
Traveling with pets on commercial flights in Thailand

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Abstract

Traveling with pets on commercial flights in Thailand is becoming increasingly popular for domestic and international trips, whether for relocation, tourism, or participation in special events. However, travelers must comply with airline policies, government regulations, and logistical requirements. Domestic airlines such as Thai Airways and Bangkok Airways have specific regulations for pet transportation, including in-cabin travel, checked baggage, and cargo transport, with restrictions based on pet size, breed, and health conditions. Meanwhile, the Department of Livestock Development (DLD) oversees international pet travel requirements, including vaccinations, health certificates, and quarantine regulations. This study found that each airline has different pet transportation policies. Some airlines allow small pets in the cabin, while larger pets must travel in the cargo hold, which may pose risks due to stress and temperature fluctuations. Proper preparation—such as conducting pet health checks, securing necessary documents, and choosing airlines with reliable pet transport services—is crucial for ensuring safety and convenience. Establishing clear national standards will enhance traveler confidence and create new business opportunities for Thailand's aviation industry.

Keywords: Pet travel, commercial flights, Thai airlines, safety, pet health

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Introduction

In recent years, the trend of traveling with pets has gained global attention, including in Thailand. As pets become more integrated into families, many owners now wish to include them in vacations or relocations, Choi, Y. J., & Lee, S. (2020) creating a growing demand for pet travel on commercial flights. While traveling by air offers convenience and efficiency for pet owners, it presents unique challenges for airlines. Airlines must navigate regulatory requirements, ensure pet safety and comfort, and address concerns from pet owners.

In Thailand, airlines offer a range of pet travel options, including in-cabin, checked baggage, and cargo transport. Each option has its own set of requirements and potential risks, such as stress, health concerns, and logistical difficulties. This study aims to explore factors influencing the decision to choose commercial airlines for pet transportation in Thailand, providing valuable insights for service providers to enhance their offerings to meet customer needs. The study will focus on airline policies, airport infrastructure, and pet owner experiences to identify opportunities for improvement, ensuring a smoother and safer journey for pets and owners alike.

Pet Travel Options on Commercial Flights

1. In-Cabin Travel: Small pets may be allowed in the cabin under certain airline conditions, typically requiring: A weight limit (e.g., 7–10 kg, including the carrier). An IATA-approved pet carrier that fits under the seat. Advance booking and additional fees. Airlines like Bangkok Airways and Thai VietJet offer in-cabin travel options (Bangkok Airways, 2024; Thai VietJet, 2024).

2. Checked Baggage Transport: Medium-sized pets may travel in the cargo hold as checked baggage, with requirements including: An IATA-compliant pet crate. A temperature-controlled and pressurized environment. Thai Airways and Bangkok Airways offer this option (Thai Airways, 2024).

3. Cargo Transport: Larger pets or breeds with special restrictions (e.g., brachycephalic breeds) must travel as cargo, which involves coordination with the airline's cargo department for health documentation (Thai Airways Cargo, 2024).

Regulations and Documentation, traveling with pets requires compliance with airline policies, government regulations, and international standards, such as those from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which sets safety standards for live animal transport (IATA, 2024). The Department of Livestock Development (DLD) also mandates health certificates, vaccinations, and inspection of pet travel regulations (DLD, 2024). Pet owners must prepare the necessary documents, including.

1. Microchip implantation that complies with ISO 11784/11785 (DLD, 2024).
2. Veterinary Health Certificate issued by a licensed veterinarian within 10 days of departure (IATA, 2024).
3. Rabies Vaccination Certificate showing the pet received the vaccine at least 21 days before travel (DLD, 2024).
4. Import/Export Permit for international travel (DLD, 2024).

Breed Restrictions and Special Considerations, some airlines prohibit short-nosed (brachycephalic) breeds like Bulldogs or Pugs due to respiratory risks (IATA, 2024). Exotic pets, such as reptiles, may require additional permits (DNP, 2024). Service animals and Emotional Support Animals (ESA) may be exempt from certain regulations depending on the airline (Thai Airways, 2024).

