Traveling With Your Ferret: Avoid It if Possible

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There are several very good reasons to advise against travel:

- Ferrets are extremely heat sensitive. In hot weather, a ferret can die of heat stroke in a few minutes if left sitting in a cage on an airport dock or in a closed car. People often underestimate the time they are away from their vehicle and find the ferret gasping for breath when they return.
- Ferrets are escape artists. A ferret that gets out of your car, trailer, or motel room will likely be killed by a vehicle, an animal, or a human, or may die of heat prostration or starvation.
- Even ordinarily gentle ferrets may bite strangers who try to pick them up when they are frightened, excited, or impatient to get moving in unfamiliar surroundings. People cannot resist touching animals. Even if the bite doesn't break the skin, some people panic and report the incident to the authorities. Many public health departments still categorize ferrets as wild or exotic rather than as domestic animals, as far as rabies vaccination status is concerned. If the ferret is found running loose, this is perfectly justifiable. In some areas, even a vaccinated ferret may be seized and killed for a rabies test. It is easier for all concerned to leave your ferret with a reliable house-sitter who is used to ferrets.
- Ferrets may contact, directly or indirectly, diseases that can endanger their lives. Even vaccinated ferrets should be protected as much as possible from distemper and rabies. Influenza is common in airports and many ferrets that travel by air develop respiratory infections soon afterwards. Viral diarrhea (ECE) is spread mainly by direct contact with infected ferrets, but also by the hands of people who touched them. A ferret that recovered from the disease but still carries the virus can indirectly infect other ferrets that contact his owner's hands or clothing.
- Some states and some areas within states forbid keeping ferrets as pets. If your ferret is seen in a public place or if someone lodges a complaint, your pet could be seized, and there may be other stiff penalties for defying these laws.

If you do decide to travel with your ferret:

- Protect him at all costs from contact with people and other ferrets. Don't let strangers pet or handle your ferret, both to protect the ferret from diseases, and to prevent him from taking the slightest nibble at someone's finger.
- Carry your ferret in a well-ventilated, securely fastened, comfortable pet carrier.
- NEVER leave your ferret unattended in a car in summer months, even with the windows open.
- If you take your ferret anywhere on a leash, make sure the harness is secure and don't take your eyes off the ferret. Some ferrets can escape even from snugly adjusted figure-8 harnesses.
- Make sure to take enough of the ferret's usual food: if it is not available where you are traveling, your ferret may refuse to eat.
- Take along a list of ferret shelters or clubs in the area where you will be staying. Local ferret associations can supply you with a list of veterinarians in their area who will treat ferrets, and can advise you of the source of a specific kind of food or litter.
- Make sure the ferret's rabies and distemper vaccinations are up to date a week before you travel and obtain a health certificate if necessary.
- If your pet has any health problems, take along enough medication to last the trip, and take it in two separate containers if possible, to allow for loss or spillage of one.
- Avoid travel to states or areas that forbid ferrets.

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