

The Top 10 Most Pet-Friendly Airports in the U.S. [Study]



BY [CHRISTY RODRIGUEZ](#) - UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 18, 2019

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Traveling with a pet can be stressful, whether it is a service animal or not.

If you have a large dog, you have to deal with the anxiety that comes with placing your pet in the cargo hold.

With a service animal or small dog that can fly with you in the cabin, you may have other concerns. Will there be any issues at security? Where can the dog relieve itself once you get into the terminal?

Luckily, some airports understand the stress that comes with [traveling with your pet](#), and are setting up **amazing areas for you both to relax before your flight**.

We did our best to point out the airports that really exceeded expectations, so read on to see how we came up with our rankings!

TABLE OF CONTENTS [HIDE]

- › [Analysis Methodology](#)
- › [Top 10 Most Pet-Friendly Airports in the U.S.](#)
 - › [John F. Kennedy International Airport \(JFK\): 10](#)
 - › [Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport \(ATL\): 9.5](#)
 - › [Sky Harbor International Airport \(PHX\): 9](#)
 - › [Los Angeles International Airport \(LAX\): 8.5](#)
 - › [Minneapolis St.Paul International Airport \(MSP\): 8.25](#)
 - › [Austin-Bergstrom International Airport \(AUS\): 7.75](#)
 - › [Reno-Tahoe International Airport \(RNO\): 7.5](#)
 - › [Dallas Love Field Airport \(DAL\): 7.25](#)
 - › [Denver International Airport \(DEN\): 7](#)
 - › [Dallas/Ft. Worth International Airport \(DFW\): 6.75](#)
- › [All The Rest](#)
- › [Best Practices for Air Travel With Your Pet](#)
 - › [At TSA Screening](#)
 - › [In the Airport](#)
 - › [On Your Flight](#)
- › [Final Thoughts](#)

Analysis Methodology

Once found on the outskirts of the airport, pet relief stations are popping up “post-security” thanks to a [federal regulation](#) requiring airports (that serve over 10,000 passengers a year) to have pet relief areas in each terminal for service animals.

For this reason, we didn’t award any points for merely *complying* with service animal portion of this federal regulation. Some airports have **extended the use of pet relief stations** to law enforcement dogs, emotional support animals, and transit pets, and we made a point to note these.

In addition, while many airports have pet relief areas that are small patches of fake grass in hidden corners of terminals, others have **pet parks with real grass**, faux fire hydrants, and space to run and play.

We awarded airports with indoor relief areas a maximum of 5 points based on quality of amenities.

For other pet-friendly amenities, we awarded a maximum of 4.5 points. An example of this includes dog parks that are fully-fenced in areas with water fountains and lots of space to run.

Our last factor was onsite boarding or daycare facilities, which earned .5 a point. If you’re not traveling with your animal, but want the flexibility to drop them off right before your flight and pick them up as soon as possible, these facilities offer 24/7 services for your convenience and a shuttle to the terminal.

Top 10 Most Pet-Friendly Airports in the U.S.

Here are our picks for those airports that make travel with our pets as easy as possible — and dare we say even a little enjoyable?

TOP 10 PET FRIENDLY AIRPORTS



| | | |
|------------|--|-------------|
| JFK | John F. Kennedy International Airport | 10 |
| ATL | Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport | 9.5 |
| PHX | Sky Harbor International Airport | 9 |
| LAX | Los Angeles International Airport | 8.5 |
| MSP | Minneapolis-St.Paul International Airport | 8.25 |

| | | |
|-------------|--|------------|
| 7.75 | Austin-Bergstrom International Airport | AUS |
| 7.5 | Reno-Tahoe International Airport | RNO |
| 7.25 | Dallas Love Field Airport | DAL |
| 7 | Denver International Airport | DEN |
| 6.75 | Dallas/Ft. Worth International Airport | DFW |

WE RANKED THESE AIRPORTS OUT OF 10 WITH POINTS BEING AWARDED FOR POST-SECURITY RELIEF AREAS AS WELL AS QUALITY OF PET-FRIENDLY AMENITIES AVAILABLE.

UPGRADEDPOINTS™

1. John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK): 10

JFK is definitely the airport to beat when it comes to pet-friendly amenities. **Multiple terminals have access to post-security pet relief areas**, so you're never far away from one without having to leave the secured area of the airport.

Terminal 5 has a 4,000 square foot outdoor garden patio (aka, the “wootop”) that's open to all passengers and their pets. Located after security, the large terrace features tables and chairs with seating for up to 50.



brennacwhalen

T5 Rooftop

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The ARK at JFK provides animal care and veterinary services for pets, horses, birds, livestock, and exotic animals. Located off of the runway, the ARK provides 24/7 access, ensuring the safe handling and efficient delivery of ALL of your animals.

