

Car Vacations With Dogs: Tips To Make Holiday Road Trips Safe And Fun For All

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Vacation time is upon us. What time is that? Well of course any time, right? But here in Canada, we are heading into the summer. And so, some of you may be thinking of taking a vacation in the car with your dog. So, I thought I would share with you not only my own [personal packing list](#), but what things I think you need to consider as far as traveling with your dog. So, let's get into it.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Today I'm going to talk about your plan, how to prepare your dog and what to pack on your trip. I'm also going to touch on safety, where you should be stopping and where you should be staying. So, let's jump into it and start talking about the plan.

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The plan needs to involve like how much time do you have? How long do you want to stay away? And if you're traveling with your dog, you want to make all parts of it enjoyable for the dog.

So, let's say you're planning to go vacation someplace that's a 15 or 20 hour drive away. You don't want to say, "Well, let's get in a car. Let's drive eight hours one day and seven hours the other. So, let's get there."

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If you've got a dog or dogs in the car, consider their experience over that two-day trip. You want to break it up as much as you can. So, plan to not travel as much as you may have if you were by yourself. Plan to add in at least two hours into every day. An hour of for lunch and two 30 minutes stops somewhere in the morning or in the afternoon.

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That way your dog's going to look forward to getting into the car every time you say "lets load up" the next day of traveling. If you make this an unpleasurable experience, you're going to find your dogs are going to start getting resistant about getting in the car with you.

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So, the plan could be, where do you want to go? And what do you want to do when you get there? I would strongly encourage not to think about theme park vacations when you're traveling with the dog. Yes, most of them would have a kenneling area, you can leave your dogs out for the day. But really - is that a fun vacation for your dog?

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When you're thinking of vacationing - or when I'm thinking of vacation with the dog - I would think of someplace with a beach or a river. Someplace on a lake. I like to think of a place that's got some trails for hiking. It's your vacation.

So, what makes it sound fun to you? You know, renting a place by the ocean might be amazing, but think of in terms of what will your days be filled with when you were there on vacation?



Car Vacations With Dogs: Tips To Make Holiday Road Trips Safe And Fun For All

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If the days are going to be filled with you going out for 12 hours sightseeing, maybe your dog vacation isn't the right one for this time around. Dog vacations mean this is going to be a fun time for you. It's not just like, "I don't want to pay for a pet sitter so you're coming pal." Right. So, dog vacation let's make it something that will be memorable for you. "I remember when I took my dog on that vacation, it was so much fun."

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Okay. So, for your plan, what's your travel plan, where are you going to stay, and what you're going to do when you get there? All right. Now let's talk preparing. There are things that I strongly encourage you to do with your dog to prepare them for this trip.

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First of all, how's your dog going to be traveling? Will they be traveling in a crate, or will you have to use a seatbelt? Now my first preference always is to put your dog in a crate. I personally love traveling with my dogs in a [Gunner crate](#), but I recognized those are big crates for a lot of people's cars. So, there are other crates that are suitable, like the [Ruff Tough crates](#). There are another great crates. Plus, you can get those in pretty colors.

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But you might have a small cars and not enough room to pack my stuff and have a crate for my dog. Okay. So, there are a couple of seatbelts that I would recommend. They do crash tests on seatbelts. There's a [safety testing center](#) for dogs, I'll put a link in the show notes. But actually, the seatbelt that I would go with would be the [Ruff Wear Load Up](#). The company's done their own testing on the harness.

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Now, if you want one that is specifically passed all the testing from the dog safety site, then that would be the [Sleepypod Clickit](#). Now the reviews are mixed on those. I've used the Ruff Wear and so that's the one that I would suggest, but at the end of the day I wouldn't be putting my dog in a seatbelt. I love the safety and security of my dogs being in a crate. Bottom line, we want our dogs to be safe, but we want them to be comfortable.

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Please just don't go to a big box store and take a harness off the shelf because they say it is safe. Do your due diligence and make sure you are getting one that your dog will be safe in the event you do have a little bit of a fender bender. No one who listens to this podcast is going to have a fender bender. Really. I'm sure of it.

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Okay. So, we've made the decision. If you said "Yes, I will be crating my dog when I travel.", let's warm up some [Crate Games](#). So, start playing Crate Games regularly with your dog. And start crating your dog during the day. Now that may be something you're already doing. Maybe you crate your dog at night. But if your dogs are like my dogs, once they're adults, I don't put them in the crate that often.

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So, I would prepare by putting them say two hours a day, they're going to stay in their crate, which prepares them for the length of time that they're going to have to be in a crate when we're traveling.



