



A Moving Experience: 19 Days. The Dog-Teared Dilemma



CFlisi Just now · 4 min read ★



by C. Flisi

Giada's tomb arrived today. I don't want to think of it like that

but the dog carrier is a large casket with the colors of black dirt and pale mud. Had the designers thought to make it chartreuse and magenta, I might have felt differently. Bold colors wouldn't have changed anything for Giada, who is color-blind like all dogs, but they would have brightened my outlook.

The rule is that dogs who are beyond miniscule cannot travel with their humans in the passenger section of an airplane. The definition of miniscule changes by airline, but by and large they can weigh no more than eight or 10 kilos INCLUDING the carrier and — more importantly — the carrier has to be able to fit under the seat in front of you. That is true whether you are flying economy or first class. Giada is about nine kilos so she would be well over the weight limit with the carrier added.

The dimensions of the carrier may also change by airline, but always the dog has to be able to stand up in it without touching the top. So Giada, with her Doberman-upright ears (well, one of them anyway) and her miniature Dobe-like posture, could not pass muster.

She and every other dog of her size or more has to travel in a special cargo area separate from the checked-in luggage. This section is oxygenated just as the passenger section is, and heated or cooled accordingly (so we are told). But it ISN'T GOOD for animals to travel this way. I had read once that six percent of dogs traveling by air die in flight, and this possibility causes me more anguish than any other aspect of my problem-lashed move.

My anguish is exacerbated by the fact that my dog is 16-going-on-17, which in dog terms is a far cry from ingénue status. She has rubbed up against her mortality a few times already, and the stress of an international flight could be fatal. But the only other alternative is by boat, and the only transatlantic ship with a kennel onboard is the Queen Mary, and the QM doesn't resume its transatlantic crossings till November.

So I started contacting pet transport services, and received the next wave of bad news. Many airlines that used to carry pets had stopped doing so "because of COVID". My first round of calls revealed that the ONLY airline then taking animals on the transatlantic route from Italy to east coast US was Lufthansa. That meant a two-leg flight — Milan to Frankfurt and Frankfurt to DC, my destination. Two legs is more likely to be deadly for dogs and is to be avoided at all costs. To fly Lufthansa nonstop to DC, I would have to take an eight-hour train ride from Milan to Frankfurt with my dog, the cage, my suitcase, my carry-on, my computer, and my handbag. That trip involved two train changes and an overnight in Frankfurt, then another ride to the airport the next day. No, not do-able.

Zurich was much closer, and Swiss also flew nonstop to DC. But they weren't flying animals at the time and it didn't seem that they would be flying animals in June.

Two of the services I contacted said that Emirates would probably be flying animals from Milan in June. American Airlines was also a strong possibility. They both fly nonstop to JFK, an airport I avoid like the plague. But the plague of this

move has been evoked, so I had no choice. Change of plans. My dog and I would fly Malpensa to JFK. There I would rent a car and drive us down to my family in DC.

Emirates was more likely to have availability but it was also more expensive. A lot more expensive. I decided that Giada didn't need falcons as travel companions in the pet section (falcons are apparently not uncommon as cargo on Emirates flights), so we would fly with American.

Now here's the next tricky part. There are only a certain number of animal slots on each flight, so the transport service makes the request and waits for the airline to respond. Once they have confirmed that Giada will be on flight X, I have to book my flight and hope there is availability for me too (not in cargo). I could book a different flight on a different airline at around the same time, but COVID makes this complicated. Some flights are cancelled last minute. What would happen if Giada's flight took off and mine were cancelled? Or vice-versa? We would wind up on different sides of the Atlantic with not only attendant trauma but also terrible logistical issues to resolve.

Dogs are not well-looked-after in airports. NOT AT ALL. I won't repeat any horror stories here, but trust me, there are plenty. If by fortune Giada manages to weather the flight itself, the sooner I claim her after landing, the better. For now we are in a holding pattern, with her request for a flight pending confirmation, and my flight plans still literally up in the air. My fingers are crossed that hers will come through and mine will

coincide. And that we will somehow both survive this ordeal.

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