



FEATURE

Flying with Dogs *In-Cabin* (Australia)

TIPS FROM OWNERS Words: Michelle Hatch

Introduction: Virgin Australia has officially announced it: from October 16, 2025, dogs will finally be allowed in the cabin on select domestic flights. It's the first time in Australian aviation history this has been possible and it's a huge milestone for Aussie pet parents.



Flying with your dog in the cabin is finally taking off in Australia. We asked frequent US dog owners what actually works: from carrier training, under-seat carrier fit, food/water timing, calm routines, and where to find airport pet-relief areas.

The hardest part of your next holiday shouldn't be leaving your best friend behind.

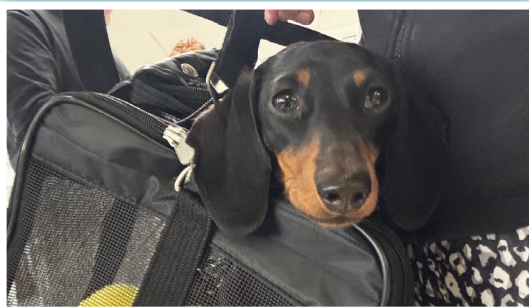
For Australian pet parents, **the arrival of in-cabin flights with Virgin Australia is a game-changer**; it means we no longer have to choose between a holiday and our dog's presence.

However, taking your small dog on their first flight (especially for destinations like the Gold Coast or Sunshine Coast) comes with a critical question: How do I ensure it's a smooth flight for both of us?

To answer this, **Michelle Hatch from Pawtripper** sourced real-world advice from experienced U.S. dog owners who fly in-cabin regularly. They shared their secrets for turning a daunting journey into a calm, predictable experience.

Meet the Travellers: Pup Passenger Flight Bios

This guide is based on first-hand interviews with U.S. dog owners who fly in-cabin regularly.



Siena: @sienainthecity (pictured left)

Breed / weight: Miniature Dachshund, 4.5 kg

- 1st Flight In-Cabin ~ LA to Dallas
- Vibe: calm, nap-loving, curious
- Carrier comfort: left out ~1 month; treat games made it a safe, happy place
- Pre-flight routine: early flight; no breakfast/water before a 3-hour hop
- Airport moment: delay jitters, a short terminal walk settled her
- In flight: silent; likely slept
- Top tip: acclimate to the bag weeks ahead

Miso @misopug (pictured right and above top)

Breed / Weight: Pug, 6.1 kg

12+ flights (LA to SF/PDX, LA to Paris)

- Vibe: chill, people-watcher, sturdy traveller
- Carrier comfort: month-long exposure; surprise treats inside; practice car rides
- Pre-flight routine: long walk; tries pet-relief area (hit-or-miss)
- In flight: sleeps most of the time; likes top open at the gate to see the action
- Gear tip: pick a carrier that attaches to your carry-on
- #1 advice: practice the carrier until it feels normal





FEATURE

How to Prepare a Dog for Flying (4-Week Plan)

To prepare a dog for in-cabin flying, make the carrier a safe, familiar space over four weeks – open at home, feed inside, practise short zip-ups and car rides, then do an under-seat rehearsal the week before you fly.

Every owner came back to the same idea: start early and make the carrier a safe, positive place. Siena's human left the carrier out for about a month and turned it into a "fun, safe place" with treat games. Miso's family layered in short car rides so the carrier "just felt normal" outside the house. Finn's person had the crate around for months, occasionally closing it briefly and even carrying him in it so being zipped wasn't brand new on flight day.

4-week carrier training plan: The best tip for in-cabin success

- Week 4: meals/treats in carrier; partial cover; aim for 20 – 30 minutes of calm hang-outs daily
- Week 3: short car rides with the carrier secured
- Week 2: add brief zip-ups (1 -3 minutes working up to 10-15 minutes) and reward those quiet exits!
- Week 1: under-seat fit rehearsal at home (make sure you've check airline dimensions)

Quick-start checklist

- Carrier out 30 days early: meals/treats inside
- Short car rides in the carrier (week 3)
- Zip-up practice to 10 – 15 minutes (week 2)
- Under-seat fit rehearsal (week 1)
- Flight day: long walk, light food, last potty, wipes + spare mat packed

What are Virgin's cabin carrier rules?

