48-72 before departure. Instruction on where reservations could be made for pets should be readily available on airline direct channels (website, mobile app, ticketing offices). If pet fares apply, these should be clearly communicated.

Airlines should instruct passengers to submit all necessary documentation for pet travel, including detailed information about the pet and its container, and clearly indicate where and when this documentation must be provided if submission is required prior to check-in. This includes completed airline-specific forms, and valid health certificates, permits and vaccination record. Passengers should also be informed of any other documentation required as per airline policy.

For itineraries involving multiple carriers, advance arrangements for interlining must be made to ensure all airlines involved accept the pet and comply with consistent handling procedures.

1.3 Booking System Integration

As per the IATA Reservations Handbook, Chapter 22 on the Carriage of Animals, airlines must use the following IATA Special Service Request (SSR) code to register pets in cabin:

- PETC — Pet in Cabin

Example: SSR PETC AC NN1 YYZYVR0061Y27OCT.DOG-8LBS-WOULD LIKE TO PURCHASE SMALL CONTAINER

Pet-in-cabin services should be listed under special baggage (i.e. ski, golf) or the additional services section of the booking flow. For chargeable ancillary services, airlines must use SSR PETC to request the service, include SSR ASVC if an Electronic Miscellaneous Document (EMD) is required and ensure each SSR ASVC is linked to a single passenger

Airlines should notify passengers that not all travel agencies or metasearch providers support pet-in-cabin bookings. In such cases, passengers should be directed to contact the airline directly to add the service.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE AIRLINE

- ☐ Make airline policy accessible, indicating pets permitted and eligibility criteria
- ☐ Share IATA LAR Container Requirement 1 (CR1)
- ☐ Inform of advance reservation requirements
- ☐ Instruct passengers to submit all relevant details, forms and other documentation
- ☐ Use IATA SSR code **PETC** to register pets in cabin
- ☐ Provide reservation instructions via website, app, and ticketing offices
- ☐ Notify passengers that third-party booking platforms may not support PETC

2. Pre-arrival

Airlines should offer pre-travel information on acclimating pets to their travel containers, outlining check-in protocols, and specifying documentation requirements and in-flight behavior standards. This should be accessible across booking channels and staff should be trained to communicate it effectively.

Responsibility for ensuring compliance with these requirements remains with the passenger/shipper.

Operational procedures should also support smooth check-in experiences. Airlines should advise passengers to arrive early, present all required documentation, and secure their pet in an IATA-compliant container. Staff should verify the availability of designated pet relief areas and communicate this to passengers. Policies must also address sedation, requiring veterinary documentation when applicable, and ensure that frontline teams are equipped to assess and enforce these requirements consistently.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE AIRLINE

- ☐ Provide guidance on acclimating pets to travel containers
- ☐ Outline check-in procedures and required documentation
- ☐ Ensure pet travel information is accessible across all booking channels
- ☐ Communicate that sedation is discouraged unless prescribed by a veterinarian, with documentation required

3. Check-in

A structured procedure should be followed when accepting pets for in-cabin travel at check-in to ensure safety, compliance and animal welfare. These procedures should enable staff to verify pet containers against the standards outlined in IATA LAR CR1 and assess animal welfare.

3.1 Acceptance

Trained check-in staff must use the airline's acceptance checklist (refer to the example In-Cabin Live Animal Acceptance Checklist in IATA LAR 7.6.2) to verify the pet's complete itinerary, confirm the owner's contact details, and inspect all required documentation, including health certificates and vaccination records. Eligibility checks must confirm the pet's age and species and assess whether the pet appears excessively lethargic or unresponsive (if there is confirmation that sedation has been used, all necessary documentation, such as a Record of Administration¹, must be present).

The travel container must comply with the airline's specific requirements and the IATA LAR CR1 standards, allowing the pet to stand, to sit erect, to lie in a natural position and to turn about normally while standing. Check-in staff must be trained to identify non-compliant containers and assess the pet's condition; if the animal appears unwell, distressed or displaying unacceptable behaviour, boarding must be denied to uphold safety and regulatory integrity.