JFK Terminal 8 has a service animal/pet relief area located post-security. In addition, [American Airlines](#) has installed a pet relief area at the terminal's departures level that includes a 1,000-square-foot patch of natural grass for your pets to stretch their legs before or after a long flight.



daisynthebigcity
T5 Rooftop Lounge

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Terminal 4 has a post-security 70-square-foot pet bathroom complete with artificial grass with built-in drainage, a replica fire hydrant, wash sink, bag dispenser, and waste receptacle.

BOTTOM LINE:

There are multiple outdoor spaces set up especially for you and your pet at JFK! When it comes to our furry friends, this airport really has it all.

2. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport ([ATL](#)): 9.5

To accommodate guide dogs AND passenger pets, **ATL provides indoor post-security relief areas in every concourse** that help make your trip as seamless as possible.



rick_james_the_dog

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport

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In addition, there's a 1,000-square-foot dog park located pre-security. This fully fenced-in park offers biodegradable bags along with benches. An additional pet relief area is located on the arrivals level of the International Terminal as well.

Pet Paradise offers an onsite 24/7 boarding facility, so if you have to leave your pets behind you won't be away from them any longer than absolutely necessary.

3. Sky Harbor International Airport ([PHX](#)): 9

Sky Harbor has 9 areas for pets to stretch their legs, drink water, and take potty breaks, 3 of which are located post-security.

The remaining pre-security areas are **fully gated and located outside of Terminals 2, 3, and 4**. To make the areas a little more special, they're even decorated with native plants!



abbythetherapydog
Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport

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4. Los Angeles International Airport (LAX): 8.5

There are 8 indoor animal-relief stations at LAX! These are all located beyond security screening checkpoints in each of the terminals.

In addition to the indoor stations, there are 3 outdoor stations. This brings the **total number of pet relief stations at LAX to 11, more than any other U.S. airport.**

5. Minneapolis St.Paul International Airport (MSP): 8.25

Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport maintains pet and service animal relief areas at both terminals. **Terminals 1 and 2 each house 1 post-security indoor pet area** featuring faux grass, a fire hydrant, and a sink. There are 2 outdoor areas as well.

Located on property, Now Boarding is an affiliate of the Animal Humane Society. They provide boarding, training, and grooming services for your pet! Even better, they will pick you up from the terminal and return you to your pet and vehicle for free.

6. Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS): 7.75

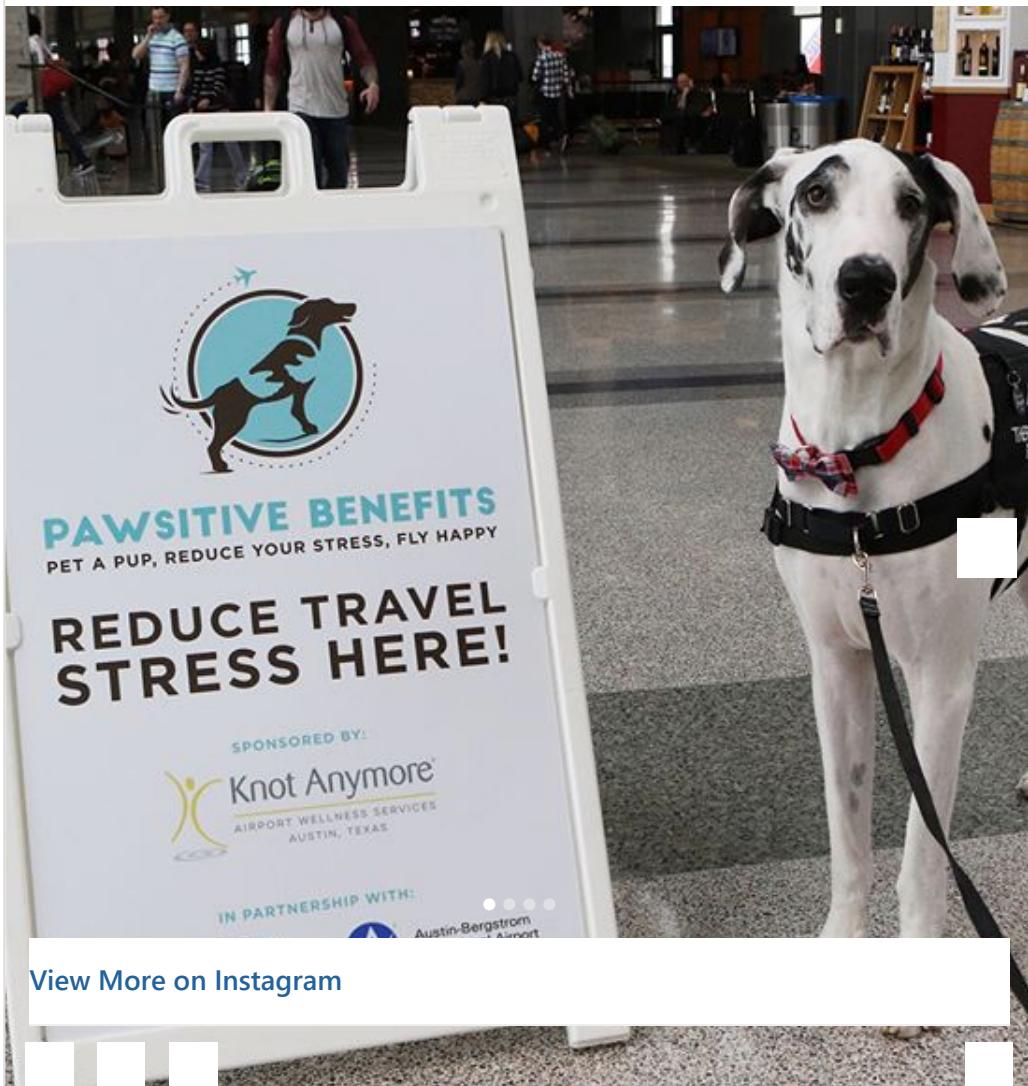
Austin's airport has a "Dog Walk" that is landscaped and lighted, and includes a pet drinking fountain, dog waste pick-up bag, and trash bins. While this is located pre-security, there is also a pet relief area in the outdoor patio post-security as well!