Bookings are now open for flights between Melbourne and the Sunshine Coast and Melbourne and the Gold Coast. Check Virgin's website for updates on dates and routes.

Pet requirements set by Virgin Australia from their website:

Your pet must:

- Be a small cat or dog, with a combined weight (pet + carrier) of no more than 8kg
- Be at least 8 weeks old
- Be up to date with vaccinations
- Have a valid veterinary certificate (if required)
- Not be a prohibited breed
- Not have given birth within the last 7 days
- Fit comfortably in an approved pet carrier under the seat in front of you
- Remain in their closed carrier at all times except during security screening or whilst using the animal relief areas
- Must not enter the airport terminal outside of the carrier



Your carrier must:

- Be an approved pet carrier (max dimensions: **44cm L x 26cm W x 28cm H**)
- Allow your pet to stand up, sit, turn around and lay down comfortably when the carrier is closed.
- **Have all but one opening secured with cable ties prior to arriving at the airport.**
- Be **soft-sided, well-ventilated and escape proof**
- Have a **leak proof base and be lined with an absorbent mat** (no puddles)

How it works

Virgin has designated specific seating areas for those travelling with their furry companions.

- As a pet-parent you'll be assigned one of our pet-friendly seats: **18A, 18F, 20A or 20F**.
- If you're travelling with friends or family who also have pets, you'll all need to sit separately in the designated pet-friendly seats.

Pet seating

- Your **pet must stay inside their carrier for the entire flight**.
- The **carrier must remain closed and stowed under the seat in front of you** until the aircraft has arrived and you're ready to disembark.

Keeping your pet secure

Pets must stay in their closed carrier at all times — both at the airport and onboard. The only exceptions are:

- When **passing through security screening**, or
- When **using an airport animal relief area**.



NEWS

Travel for cats

- Heads up cat lovers, currently cats can only fly on the Melbourne to Sunshine Coast route.

How to book your pet in cabin

To book, call our Guest Contact Centre on **13 67 89**. Be sure to book early because there's a limited number of pets spaces on each flight.

Important things to remember:

- You'll need to book more than 72 hours before travel
- You must check in in person with one of our Guest Services Agents no later than 75 minutes before departure
- Paws up! We have an introductory fee of \$149* per flight for your pet to join you in the cabin
- Only one pet per guest

What should my dog eat and drink before a flight?

Give a light meal 2–4 hours before departure, offer only small sips of water and take a final toilet break just before security; skip feeding during short flights.

Keep it light and planned. Miso gets an extra-long walk before the airport and a pit stop at the pet-relief area, though they noted it's hit-or-miss whether she'll actually go. Siena flew early in the morning and skipped breakfast for a short hop, which aligned nicely with her usual nap time.

Practical Tips

- Morning flights pair well with natural nap rhythms
- Keep food light for short sectors; bring only tiny treats
- Use pet-relief areas if available, but carry wipes/liners just in case & do a longer walk prior to airport arrival

Where are airport pet-relief areas on trial routes?

Melbourne (MEL) – T1 & T4: Assistance Animal Relief after security (see T1 & T4 Departures map):

https://www.melbourneairport.com.au/_assets/be08d7b0-97a1-02f9-2be6-a0c139c3c337/7f997e55-b656-4d1a-bc05-04f228520939/T4-Domestic-Departures.pdf

Gold Coast (OOL): Two pre-security Assistance Dog Zones – one along the northern walkway (north of check-in) and one near international arrivals (south end); both with toileting space and pet-friendly water:

https://www.goldcoastairport.com.au/accessibility/accessibility-overview/terminal-facilities?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Sunshine Coast (MCY): External relief area only – use it before security.