Only when all criteria are met should the pet be cleared for travel. Failure to meet these requirements must result in denied boarding.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE AIRLINE

- ☐ Verify complete flight itinerary (including connections)
- ☐ Confirm owner's contact details
- ☐ Verify that all required documentation is present
- ☐ Confirm that health certificate, vaccination records and all other relevant documents for the complete journey are available
- ☐ Confirm pet's age, species eligibility and overall pet condition
- ☐ Train check-in staff to verify pet and container compliance with IATA LAR CR1
- ☐ Confirm with owner that pet has not been sedated (or if sedation has been used, that all necessary paperwork is present i.e. Record of Administration¹).
- ☐ Enforce boarding denial if requirements are not met

4. Security Screening

Screening is defined as the application of technical or other means intended and designed to identify and/or detect weapons, explosives or other dangerous devices, articles or substances, which may be used to commit an act of unlawful interference.

Passengers traveling with pets should be informed of the varying security screening procedures depending on origin, transit/transfer and destination requirements. Screening may involve visual checks, physical inspections, frisk searches, metal detection, x-ray, explosive trace detection, or other approved screening methods to identify prohibited and dangerous items. Pets and their containers are subject to screening protocols, and in some jurisdictions, pets must be removed from their containers to facilitate the screening of the animal and container separately. By booking in-cabin pet travel, passengers agree to comply with all applicable security screening requirements.

5. Boarding

Gate agents should verify that both soft and rigid cabin containers comply with IATA LAR CR1 and airline-specific standards. Containers must be secure, well-ventilated, appropriately sized, and capable of fitting entirely under the seat in front of the passenger, where under-seat stowage is permitted, without compromising space and ventilation. Passengers should be informed of under-seat limitations across aircraft types and in situations where under-seat placement is not allowed, airlines must provide or designate an

¹ The IATA Record of Administration is an example of a form to be completed when sedatives, tranquilizers and other psychoactive drugs have been administered pre-flight.

alternative safe stowage location that maintains the animal's welfare. If a container is non-compliant or the pet appears distressed, boarding must be denied to uphold safety and regulatory compliance.

As per the IATA Cabin Operations Safety Best Practices Guide (COSG) section 11.7, cabin crew must receive a Passenger Information List (PIL) before boarding, clearly identifying travelers using the Pet Cabin Service (PETCS). This enables crew to verify that seating arrangements comply with pet placement regulations, monitor pet welfare throughout the flight, and manage any passenger sensitivities such as allergies. During boarding, ground staff and cabin crew should conduct a visual welfare check of each pet to confirm it appears healthy, calm, and securely contained. If any issues are observed, assistance should be given to the passenger to resolve them prior to departure to ensure safety and comfort for all onboard.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE AIRLINE

- ☐ Assess pet container for compliance with IATA LAR CR1
- ☐ Conduct visual welfare check of each pet
- ☐ Deny boarding if container is non-compliant, pet is unwell or displaying unacceptable behavior

6. In-flight / Onboard

IATA COSG section 7.9 instructs that airlines must establish in-flight protocols to ensure cabin crew maintain hygiene and safety when pets are onboard.

Passenger responsibilities when traveling with pets must also be clearly communicated to the passenger. These include using an IATA-compliant container, keeping the pet inside the container at all times, and ensuring the container is stowed during taxi, takeoff, landing, and turbulence.

Airlines should provide training to cabin crew on accepted container dimensions, under-seat space across their aircraft fleet and how to address conflicts related to allergies, phobias, and other sensitivities. They should also give clear instructions to cabin crew on where animals must be safely stowed during all phases of flight, including take-off and landing.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE AIRLINE

- ☐ Develop safety protocols for cabin crew
- ☐ Train crew to respond to pet-related concerns
- ☐ Clear guidance for passengers on in-cabin requirements
- ☐ Advise cabin crew on pre-flight preparations for safety and hygienic onboard journey

7. Connection / Transit

Airlines are not responsible for airport infrastructure or procedures; however, they should proactively inform passengers traveling with pets about the availability and limitations of pet relief areas at airports. Such designated zones allow pets to stretch, hydrate, and relieve themselves before or between flights. Access to

these areas varies significantly depending on airport layout and security protocols. While some airports provide indoor relief stations beyond security checkpoints, others may only offer outdoor facilities accessible before check-in. In many cases, airports may lack designated pet relief zones altogether. Therefore, passengers should be advised to research each transit point in advance and plan accordingly, especially for long layovers or multi-leg journeys.