Car Vacations With Dogs: Tips To Make Holiday Road Trips Safe And Fun For All

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It could be two hours when you're not home, but I would always put in [some time when you are home](#), because your dog's going to see you in the same room AKA the car and they're gonna wonder why they're in this crate. And so, they may get fussy if they haven't been used to being in a crate in the same room and you're not entertaining them or taking them out of that crate.

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So, number one, crating. Get your dog used to being crated more. If you are going to be staying in a hotel or a place you're going to use a soft sided crate, then you want to make sure you build up and understand that your dog's not going to destroy that soft sided crate. Because it happens a lot.

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So, test out the soft sided crate and make sure your dog is comfortable and won't try to rip their way out of that soft sided crate. The next thing I would recommend is start playing games. Now, if you are a member of our [Recallers](#) program, make a list of the Recallers games that you're going to do when you are on the road with your dog, or when you're on vacation to make it an enriching and engaging experience for them.

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If you are not a member of our Recallers or Home School the Dog program, I'll put a link in the show notes to several [videos that I've got on YouTube](#) where you can learn to play games. And these are just things that you get to the hotel, and you're tired you want to just you know, have an adult beverage and relax but your dog's like "I've been in a crate all day. Let's do something."

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Well, you can play a few little games and then I'll mention some enrichment things they can do alone. So, we've got our dog crated. We've got some games that we know that we can play. Next [ItsYerChoice](#). So very important. You're going out to a strange area. You might be walking your dog at a park you don't know.

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You want to play ItsYerChoice and grow ItsYerChoice to include surprise things found in the grass. I know of three people personally who when they're out hiking or they're at a park their dog ate a stash of marijuana. So, if your dog has really good ItsYerChoice they may alert you to "look at here, mom" but they're not going to devour it. All right.

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So put in a few rounds of ItsYerChoice in your enriching games that you're playing with your dog. Of course, you're going to want to make sure that your dog doesn't get [car sick in the car](#). So, take them on some short little day trips around the city right now. And here is my final preparation and you are going to thank me for this one.

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Make sure your dog will pee and poop on a leash. Yeah, you're welcome. Because otherwise you're going to be one of those people walking up and down that little strip of grass outside of a hotel going, "Come on, buddy. Please go to the bathroom." But if your dog is used to only doing their business out in your yard or out on a walk in the forest, they're not going to want to do it on leash.



Car Vacations With Dogs: Tips To Make Holiday Road Trips Safe And Fun For All

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So, level one number one would be get them to be comfortable going to the bathroom on leash. Level number two would be put it on cue. So, I have both elements on cue. So, if I want my dog to pee, I say "go potty". And if I would like them to poop because I think they do, and I want to put them in the car for a couple hour of drive then my cue that I use is "get busy".

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Now it's not the cue that makes it happening guys. It is the conditioning. So, I'll put a link to podcast [episode number 48](#), where you can get that information on how to condition your dog to potty on leash. So that is the preparation for the dog. Also, if you've never done any enrichment games with your dog, I would do it beforehand so it's not something new and novel.

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So, puppy puzzle games or putting things in stuffed toilet paper rolls or snuffle mats, things like that that your dog can have fun alone when you are relaxing with that adult beverage. Right. Next up what to pack. Now I will put a [link to my personal packing list](#). A couple of things to be aware of this packing list includes things that I'm going to bring. If I'm going to an agility trial that requires me driving in a car versus getting on a plane.

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So, the first thing you might do is get a marker and scratch off the things that you aren't going to be needing on that list. That's what I do every time I print out this list for a trip. I go, "Okay well, I won't be needing this, this, or this."

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You're gonna look at this list and go "OMG I could never travel with Susan Garrett. She brings everything and the kitchen sink." And you'd be right. I do bring a lot of things. And so, I actually have a big tote container on wheels and a handle, it's a big plastic container with snaps on the lid. And I take that into the hotels that I'm staying in.

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And in that tote, there'll be things like my blender of course, I'm not traveling without my blender. I bring a single burner hot plate, French press of course, a little bowl, a little pot to cook in. So, there's things on this, on my packing list that you're going to go "Heck no! I'm not bringing that along."

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So, I'm just giving you the big picture view. There may be things that you have on your list that I'm missing from mine. And I would like to know them, please let me know them. So, things like a first aid kit, that's a non-negotiable of course, and I have things that I put in categories. So, if I'm traveling in an RV, which if you're taking a trip on with your dog, you might want to consider that. I'll have items that go in the fridge, items that go in the freezer.