Keeping Dogs Calm on Planes (Owner Tips)

Calm dogs come from calm routines – train quiet time in the carrier, use familiar scents or pheromone spray, board early if allowed, and settle your dog with brief, pre-tested distractions.

If you're flying with a dog in the cabin for the first time, think "quiet crate at home = quiet dog on planes." Once the groundwork is done, many small dogs simply sleep. Siena "didn't make a sound" for the entire flight – classic morning nap energy. Finn's human called the whole experience "surprisingly easy" after consistent crate practice. Miso likes watching the world at the gate with the carrier top unzipped (when allowed), but once onboard they zip and settle Miso per crew instructions.

Calm-onboard habits

- Rehearse quiet crate time at home; reward resting, not fussing
- Brief visibility at the gate can help some dogs; onboard, keep the carrier zipped and follow the crew's directions
- Essential Calming Tools: For many owners, a long-lasting, low-odour chew or a portable lick mat is the ultimate distraction for take-off and landing. This helps focus nervous energy.

Is flying in-cabin right for my dog?

In-cabin flying suits small, well-trained, low-anxiety dogs; if your pup is over size/weight or still building confidence, consider a road trip or speak with your vet about alternatives. Not sure your pup's a good candidate? Read our vet advice for flying with dogs before you book.

Flying suits calm, well-trained dogs best. Finn's human puts it bluntly: "If your dog isn't generally a calm dog, they aren't going to like flying. Working with your dog to be well trained is the key." With a little prep, you'll be relaxing into the shared adventure and rewarded with memories together. Don't be afraid to just go for it!

FAQ: Flying with dogs in the cabin

Q: What are the best tips for flying with a dog in the cabin?

A: The best tips centre on early preparation and training. The most crucial tip is implementing the 4-Week Carrier Training Plan outlined in this guide, making the carrier a familiar, safe place long before your flight. You should also choose an airline-compliant carrier, keep pre-flight food light, and use long-lasting chews to manage anxiety during take-off and landing.

Q: How long can dogs stay in a carrier comfortably?

A: With training, many small dogs can rest quietly for 60–90 minutes. Build up gradually at home before you fly.

Q: Should I feed my dog before a short flight?

A: For 1–3 hour hops, most owners keep food light and offer a few kibbles at take-off/landing as a distraction.

Q: Is it different to travel with dogs on U.S. airplanes vs Australian flights?

A: The basics are the same. U.S. airports often have pet-relief areas; in Australia they may vary, so plan a last stop before security. Always check your airline's current rules for air travel with dogs.

Q: What's the best carrier feature to prioritise?

A: Airline-compliant size, a firm base, good ventilation and a way to secure it to your suitcase handle for easier airport movement.

Medical note: This article shares owner experiences, not medical advice. Always consult your veterinarian and check your airline's current pet policy before you book.

Check in with your vet

The risks of air travel can be higher for some animals because of changes in altitude, pressure in the cabin and changes in temperature. Before you fly, it's a good idea to visit your vet to make sure your pet is healthy and ready to travel.

Veterinary certificate

Virgin Australia may require a veterinary certificate for your pet; this is an official health report from a registered vet confirming your four-legged friend is ready to fly. It must be **issued within 14 days of your flight**.

A veterinary certificate is required if your pet:

- Has a medical condition or is unwell
- Has had surgery in the last 2 weeks
- Has recently sustained an injury
- Is a brachycephalic breed requires you to complete a specific (Brachycephalic Fit-To-Fly assessment form)
- Is between 8 weeks & 12 weeks of age
- Is over 12 years old
- Is pregnant
- Needs to be sedated on the recommendation of your vet

You can also ask your vet about:

- Preparing your pet for travel
- If your pet is on chronic medication, ensuring you have enough for the duration of travel, including possible delays
- Options for veterinary care (if required) at your destination



About the Author

PawTripper co-founder **Michelle Hatch** calls Sydney home and has built a life around one thing - making every adventure better with dogs. She leads our accommodation reviews and neighbourhood guides, with a focus on practical details (pet fees, room types, parks nearby) and honest, first-hand **advice for travelling with dogs**.

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