Laws and Regulations, International Laws and Regulations ATA, Live Animals Regulations (LAR) set standards for transporting pets, Fitzgerald, L. (2021) including crate specifications and temperature control. World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) regulates animal movement to prevent zoonotic diseases like rabies. International Health Regulations (IHR) govern the spread of diseases between countries, including those spread by pet transport. Laws in Thailand, The Animal Epidemic Act B.E. 2558 requires health certificates for pets transported across provinces or internationally. The Air Transport Act B.E. 2497 outlines guidelines for transporting passengers and goods, including pets. Department of Livestock Development Regulations mandate health certificates, import permits, and vaccination records for pets entering or leaving Thailand. Parker, R. (2020) Airline and Destination Country Regulations, Airlines set their own policies regarding pet

size, breed, and required documentation. Some destination countries, such as Japan, Australia, and the UK, have strict pet import regulations, including quarantine and vaccination requirements.

Preparing Pets for Air Travel, preparing pets for air travel can be challenging, but proper preparation helps reduce stress and ensures their safety. Essential steps include:

1. Health Check: Take pets to a veterinarian for a health check-up and obtain a health certificate within 7–10 days before departure. Ensure vaccinations, especially rabies, are up to date.
2. Choosing the Right Travel Crate: The crate should meet IATA standards, allowing pets to stand, turn, and lie down comfortably.
3. Acclimating Pets to the Crate: Gradually get pets used to the crate before the trip with positive reinforcement.
4. Preparing Documents: Confirm the required documents, such as health certificates and vaccination records.
5. Food and Water: Feed pets 4–6 hours before the flight and provide water, but avoid overfeeding.
6. Travel Day: Arrive early at the airport for check-in and choose direct flights to minimize travel time.
7. Reducing Stress: Place familiar toys or clothing with your scent in the crate to comfort pets.
8. Checking Airline Policies: Research the airline's pet travel policies to ensure all requirements are met.

There are several airlines that allow pets to travel with passengers. However, their policies and requirements differ, including weight limits, pet sizes, and travel methods (in-cabin or cargo hold). Below are examples of airlines that provide such services.

Domestic Airlines in Thailand: 1. Thai Airways: Pets are allowed to transport in the cargo hold. Pets must be kept in standard-compliant carriers, and the combined weight of the pet and the carrier must not exceed the specified limit. Required documents include health certificates and vaccination records. 2. Bangkok Airways: Pets are allowed to only transport in the cargo hold.

Size and weight restrictions for pet carriers will be applied. 3. Thai Smile: Pets are not allowed to be in the cabin. Transportation of pets is available via cargo services.

International Airlines: Khan, M. I., & Rehman, A. (2022) 1. Singapore Airlines: Pets can only travel in the cargo hold. The airline offers a Pet Travel Program to ensure the care of pets during the journey. 2. Japan Airlines (JAL): Pets can travel in the cargo hold, with some routes allowing small pets in the cabin under the "Pet Cabin" service. 3. Korean Air: Small pets (dogs and cats) are allowed in the cabin if the combined weight of the pet and carrier does not exceed 7 kg. Larger pets must travel in the cargo hold. 4. Emirates Airlines: Pets are not allowed in the cabin, except for falcons. Other pets must be transported via the cargo hold. 5. Air France: Small pets (dogs and cats) are allowed in the cabin if the combined weight of the pet and carrier does not exceed 8 kg. Larger pets must be transported in the cargo hold.

Pet transportation by air in Thailand is available at various airports offering both domestic and international services, depending on the airline and the airport's policies. Below are examples of major airports in Thailand that provide pet transportation services:

1. Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK) The primary airport for both domestic and international pet transportation, with airlines like Thai Airways, EVA Air, Qatar Airways, and other international carriers offering pet transport services.

2. Don Mueang Airport (DMK) is one of the airports in Bangkok. The airport offers a service of Low-cost airlines such as AirAsia and Nok Air that offer a service of pet transportation services on select routes.

3. Chiang Mai Airport (CNX) is a major airport in the Northern region. The airport provides both domestic and international pet transport, especially on routes between Chiang Mai and Bangkok, as well as neighboring countries.

4. Phuket Airport (HKT) is a major airport in the Southern region offering pet transport services on both international and domestic routes.

5. Hat Yai Airport (HDY) is an airport in the Southern region. The airlines in this airport offers domestic and international pet transport services, particularly to ASEAN countries.

6. U-Tapao Airport (UTP) is an airport in the Eastern region. Some airlines offer pet transportation services on both international and domestic routes. Popular Routes for Pet

Transportation: Domestic routes such as Bangkok (BKK, DMK) to Chiang Mai (CNX), Phuket (HKT), and Hat Yai (HDY) are commonly used.

The following are information of 3 commercial airlines in Thailand that allow pets on board.

1. Nok Air. The pet owners can transport your pet with Nok Air in Cargo, which operates under the standards and regulations of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and is authorized by the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (CAAT).

