

# BEING RESPONSIBLE PET PARENTS IN EUROPE

**F**or many of us, a stressful aspect of moving to Europe is the transportation of our four-legged family members. I worried the entire flight to Germany about my dog and cat, but they were both eagerly awaiting us at baggage claim, no worse for the wear. After a thorough examination of our pets' records by customs, we started the journey to our new home.

A few months later, I was out running errands on the economy with Jolene, my Labrador mix, along for the ride — her head sticking out the window, tongue and ears flapping in the breeze. Suddenly, I was stopped by the German police and issued a citation because Jolene was in the vehicle unrestrained. I was unaware of this law. After paying the ticket, I continued on my way with my first task to locate a pet store and purchase a dog seatbelt, something that seemed quite foreign to me.

While my experience with German pet regulations was nothing more than an inconvenience, this is not always the case. Knowing your host country's laws and courtesies related to pet ownership ensures that you and your pet have a safe and enjoyable experience while living overseas.

## HOST COUNTRY REGULATIONS

Regulations regarding pets vary by country, but the greatest restrictions are related to dogs, cats and ferrets. The most common requirements for pets in European countries are certificates of health, international microchips (ISO) and rabies vaccinations. Additional vaccinations may also be required, especially if you plan to board your pet.

Many laws govern pet care, especially for dogs. In Germany, dogs are not allowed to be in a crate for more than two hours per day, and they are to receive two hours of interaction, twice per day from owners.

Many European regions require that dogs are registered; this is a



common practice in Germany and the Tuscany region of Italy. Register your pet with the veterinarian on your installation within 14 days of arriving or obtaining a pet.

Before traveling with your pet to other European countries, make sure to obtain a pet passport and review breed restrictions and local laws. For more information about pet regulations in your host country, or to obtain a pet passport, contact your local vet clinic.

## TRAVELING TO YOUR NEXT DUTY STATION

Preparing to PCS can be an overwhelming experience, especially for an international move. But in the midst of packed boxes and paperwork, remember your pets! Documentation is required for both your host country and airline. All dogs and cats traveling to the United States, even expatriates, must have proof of current rabies vaccination, and the vaccination must have been administered at least 30 days prior to travel. Pets arriving with vaccinations less than 30 days prior, or pets too young to receive the vaccination, must complete a confinement agreement for 30 days following vaccination. Locations that

are free of rabies, such as Hawaii, Guam, Japan and the United Kingdom, have very strict pet importation requirements that should be planned for. Airlines typically require a certificate of health to be completed by a veterinarian fewer than 10 days prior to departure. Additionally, specifications regarding the type and size of kennel, labeling for the container, check-in requirements and air temperature can impact your pet's travel.

Shipping fees and breed restrictions must also be considered. Several breeds are restricted on many airlines as well as in many European countries. Research your pet's breed before you begin your travel preparations.

Furthermore, the cost to ship your pet may have increased since your arrival in Europe, so give yourself adequate time to research alternatives. Contact your local veterinary clinic and the airline well in advance to ensure that you and your pet meet all of the necessary requirements for travel. Also consider pet-shipping services such as Pet-Air, Happy Tails, Inc. and other airline services.

If you cannot afford to pay for pet shipping, apply for a grant through SPCA International's Operation Military Pets program. You must undergo an approval process, and there is a waitlist. Visit [www.spcai.org](http://www.spcai.org).

It is your responsibility to make sure your pets arrive safely to their next home. Too often, those PCSing do not make arrangements in time or simply decide that taking pets along is too much of a hassle. These pets are abandoned with the prospect of life on the streets or in a shelter, creating a burden and leaving a bad impression on your host nation. This problem has led many European shelters to prohibit pet adoption by Americans and caused the Pentagon to seek greater authority to punish servicemembers for pet neglect or cruelty.

If circumstances arise that keep you from taking your pets, please make every effort to find them a good home. They deserve the best care and consideration possible. ■

