

## Tips for Cheaply Traveling With Silent Pets

I have a 4 lb. pet rabbit. The little bunny does not like to travel, but sometimes it is necessary. Wildfires have necessitated finding temporary abodes for us, and we surely could not leave bunny in the house to fend for herself. Vacations are another source of travel that necessitate moving her. Those of you with small silent critters (e.g. hamsters) may have similar needs.



Suppose you decide to stay in a hotel. Many do not allow pets, while others do allow them but charge daily admission. Bunny resents these deplorable policies. Noisy and messy toddlers are neither turned away nor charged admission, so why should a silent and clean 4 lb. animal be treated differently?

Hence Bunny devised a workaround: Sneak In. Bunny has snuck in for multi-day stays at some of the finest hotels available on Priceline.com, i.e. what they liberally term "4-Star" hotels. As far as I can discern, having a bed that fits entirely in the room earns one star, indoor plumbing garners another, while serving a free breakfast of some sort brings a coveted third star. The fourth star is reserved for hotels that additionally offer overpriced meals in a real dining room, so to speak.

Bunny is not fussy about these things, though. Her main concern is having a safe and quiet place to hide, kept at a constant comfortable temperature. The typical, cheap wall-to-wall carpeting provides suitable grip for mad dashes around the room, and the ubiquitous small tables provide good hiding places underneath. While Bunny doesn't like beds with wooden frames extended down to the floor, when it comes time to check-out, that kind of frame prevents Bunny from holding out under the bed, where we can't seize

her in order to leave the premises. I wish Priceline.com gave an extra star for those kinds of beds....

Here are some tips for those of you who want to adopt our scoff-hotelrule way of life:

1. Purchase a small pet carrier that looks like an ordinary carry-on. We found a black, soft-sided Samsonite model with flaps that can be secured over the mesh sides and top, thus preventing busybody check-in staff from seeing inside. When secured, it doesn't look like it houses anything alive. Also, the darkness seems to calm Bunny, who in any event has little time for idle chitchat with smiling clerks.
2. Ask for a room at the end of a hall. There will be an adjacent stairway, leading to a side entrance far away from the prying eyes of hotel staff. Once you have dropped your pet off in the room, you can pull your car around to the side entrance to transfer suspicious items required by your pet; in our case, this is the litter box, bag of hay, and water dish. Also, the end of the hall has neighboring rooms on only one side, decreasing the number of eyes that could bear witness to the crime.
3. Deploy the "Do Not Disturb" tag continuously. This will keep the housekeepers out, thus avoiding the dreaded scenario of a woman screaming "Conejo! Conejo!" when she is shocked to find Bunny running away from her scary vacuum. The tag will work for at least a day. If you are staying more than 24 hours, it is best to request a room change. After moving to your already cleaned new room, you should remove the "Do Not Disturb" tag from your old room, so the housekeepers can satisfy the management's pledge to change the linens and clean the room. But won't the housekeeper see the mess your pet created? Not if you brought a small handsweeper and dustpan to pick up any detritus on the carpet. Dump it in one of the little room wastebaskets, remove its plastic bag liner that was thoughtfully placed by the housekeepers, and dump the bag in the outdoor waste receptacle intended for smokers.
4. While this may seem obvious, make sure your spouse answers "No" if an affable staff person asks if you have pets at home. Mine once answered "Yes", and then in response to the inevitable follow-up question, "Where is your pet now that you aren't there?", my spouse answered "Here". I thought we were busted for sure, but miraculously, the staffer next suggested "You mean at the Humane Society here?", and fortunately my spouse answered "Yes". Getting one out of three questions right prevented the bust, but you might not be as lucky. So discuss this scenario with your spouse before you check-in. Forewarned is Forearmed!