Conditions for transporting goods and pets: The weight must not exceed 20-25 kilograms. The cage must not be hazardous materials and not violate safety measures or pose risks to air transport. The weight and size that exceed the aircraft's capacity, will not be accepted. Live animals must not include venomous species, aggressive or dangerous dogs, or certain dog breeds. Dog breeds prohibited from transportation by Nok Air (19 breeds): Pug, French Bulldog, English Bulldog, American Bulldog/Bully, Brussels Terrier, English Toy Spaniel, Japanese Spaniel, Pekingese, Tibetan Spaniel, Shar Pei, Lhasa Apso, Boston Terrier, Boxer, Dogue de Bordeaux, Chow Chow, Mastiff breeds, American Pit Bull Terrier, Pit Bull, Staffordshire Bull Terrier. Pet crate requirements: Must be made of hard plastic per IATA standards. Must have a single, secure door to prevent escape or claw injuries. Screws must be tightly secured around the crate. The pet owners must bring their pets to the Cargo at least two hours before departure.

The crate must have ventilation on more than one side, be clearly identifiable as a pet crate, and have moisture-absorbing material at the bottom. The crate must have enough space for the pet to turn around comfortably. There must be a securely attached drip water bottle for dogs, cats, or rabbits. The damaged crates will not be accepted, as determined by airline staff.

Service limitation: Nok Air only offers pet transportation only on Boeing 737-800 aircraft for domestic routes. Space availability may be limited on certain flights.

Cost: Pet transportation fees start at 440 THB.

2. Thai Airways offers pet transport as Checked Baggage (AVIH), adhering to IATA's Live Animals Regulations (LAR). Pets are placed in a special cargo compartment designed with temperature control. Cages must be made of fiberglass, metal, hard plastic, welded metal mesh,

hardwood, or plywood. Routes not accepting pets as Checked Baggage (AVIH): Flights to Auckland, Denpasar, Dubai, Hong Kong, and London. Flights to/from Australia (Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney).

Flights operated with Airbus A320 aircraft. Dog breeds not accepted by Thai Airways (34 breeds): Includes breeds such as Affenpinscher, American Bully, American Pit Bull Terrier, Boston Terrier, Boxer (all breeds), Bulldog, Chinese Pug, Chow Chow, English Bulldog, French Bulldog, Lhasa Apso, Mastiff (all breeds), Pekingese, Pug, Shar Pei, Shih Tzu, Tibetan Spaniel, and others.

Cost: Free for service dogs assisting visually or hearing-impaired passengers. Medium or large dogs cannot sit with regular passengers and must travel as Checked Baggage. Contact Thai Airways at least 48 hours in advance to arrange transportation. Additional fees apply per air freight rates.

3. Bangkok Airways provides pet transport services, with pets placed in temperature-controlled cargo compartments. Conditions for pet transport: Only dogs and cats are accepted. Notify the airline via Call Center or ticket office at least 24 hours before departure. For international routes, provide complete documentation (import/export permits, veterinary health certificate, rabies vaccination certificate, pet passport). Pet crates must meet safety standards and be sturdy. Remove collars, vests, harnesses, clothes, and GPS devices from pets. Domestic services are available only on routes to/from Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Samui, using AT72 aircraft. Pets must be at least 8 weeks old. For international routes, pets are accepted on all routes except for Maldives, which only accepts cats.

Prohibited dog breeds includes breeds such as American Bulldog, American Staffordshire Terrier, American Pit Bull Terrier, Boston Terrier, Boxer, Bulldog, Chinese Pug, Chow Chow, English Bulldog, French Bulldog, Lhasa Apso, Mastiff (all breeds), Pekingese, Pug, Shar Pei, Shih Tzu, Tibetan Spaniel, and others.

Cost: Domestic pet transport is charged as excess baggage at 180 THB per kilogram per flight. For international routes, rates vary by region.

Important Information for the pet owners who want to transport pets: 1. Types of Transportation Cabin: For small pets that meet the airline's weight and size criteria. Cargo Hold: For larger pets or specific breeds with restrictions. 2. Required Documents Health Certificate.

Vaccination Records. Microchip documentation (for some airlines or countries). 3. Advance Booking Book pet travel in advance as most airlines limit the number of pets per flight. 4. Choosing a Travel Carrier The carrier must meet IATA standards and be appropriately sized for the pet.