In addition, AUS teams up with a local wellness company to offer a quarterly event where you can **pet therapy dogs in the airport**. Hopefully, you're lucky enough that your trip can coincide with this!



ausairport
Austin Bergstrom International Airport

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Bark and Zoom is located on airport property. They will valet your car (for a very reasonable rate!) in a covered parking lot and shuttle you over to the terminal. This facility is equipped with outdoor play yards and dogs-only swimming pools – basically a vacation for your pet while you are on vacation!

7. Reno-Tahoe International Airport (RNO): 7.5

Reno-Tahoe International Airport has opened an indoor pet relief area located post-security on the second floor of the terminal.

In addition, the airport has **2 outdoor dog parks** to serve their 4-legged passengers. The 2 “Bark Parks” are fully fenced with ADA accessibility, running water, mutt mitts to clean up after dogs, a fire hydrant, and a canopy for inclement weather.

In addition, RNO offers a super popular Paws for Passengers program that features 25 service dog teams to help welcome and send off passengers throughout the terminal.

8. Dallas Love Field Airport (DAL): 7.25

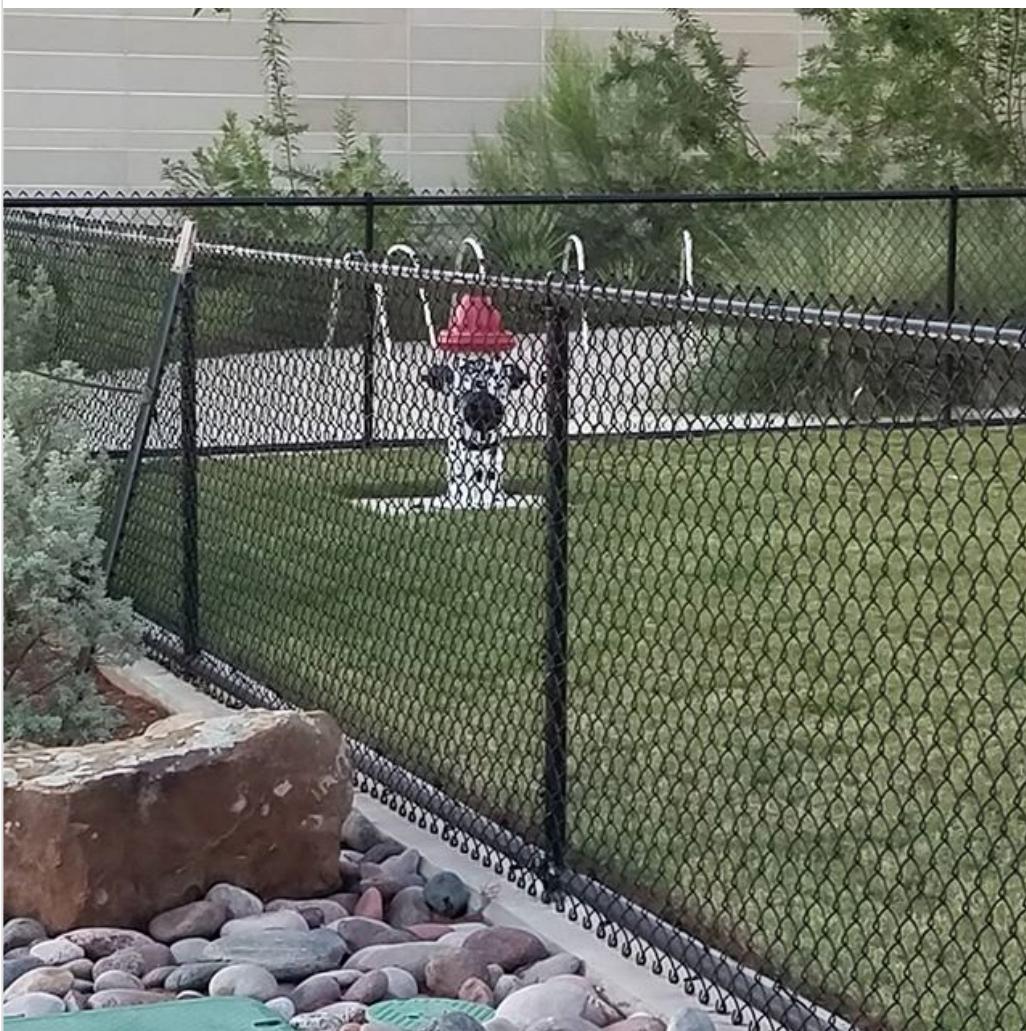
The Pet Park at Dallas Love Field is large enough for any animal to stretch, run, and relieve themselves. It's located at the **end of the Baggage Claim Hall on the upper level**, and there is a smaller pet relief area on the lower level as well.



dallaslovefield

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There is also a small animal relief area inside the secure portion of the terminal.

9. Denver International Airport (DEN): 7

Denver's pet relief rooms are conveniently located post-security in the **centers of concourses A, B, and C**. Each features turf flooring with a drainage system and an artificial rock.

To bring the outdoors in, each room has a wall mural featuring Colorado's great outdoors. There is also a pre-security outdoor pet relief area.

Paradise 4 Paws, a premium resort for dogs and cats, is an on-airport pet boarding facility featuring more than 25,000 square feet of space with 24-hour service that includes day and overnight pet stays.



beatricethedenverfrenchie

1,095 followers

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10. Dallas/Ft. Worth International Airport (DFW): 6.75

There are 4 designated pet relief areas located inside security, as well as multiple areas for pet relief outside entry doors on the lower level. While the spaces aren't

