

Flying with Furry Friends

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Moving to a new country can be difficult; moving to a new country without a family pet can be downright traumatic. Though there is no shortage of soi dogs and cats in need of a good home, if you already have a furry friend with whom you would like to share your Thai adventure you are free to have them join you. You will, however, have to complete some paperwork and follow certain procedures related to their health.



Before your pet boards a flight to Thailand, it must have a number of vaccinations in order to ensure that it is not carrying specified diseases. Both cats and dogs must have a rabies vaccination at least 21 days, but not more than 1 year, prior to departure. The original certificate must accompany your pet on its journey, and must specify the complete vaccination information including: manufacturer, name of the vaccine, batch/serial number, date of vaccination, and date of re-vaccination. In addition, a standard vaccination certificate is also required to show that your pet is inoculated against other common diseases.

For dogs, those vaccinations are Distemper, Hepatitis, Parvovirus, and Leptospirosis. The general vaccinations required for cats are Calicivirus, Panleukopenia, and Rhinotracheitis. As with the rabies vaccination, these general vaccinations must be done at least 21 days and not more than 1 year, before departure.

Not more than 10 days before leaving your country, a clinical health examination by a licensed veterinarian will need to be completed and an official international health certificate issued that among other things describes the age, breed, sex, color and overall health status of your pet. This certificate must be further endorsed by an authorized veterinary official of the government of the exporting country. I confess that I was once exporting a dog from a developing country to North America and the dog began vomiting prodigiously underneath my chair in the government vet's office at the exact moment the vet was attesting to the dog's flawless health; it was just something bad the dog ate, but don't expect

that same lack of vigilance when getting your pet's health certified. Finally, your pet must have resided in the exporting country for no less than 6 months prior to the departure date.

Upon arrival at Suvarnabhumi and before you can get your pet into a taxi and to its new home, an Import Permit is required from the Thailand Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives - Department of Livestock Development. It should be applied for in advance, to avoid having your pet quarantined at the airport following its long flight. This permit is valid for 45 days. The Ministerial authority will examine the animal disease status of the country of origin before issuing the permit. Note that if you are bringing your pet as extra baggage on your flight, rather than on a different flight, you may find that in practice some of the requirements set out here are not always enforced. Anecdotes vary.

Presently, there are no quarantine restrictions on household pets coming into Thailand unless from a country that is reported to have widespread outbreaks of certain diseases that could be transferred to local animals, but these are rare cases.

Finally, you will have reached the last step in the process: the Thai Customs Department at Suvarnabhumi. After the officials check over the validity and accuracy of all your documents, including an Import Entry Form that must be filled out at the time of arrival, you must then pay an import duty for your pet to enter the Kingdom. However, for pets staying in Thailand less than 6 months, import duties are waived, but you will need to fill out a guarantee form and pay a deposit at the airport to ensure that your pet makes its flight back home.

For pets staying longer than 6 months, import duties are assessed based upon the size and pedigree of the animal along with the amount paid to ship the animal to Thailand as shown on the Airway bill that must be submitted to the Customs official. We have heard that in practice the assessed fees may "vary", particularly if you don't speak Thai and are not familiar with the bureaucratic process. This sort of negotiation can be a frustrating experience at the best of times. When you are waiting to be reunited with your beloved and very hot and tired pet, it may be intolerable. Also, you will want to have ensured that your pet arrived early enough in the day for these procedures to be completed on the day of arrival. Failing that your pet will spend the night at Suvarnabhumi. It is for these reasons, among others, that many people decide to use a professional pet-shipping company to facilitate the transport of their pet to another country.

Although it is considerably more expensive than doing it yourself, it is also, for the most part, worry free. If you pick the right company they will have thought through some of the issues and logistics that you may not have. For example, most flights from the North American west coast fly heading west, with one stop-over in Asia, before arriving in Thailand in the evening, when it may be too late to complete the import procedures. Yet when we flew a dog to Thailand from the North American west coast using a professional transporter, they routed the dog through Amsterdam, where it (allegedly) got a walk and spent an overnight in the company's kennel before embarking, refreshed I'm sure, on another flight that arrived in Bangkok in the morning. Having shipped pets by myself and using the services of a professional pet-shipping company, I can attest to the value of the latter. There is no guarantee that your pet will like his or her new home, but at least they will arrive there safely.

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