Traveling with pets on commercial flights in Thailand involves a careful balance of preparation, regulation compliance, and airline policies. Understanding the factors influencing pet transportation can help improve safety, convenience, and overall travel experience for both pets and owners. This study emphasizes the importance of clear guidelines and informed decision-making for a smooth journey, benefiting both the aviation industry and pet travelers.



Figure 1. Examples of Cat Carriers for Travel



Figure 2. Examples of Dog Carriers for Travel

A Framework of Pet Travel on Commercial Flight in Thailand is as follow

This study purpose a framework that is consisted of four key components: policy and regulation, infrastructure and operations, pet and owner perspectives, and best practices and recommendations. Each component provides a structured approach to analyzing the subject.

1. Policy and Regulation Scope: Examine the existing rules and guidelines of Thai airlines regarding pet transportation. Review international aviation standards (e.g., IATA Live Animals Regulations) and their applicability in Thailand. Key Questions: What are the requirements for pets traveling in the cabin vs. the cargo hold? How do Thai airline policies align with global standards? Expected Output: A comparison of regulations across Thai airlines and international benchmarks.

2. Infrastructure and Operations Scope: Assess the readiness of Thai airports and airlines to accommodate pet travel. Evaluate the conditions for pets in the cabin and cargo hold (e.g., temperature control, ventilation, handling). Key Questions: Are Thai airports equipped with facilities to ensure the safety and comfort of pets? How are pets handled during boarding, transit, and arrival? Expected Output: An evaluation of operational gaps and opportunities for improvement.

3. Pet and Owner Perspectives Scope: Gather insights from pet owners about their experiences, concerns, and expectations when traveling with pets. Consider the health and well-being of pets during flights. Key Questions: What challenges do pet owners face during booking, check-in, and transportation? How does air travel impact pets physically and emotionally? Expected Output. A comprehensive understanding of owner and pet needs and preferences.

4. Best Practices and Recommendations Scope: Identify successful practices from international airlines that offer exceptional pet-friendly services. Propose actionable recommendations for improving pet travel experiences in Thailand. Key Questions: What innovations can Thai airlines adopt to enhance pet safety and comfort? How can airlines leverage pet travel services to gain a competitive edge? Expected Output: A set of recommendations for policymakers, airlines, and airport authorities to implement. -Expected Outcome By using this framework, the study aims to provide a well-rounded analysis of pet travel on commercial flights in Thailand, ultimately leading to improved policies, better infrastructure, and enhanced travel

experiences for pets and their owners. This framework will also help airlines capitalize on the growing demand for pet-friendly services.

Factors Influencing Pet Travel on Commercial Flights in Thailand

Several factors influence the ability to travel with pets on commercial flights in Thailand. These factors affect pet safety, airline policies, and overall travel feasibility. The most significant influences include government regulations, airline policies, pet health and breed considerations, travel duration, and pet owner preparedness.

1. Government Regulations

The study on traveling with pets on commercial flights in Thailand reveals that strict adherence to airline policies and government regulations is crucial for a smooth journey. The Department of Livestock Development (DLD) enforces strict health and documentation requirements for pet travel. Pets must have microchip identification, a valid rabies vaccination certificate, a veterinary health certificate, and import/export permits for international travel. Failure to comply can result in travel restrictions or quarantine (DLD, 2024). Therefore, pet owners must comply with the requirements set by the DLD and IATA regarding pet health, documentation, and transportation methods (DLD, 2024, IATA, 2024).

2. Airline Policies and Travel Methods

Each airline has different policies on pet transportation. Some allow in-cabin travel for small pets, while others require pets to travel as checked baggage or cargo. Airlines such as Thai Airways, Bangkok Airways, and Thai VietJet have specific requirements such as weight limits, crate requirements, and additional fees, influencing how and whether a pet can travel (Thai Airways, 2024, Bangkok Airways, 2024, Thai VietJet, 2024). Particularly, pet owners traveling with service animals or emotional support animals (ESA) should verify airline-specific policies for exemptions and special accommodations (IATA, 2024, DNP, 2024).

3. Pet Health and Breed Restrictions

Pet health is a critical factor, as not all animals can safely endure air travel. Brachycephalic (short-nosed) breeds like Bulldogs and Pugs face a higher risk of respiratory issues due to cabin

pressure changes, leading some airlines to restrict their travel in the cargo hold (IATA, 2024). Additionally, pets must be in good health, as sick or unfit animals may not be permitted to travel (DLD, 2024).

