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## Travelling with Toto

By Suzanne Morphet

From Wednesday's Globe and Mail

*This week, animals are going airborne, with the launch of a new airline that only carries pets. It's part of a growing range of services for people determined to travel with their furry friends*

When Jim Dempster bought his Rottweiler-cross dog four years ago, he decided he wanted Bear to travel with him. "I didn't want to have a dog who was just going to lay around, to feed and pick up after all the time," Dempster says. "I wanted to be able to do things with him."

So this month, Dempster hit the road from his home in Ohio to Ontario's Algonquin Park for a three-day canoe trip - with Bear in the passenger seat. "It's almost like he can tell" when it's time to hit the road, says Dempster, a 45-year-old teacher. "He gets hyper when we get to the parking lot."

The trip was organized by Dog Paddling Adventures, one of a number of businesses catering to pet owners and their furry friends for travel and luxury vacations - including one that offers animals their own airplane. Yesterday, Pet Airways launched its first scheduled flight from New York to Chicago, sending a Beech 1900 aircraft with about 50 pets, primarily dogs and cats, as the only passengers.

Until now, air travel has been a major challenge for pet owners, with commercial airlines restricting most pets to the baggage compartment or cargo section, where it's dark, and the temperature and air pressure can fluctuate drastically. Pet Airways is exclusively for pets - no people are allowed - and they ride in the cabin. The company says initial response has been strong: "We have flights that are fully booked and we have wait-listed flights," director Alyse Tognotti says. And its network will expand: In addition to Washington, Denver and Los Angeles, Tognotti says Pet Airways plans to serve Canada by the winter. "Our research indicates that Toronto and Montreal have more than enough pet travellers" to make it worthwhile, she says.

Air Canada must think so. In response to demand, on July 1 the airline started accepting pets in the cabin once again, as long as they're small enough to fit in a crate under the seat.

WestJet has the same policy. But each passenger can bring only one pet in the cabin on either airline, and both limit the total number of pets.

Worries about putting her own dogs in cargo motivated Chris Shoulet to start Dogtravel two years ago. Unlike Pet Airways, Dogtravel lets dog owners travel with their pets in the seat beside them. "So they've got that comfort and security, you know - just like if you were in a thunderstorm, having your owner there with the loud noise comforts you," she says. The company operates as a club; members request quotes for where they want to go and the company charters a plane. A typical flight would carry about 20 passengers, but a couple of times Dogtravel has chartered a

737, which holds 120 passengers.

And guess who gets the window seat? The dogs, of course, although Shoulet knows of one dog who prefers the aisle, likely to be closer to the snack cart when it arrives.

There's also a piece of sod on board so dogs can relieve themselves.

Not surprisingly, dog owners pay big bucks to travel with their pooch beside them. A one-way Dogtravel flight from Los Angeles to Honolulu has cost from \$7,400 to more than \$12,000 per seat. (By comparison, Pet Airways' flights from New York to Los Angeles begin at \$341 per animal, depending on size.)

When she first started the business, Shoulet had visions of dogs howling when the aircraft engines started and pilots rolling their eyeballs. But so far, she says, "an occasional bark is all that I've heard." One memorable exception: A dog travelling from Seattle to New York "decided to chase clouds through the window and he was barking at all the clouds as they went by!"

Jim Dempster and Bear are travelling by car, but their canoe trip - their fourth trip to Ontario - is all about dog-friendly travel too. Dog Paddling Adventures, based in Markham, Ont., specializes in one-to-five-day adventures for people and their pooches in Ontario wilderness. At this time of year, that means paddling and hiking. Dogs get their own life jackets, and the canoes have flat bottoms. Dempster says his dog is good in a canoe, though he won't sit still and likes to dip one foot in the water, "almost like he's helping to paddle."

Kathryn Howell, a co-owner of Dog Paddling Adventures, is often amused by her clients' devotion to their animals. "We've had people drive all over North America to come on our trips," she says. And some clients come with dogs that aren't physically able to hike for hours on end, so the owners bring dog strollers. "Some of our guides have had to push strollers up very big hills!"

What's behind this desire to travel with one's pets? Scott Beddall, director of operations for Pets Can Stay Travel Services in Victoria, thinks demographics has something to do with it. "It could be the growing baby-boomer market where the kids are moving out," he says, "and people are having the pet there as surrogate children."

Pets Can Stay certifies accommodation providers that are pet-friendly, meaning they provide amenities such as food and water bowls, and make non-smoking rooms available for people with pets. The company also provides an accommodation directory and books rooms for pet owners, like any other travel agent.

Beddall's research shows that travelling with pets is the fastest-growing segment of the North American travel market. "We're just seeing a lot of growth from a niche market to something a lot bigger, a lot more noticeable." From 2005 to 2008, the number of pet owners requesting assistance from Pets Can Stay Travel Services rose from about 1,300 to 4,200.

But even with a place to stay, you need to plan ahead, warns Lara Willis, founder of All Canadian Pet Services Network, an association of dog walkers and petsitters. "What happens if the pet gets lost in a strange city?" she asks. "It's difficult enough at home, but what if you don't find them before it's time for you to go home?"

Forgetting to pack your dog's favourite toy, or worse - his medication - could also spell trouble. But that hasn't stopped Willis herself from travelling with her 110-pound mutt, Shadow. "I don't go anywhere that I can't take him along."

*Special to The Globe and Mail*

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### **Pack your bags**

#### **TRAVEL AND TOURS**

**Air Canada** Pets in cabin \$50 each way in North America, \$100 each way on international flights.

**Westjet** Pets in cabin \$50 each way; maximum four animals per flight.

**Pet Airlines** [petairways.com](http://petairways.com). Offers regularly scheduled flights this month between five cities in the U.S.

**Dog Paddling Adventures** [www.dogpaddlingadventures.com](http://www.dogpaddlingadventures.com). Offers hikes in the spring and fall, paddling trips in summer and skijoring and snowshoeing trips in the winter.

**Dogtravel** [www.dogtravelcompany.com](http://www.dogtravelcompany.com).

## ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

**Pets Can Stay Travel Services** [www.petscanstay.com](http://www.petscanstay.com).

**All Canadian Pet Services Network** [www.petcareprofessionals.com](http://www.petcareprofessionals.com). [<http://www.petcareprofessionals.com>]

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