8. Disembarkation

Airlines should ensure passengers are fully informed of destination-specific regulations and post-arrival protocols. This includes remaining onboard until clearance is given to disembark and presenting their pets at a manned customs office or veterinary border control point during designated clearance hours where officials will verify the pet's identity, inspect the transport container, and review all required documentation, including pet passports, health certificates, vaccination records, and import permits. Pets must remain in secure, leak-proof containers until cleared by customs and veterinary officials, and any signs of distress or illness may prompt intervention.

Airlines should inform passengers in advance of these requirements and strongly encourage them to carry original, up-to-date paperwork to avoid delays, penalties, or border veterinary office or quarantine facility or being reshipped.

Passengers must be reminded that pets are not permitted to roam freely in terminals or lounges and must comply with airport-specific rules.

Passengers should also be advised that quarantine requirements vary by country and depend on the pet's origin, vaccination status, species and import requirements. In addition, there may be potential restrictions such as breed-specific entry bans and limits on the number of pets per traveler, and strongly recommend checking the latest regulations for their destination prior to departure.

In cases where a Pet Cabin Service (PETC) animal is denied entry, airlines must have a contingency plan in place to coordinate with local authorities and ground teams, ensuring the pet's safety and providing passengers with clear guidance and support.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE AIRLINE

- ☐ Inform passengers to remain on board until clearance is given to disembark
- ☐ Ensure pets remain in containers until cleared by customs/veterinary officials
- ☐ Advise passengers to follow customs requirements and/or present pets at manned customs office and/or veterinary border control point
- ☐ Alert passengers to quarantine rules based on origin and species
- ☐ Develop contingency plan for denied entry

Irregular Operation

Airlines should establish a clear procedure for managing in-cabin pet travel during irregular operations, including emergencies, flight delays, cancellations, diversions, and rerouting. These situations can significantly impact pet welfare and regulatory compliance, especially when transit times are extended or entry conditions change. The procedure should outline how to communicate with affected passengers, assess pet needs during

prolonged confinement, and coordinate with airport authorities or veterinary services if necessary. Airlines should also define protocols for rebooking, temporary holding arrangements, and documentation updates when rerouting involves new jurisdictions. In all cases, the pet's safety, containment, and legal status must be maintained, and passengers should be supported with timely information and assistance to minimize stress and disruption.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE AIRLINE

- ☐ Establish a documented procedure for handling in-cabin pets during irregular operations
- ☐ Notify passengers of delays or rerouting as early as possible
- ☐ Provide clear instructions and support to passengers during extended wait times
- ☐ Train staff on pet-specific protocols during delays, diversions, and emergencies
- ☐ Ensure coordination between ground staff, cabin crew, and customer service teams

Other pet categories in aircraft

Service animals and emotional support animals (ESAs) are subject to distinct travel protocols that differ from standard in-cabin pet policies.

Service animals, typically dogs trained to assist individuals with disabilities, are recognized under international and national regulations and may travel in the cabin free of charge, provided they meet documentation and behavior requirements. Emotional support animals, however, are not universally recognized and may be treated as pets depending on the airline and destination country. Airlines should clearly outline these distinctions in their accessibility or special assistance policies, which should be referenced on their official website or booking platforms. Passengers traveling with service animals or ESAs should be directed to submit required forms and documentation, such as veterinary health certificates, behavior attestations, or disability declarations, through designated booking channels or customer service teams well in advance of travel.

The release of [IATA's Guidance on Service Dogs](#), developed collaboratively with airlines, service dog groups, disability advocates, and regulators, is an important milestone. Created to address long-standing inconsistencies and confusion around service dogs, emotional support animals, and pets, the guidance brings much-needed clarity on documentation requirements, behaviour expectations, and boarding procedures across jurisdictions. This new guidance marks a meaningful step toward more consistent and accessible air travel and strengthens ongoing engagement with state regulators and ICAO as part of the global accessibility aviation strategy.

From the moment of booking at the point of origin to clearing customs at the destination, passengers traveling with pets in the cabin depend on airlines to deliver a seamless and well-coordinated experience. This requires effective communication across all operational departments, including booking agents, check-in staff, and cabin crew, to ensure consistency and clarity throughout the journey. Clear marking and proper labeling of pet containers help facilitate smooth handling and compliance with airline and regulatory standards. Where applicable, airlines should also provide post-arrival support to assist passengers and their pets in transitioning comfortably upon arrival.

Your insights can help shape safer, more standardized practices for in-cabin pet transport across the industry. If you'd like to contribute to the enhancement of these operational guidelines, please email the IATA Secretariat at larper@iata.org.