anything special, the **sheer number of relief areas can be a comfort to pet owners!**

If you plan on staying overnight at DFW or need overnight care for your pet while you're away, Paradise 4 Paws is a premier pet resort for cats and dogs located outside security near the airport. Paradise 4 Paws is staffed 24 hours, so pets can be picked up and dropped off any time day or night.

All The Rest

The “Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Air Travel” mandate went in to effect in 2016, and requires airports of a certain size to “provide convenient, indoor, wheelchair-accessible pet-relief areas for service animals that accompany those passengers who are connecting, arriving, or departing on flights.”

That being said, outside of these mandatory SARAs (Service Animal Relief Areas), **most airports are utterly lacking when it comes to pet-friendly services.** Over 75 of the airports we looked at scored a 0 in our rankings — basically the **OPPOSITE** of pet-friendly.

These airports only had pre-security pet relief options, with most being a patch of rocks. And they definitely don't have additional amenities like a dog park with real grass!

It should be noted that some airports stated on their websites that they would provide you and your pet an escort to the pre-security pet relief areas if needed. This would allow you to leave the secure area of the terminal and not have to re-enter through TSA.

Best Practices for Air Travel With Your Pet

Now that you know the airports that are best suited for traveling with your pet, it's time to get traveling with them! Here are some best practices to help make the trip easy for all members of the family.

1. Before Your Flight

Contact your airline to learn about their policy on traveling with pets. Many airlines have limits on how many animals can be in the cabin and operate on a first-come-first-serve basis, so be sure to leave plenty of time to sort out these logistics early on.

Try to book a direct flight to reduce stress on the day of the flight. Ideally, try to book a nonstop flight and make sure you take temperatures into consideration. In the summer, fly at night when it's cooler, and fly during the day when it's warmer in the winter.

2. Medical Considerations

For pets that fly, federal and state laws require a health certificate signed by a veterinarian. These certificates must be presented to your airline prior to your flight. It's always a good idea to print out a hard copy of vaccines to carry on your person in case anything happens.