4. Travel Duration and Environmental Factors

The length of the flight, climate conditions, and seasonal temperatures impact pet travel safety. Long-haul flights may require extra preparations, including hydration, feeding schedules, and breaks during layovers. Extreme temperatures at departure or arrival locations can also affect whether airlines allow pets to travel in cargo (IATA, 2024).

5. Owner Preparedness and Documentation

The findings emphasize the importance of advanced preparation, including securing necessary documents such as microchip identification, vaccination records, health certificates, and import/export permits. Effective coordination with airlines and authorities helps ensure a safe and hassle-free pet travel experience. The pet owners' ability to plan ahead, understand the airline policies, and prepare necessary the documents greatly influence a safe travel. Booking in advance, choosing the right pet carrier, and ensuring proper vaccinations are essential steps. Failure to meet airline and government requirements can lead to denied boarding, fines, or quarantine upon arrival (DLD, 2024).



Figure 3. Pet transportation

Discussion and Conclusion

Traveling with pets on commercial flights in Thailand is influenced by various factors, including government regulations, airline policies, pet health, travel duration, and owner preparedness. Pet owners must carefully research airline policies, ensure compliance with legal requirements, and consider their pets' health and comfort to ensure a smooth and stress-free journey. The process of traveling with pets on commercial flights involves navigating a range of factors that directly impact the safety and well-being of pets. These factors include government regulations, airline policies, and international standards. The Department of Livestock Development (DLD) in Thailand enforces health and vaccination standards for pets, while the International Air Transport Association (IATA) provides global guidelines for the safe transport of live animals (DLD, 2024; IATA, 2024). The findings indicate that each airline in Thailand has different policies regarding pet transportation, with variations in weight limits, crate specifications, and available travel options. Airlines like Thai Airways, Bangkok Airways, and Thai VietJet each set their own guidelines, making it crucial for pet owners to verify policies in advance (Thai Airways, 2024; Bangkok Airways, 2024; Thai VietJet, 2024). One major challenge for pet owners is deciding on the appropriate travel method—whether in-cabin, checked baggage, or cargo. Breed restrictions, particularly for brachycephalic (short-nosed) breeds, further complicate travel plans due to their higher susceptibility to respiratory distress during flights (IATA, 2024). Additionally, proper documentation is essential; pets must have microchip identification, valid rabies vaccination certificates, veterinary health certificates, and import/export permits for international travel. Failure to comply with these requirements can result in delays, quarantine, or denied boarding (DLD, 2024). Furthermore, service animals and emotional support animals (ESA) may receive special exemptions, but these policies vary widely among airlines and destinations (Thai Airways, 2024). While Thailand has established clear regulations for pet travel, there is room for improvement. Enhancing the documentation process, expanding pet-friendly flight options, and raising awareness among pet owners are key areas for growth. Future developments could focus on improving safety measures for at-risk breeds and providing better accommodations for pets on long-haul flights. Overall, thorough preparation, early communication with airlines, and adherence to regulations are essential to ensure a successful and stress-free journey with pets.

Suggestions for Pet Owners

Traveling with pets on commercial flights in Thailand requires careful planning and compliance with regulations set by airlines, the Department of Livestock Development (DLD), and international standards such as those from the International Air Transport Association (IATA). Pet owners must ensure their pets meet all health and documentation requirements, including microchip implantation, up-to-date vaccinations, veterinary health certificates, and necessary import/export permits (DLD, 2024; IATA, 2024). Each airline has its own policies regarding in-cabin travel, checked baggage, and cargo transport, with specific restrictions on weight limits and pet carrier specifications. Airlines like Thai Airways, Bangkok Airways, and Thai VietJet have clear guidelines for pet travel, which should be reviewed well in advance (Thai Airways, 2024; Bangkok Airways, 2024; Thai VietJet, 2024). Pet owners are advised to check airline websites for detailed policies and to book pet travel services early.

Certain breeds, particularly brachycephalic dogs and cats, may face travel restrictions due to health risks, and exotic pets require additional permits from the Department of National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation (DNP) (IATA, 2024; DNP, 2024). Additionally, service animals and emotional support animals (ESA) may have exemptions under specific airline policies (Thai Airways, 2024). Smith, J. T., & Jones, R. A. (2021) To ensure a smooth journey, pet owners should carefully review airline policies, secure necessary permits, and properly prepare their pets for travel. Early communication with airlines and relevant authorities is crucial to ensure the safety and comfort of pets throughout the journey. Moreover, pet owners may want to consider travel insurance plans that provide affordable premiums and comprehensive coverage, especially for international travel.

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