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Also, I love to travel with a [Koolatron](#), and that is a cooler that has wheels that plugs into the cigarette lighter in the car. Do they still call them cigarette lighters when nobody actually uses them for cigarettes? I don't think so. Showing my age. But they plug into the little outlet in the car which is amazing because then you don't have to rely on having ice packs all the time.



Car Vacations With Dogs: Tips To Make Holiday Road Trips Safe And Fun For All

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I have one of those with me at all times. I also have another little cooler where I'll put the frozen dog food in one and I'll put my own food in another. So, I have items that go into the Koolatron, items that go into the cooler. And then I have a list of dried food products that I will bring everywhere I go.

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And what's in my dog training bag when I'm taking these trips, of course rain gear always. Always important to bring rain gear because you don't want to rush your dog when they're out sniffing around wanting to go to the bathroom, just because you don't want to be out in the rain because you didn't bring rain gear. All right.

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I also have miscellaneous things. Now these are important. I had these [shade screens that are mesh and reflective](#). They are the best investment in shade cloth ever. I'll put a link in the show notes. I love these shade cloths. You will need them to put over your dog at the back of your car or if they're in a crate. All right.

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If they are in a seatbelt, please don't wrap them in a shade cloth, but you might want to hang one over the window. Because a lot of dogs get excessively hot. I've actually had Veterinarians tell me that dogs have died of heatstroke when they are in the back of a car where the airflow isn't great, and the sun is beating in on one window for an excessively long time.

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All right. So, I'm going to put a link to those shade clothes. Also, the [Ryobi fans](#), and I'm sure there's other fans, but the Ryobi fans that you can put in front of your dog's crate. Or just to get air circulating in the back where the dog crates are. Those are two big, big things that I think are really important for when you're traveling.

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So, there's a lot of things that are ridiculously crazy that I would consider taking with me. But they're on my list and yeah, chances are if you're traveling with me, I'd be bringing them. So that's the packing. Of course, there's going to be your dog's food. So, if you're like me and you feed raw and you're going someplace where you're maybe going on a canoe trip and you're going to go into the woods, I'd strongly recommend you change your dog from a raw meal to a dehydrated raw meal.

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And so that it's super light, because let's face it you're not going to be trekking back into the bush with 25 pounds of raw food for your dog. Because then you'll have to have 25 pounds of ice to keep it fresh for the time your way. So, transition your dogs to a dehydrated raw. Those of you who are feeding kibble as you were, because you can just take your kibble along with you.

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All right. So that's the things that I've packed. Now let's talk about safety. I mentioned, do you travel with your dog in a crate? Do you travel with your dog in a seatbelt? That's super important. Also, you need to consider when you're stopping, if you're taking your dog out for a potty break where there's a lot of traffic, not one I'd recommend, but you know sometimes they go like "I got to go now."



Car Vacations With Dogs: Tips To Make Holiday Road Trips Safe And Fun For All

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You've got to get them out. I would have them on a harness and a leash if you're not sure if they're a little bit worried about the traffic or about people, we don't want them to slip out of their collar and something bad happens. So, think about those things when you're traveling with your dog now.

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Okay. Now let's talk about where you stop along the way. I recommend you plan in a 30 minute stop in the morning and a 30 minute stop in the afternoon. And a 30, 45, hour, depends on what you want for a lunch break, a nice picnic lunch where you can relax, and your dog can relax. Wouldn't that be great? I think that would sound, that would be an amazing way to travel for a vacation with your dog.

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And so, they're in my area and I noticed it's straight North America. I'm not sure where else in the world this is, but I bet you a grown population. There is a site called [Sniffspot.Com](https://www.sniffspot.com) and it gives you areas that you could rent for 30 minutes at a time where it could be somebody's backyard that's completely fenced in that they're putting it on sniff spot.

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It's like Airbnb, but places that you can take your dog to exercise them. So that you can say, "I want something bigger than an acre." "I want something that's got a hiking trail." "I want something that's got a place for my dog to swim." You can even say "I want something that's got agility equipment." - sniffspot.com.

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So, I would plan my stops around where I can go to Sniffspots that look interesting to me and my dog. This is where when you're saying, "Okay, I'm going to travel on the road", what are you going to eat yourself? Now yes, you could go into a restaurant. I'm not a fan of doing that and leaving my dogs in the car and I encourage you please don't even consider it.

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If it's hot out I always either pack my own meal. That's what I normally do. Well, what am I, who am I kidding? Somebody's going to pack a meal for me. Or I'll stop at a place where I can get takeout like Chipotle in the United States is my favorite place to grab something healthy and fast that I can take and then go a little picnic with my dogs. Like that's so awesome.