Sedation is not normally advised, since the effects of tranquilizers at higher altitudes are unpredictable. However, the decision to prescribe a tranquilizer for your pet should ultimately be made by your veterinarian.

If you travel outside the continental United States, some destinations require special vaccinations ([for humans too!](#)) and may impose a quarantine period when you arrive at your destination. Ask your airline for assistance in learning the rules that pertain to traveling with your pet internationally.

3. Food and Water

If you are placing your pet in cargo, the USDA requires that your pet be offered food and water within 4 hours before check-in with the airline. Be careful not to overfeed your pet though; a full stomach might make your pet ill on the flight.

HOT TIP:

For pets traveling in cargo, a light meal 2 hours before you leave for the airport is recommended.

It's good to let your pet use the bathroom before the flight as well. Whether you can do this pre- or post-security will depend on your airport, so it's worth it to check before you arrive.

4. Pet Carriers or Crates

Using the carrier most appropriate for you and your dog is hugely important in reducing travel stress when you're at the airport. **Because the entire carrier (dog included) has to fit under the seat in front of you**, do your research on your airline's under-seat specs.

If you have to crate your pet, let your pet get acquainted with their carrier before flying. Open the door and let them explore. Put a favorite toy and something of yours inside so the scent will help comfort them. Here are some other tips:

- Be sure to clearly display your name and contact phone number
- Include empty food and water dishes secured inside the kennel and accessible from outside
- Attach a food and water schedule; if any food is necessary, include an ample supply in a bag secured to the outside of the kennel
- Have crate pet pads

- Display labels on top and at least one side with the words LIVE ANIMALS printed
- Have a favorite blanket and something soft inside to help make their trip as comfortable as possible

5. Packing

Make sure you have everything your pet needs with you on the plane, including:

- Treats
- Long-lasting chews or toys
- Pee pads
- Poop bags
- Portable or collapsible water bowl

Pack everything else you don't need for the flight in your [checked luggage](#), like food for the trip, grooming tools, etc.

At TSA Screening

You will need to present your pet to security officers at the checkpoint, but **your pet will NEVER be placed through an x-ray machine**. However, you may be asked to remove your pet from its carrier so that the carrier can be placed on the x-ray machine.

You can walk your animal through the metal detector. If this is not possible, your pet will have to undergo a secondary screening, including a visual and physical inspection by TSA. Once [you pass through security](#), promptly return your dog to the carrier.

Note: Service animals are not subject to these rules.

In the Airport

With the exception of TSA as noted above, all non-service animals must typically be kept kenneled while in the airport's facilities.

If you [enjoy the use of airport lounge facilities](#), you'll find that many lounges generally allow pets – including [The Centurion Lounge](#)! Airline-specific lounges (including [Delta Sky Club](#) and [Admirals Club](#)) have rules that mirror their onboard pet-policies. For [Priority Pass lounges](#), it is best to check with the specific lounge regarding their policies as there is no one, overarching PP policy.

If you are lucky enough to travel through one of our top 10 pet-friendly airports, you will definitely be able to relax before your flight at the relief/play areas that we've noted above.

HOT TIP:

Many airports state that they have escorts to take you and your pet to a relief area outside of security, which removes the need to go back through TSA. If your airport doesn't have a post-security relief area available, it may be worth it to ask about this possibility.

On Your Flight

Getting settled may take some time. For this reason, ask your gate attendant if you can board early with your pet.

Check in with your pet and provide water in your collapsible water bowl if it seems like they need it. **High altitudes don't just dehydrate humans!** Do try to limit the amount of liquids you provide in the flight though.

Check the temperature of the floor; you might want to have a blanket handy if your dog gets cold easily!

HOT TIP:

If you're traveling with a pet, make sure you've chosen an airline that has a decent track record when it comes to animal care. Reviewing this study on the [Best & Worst U.S. Airlines to Fly With Your Pet](#) is a good start.

Final Thoughts

Airports that don't appear on this list should definitely take note — pet travel has more than doubled in the past year according to Travel + Leisure, so including amenities for pets won't be a wasted effort to attract travelers.

For now, if you have a layover, try to plan it through one of these airports to minimize stress for you and your pet!

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About Christy Rodriguez

Christy was born in St. Louis, Missouri, but lived in Texas the majority of her life. Now, work has her living in the Bay Area with her husband and yellow lab. Her first international travel experience was for a summer study abroad program in Italy. After that, she knew that she was destined to travel as much as possible. Luckily, her husband worked at Southwest Airlines, so they were introduced to the exciting world of "non-rev" travel.

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