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So, if you've looked on the map or Sniffspot hasn't come to the area you're traveling in yet, then the next best thing would look for a conservation area or a state park or someplace that has a lot of lawn that's away from the highway.

You know, if you're traveling during the daytime, you could go to baseball diamonds because there's not going to be anybody there during the day.

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Make sure of course wherever you're going it goes without saying that you're going to clean up after your dog. But what I would avoid is getting my dog out at a gas station, if at all possible. Yes, I do it. Yes, I've done it. But I will then look to go to the rest area part where there's big grassy area at the back. When a lot of those times they have picnic tables back there as well. Not my first choice.



Car Vacations With Dogs: Tips To Make Holiday Road Trips Safe And Fun For All

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Sniffspot now would be my first choice but look for something that safe and interesting for your dog, like ahhh your dog's not going to want to like get cozy and start sniffing along the side of the highway, right? Nor would you want them to.

Also, this is the one time I would use a flexi on an older dog or a puppy. Because they won't have the understanding of traveling on a loose leash. I mean the older dog may, but they might be deaf, but give them the freedom to explore on a flexi and you still have safety.

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I'm not a fan of a retractable leashes but that is the one place that I would use them. Okay. Let's talk about where are you going to stay. Now you might think, "Oh well, I'm traveling. I don't know anyone in the area. I got to stay at a hotel." Not necessarily. So, we're going to leave hotel to last. So, my first choice is always an Airbnb.

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You can just click 'I'm going to be traveling with pets' on the option. And even if they say no dogs allowed, I will often contact them and say, "Look, my dogs are trained." And "Look at my references in Airbnb and I'd love to stay at your place." And I would say 50% of the time they'd let me stay. But sometimes they just say no.

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So, it's safer just to go with the option that says pets are allowed. Airbnb, always my first choice. And there is like I mentioned off the top, you can rent an RV and make your whole vacation one big fun thing with your dog in an RV. That would always be fun.

Little known fact, many campgrounds, how would they call 'camp cabins' KOA in the States and in Canada, I know have these camp cabins where you can go in and just have a cabin in the woods as your place you're staying for the night.

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So, it's like camping but you don't have a tent or anything to camp with. Right. Now, you will have to have your own bedding and stuff like that, but I've stayed at those. And those are really interesting and rustic. Also, you can then go to a hotel. Now, things to be aware of if you're vacationing in a hotel. Most hotels are going to spray their lawns. That's how they get them really nice.

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So, I would encourage you to clean your dog's paws if they're spending any time on that lawn at all. Especially when they're in for the night.

Also, you need to consider white noise if you are going out and leaving your dog and the hotel, maybe going out for dinner, then have some white noise. And of course, I would bring a crate into the hotel. Also, courteous things to do in a hotel is always bring a sheet to put on top of their bedspreads.

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And I like to bring dog beds in because I don't want my dog sleeping on some of that, whatever chemicals are on those carpets in those hotels. Personally, I avoid hotels if I can, but you know sometimes I have to go into a hotel with my dog. So those are some of the things that I'll do to prepare myself and my dog for going into hotel.



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Okay. There you have it. All the things you need to know for keeping your dog safe and happy. And the two of you or three of you, or five of you if it's a family vacation, having an amazing time and making memories that you're never going to forget with your dog. I'd love to see your vacation pictures.

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Come on over to YouTube, put in a link and let me know how it goes for you and your dog and your family. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Road Trip Packing List:

[Download Susan's Packing List as a PDF](#)

Resources:

[Get Crate Games Online](#)

[Learn How to Play ItsYerChoice \(IYC\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 75: Stop Motion Sickness: Helping Your Puppy or Dog Love the Car](#)

[Podcast Episode 98: Puppy Home Alone: Are You Creating Chaos or Calm?](#)

[Podcast Episode 48: Potty Train Your Puppy in a Week \(Easy 3 Step Process\)](#)

[Recallers](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Training Games](#)

[Gunner Crates](#)

[Ruff Tough Kennels](#)

[Ruff Wear Load Up Car Harness](#)

[Sleepypod Clickit Harnesses](#)

[Center for Pet Safety](#)

[Koolatron Kool Wheeler](#)

[Aluminet Reflective Mesh](#)

[Ryobi Fan](#)

[Sniff Spot](#)



Car Vacations With Dogs: Tips To Make Holiday Road Trips Safe And Fun For All

About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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