

Taking a dog or cat to the UK or Europe

Before you can do anything else:

1. Microchip your pet. This has to be done before anything else happens.
2. Get your pet's rabies vaccine and record the details including the batch number of the vaccine. Ideally you want the sticker that comes on the bottle to be put in their vaccination book.
3. Vaccinate for other dog diseases such as parvovirus and distemper.
4. After the rabies vaccine, wait thirty days. Then you can go to the vet to do the rabies titre test. This involves taking a blood sample which must be sent to an EU approved laboratory. If the lab is not approved the result does not count. I used Dr Khamdeng who charged about 80,000kip to take the blood and fill out the form, plus about \$70 to send it to the lab and the lab charged me about \$90 to test the blood. I had to pay online for the lab. If your dog is already vaccinated for rabies you can blood test straight away, but be aware that if they are due a booster their antibody count might have dropped below the level needed to pass the test. It is worth getting a booster first and waiting 30 days before testing.
5. The results will be emailed to you and the hard copy of the results sent to the vets. It is important to collect the hard copy and make sure the lab have stamped it as original as Thai export customs are very fussy about this. If someone else gets the email from the lab (say the vet) and they forward it to you, the email must have all of the evidence that it originally came from the lab.
6. Three months from when the blood was collected you can travel. For the UK and Europe, the blood test does not go out of date as long as the rabies vaccine remains updated at the correct time each year. I had both of my dogs tested 18 months before I flew.

Decide how to travel.

I was travelling with two medium sized dogs (total weight with crates about 60kg). Thai airways charge \$55 per kg, so that wasn't an option. Vietnam airways charge \$20, but don't have the best reputation when it comes to flying animals, plus transiting in Hanoi is difficult as you have to import and export your animal rather than get a transit visa. I chose KLM who charge a flat fare of \$200 per animal and have a good reputation. However, you can only fly animals into the UK as manifest cargo, which meant I had to fly to Europe and then get the ferry in order for them to travel with me as excess baggage.

Because KLM don't fly out of Vientiane, I decided to cross to Thailand and drive to Bangkok. I then flew from Bangkok to Amsterdam directly, before getting the ferry from the Hook of Holland to Harwich.

For the KLM flight ticket, phone the airline to book your ticket and provisionally book your dog's ticket at the same time. They will check with head office and confirm in a few days. Vietnam airlines will only allow you to book an animal after you have bought your ticket and once the health certificate is issued. This means you can't do it in advance. I asked about what would happen if the plane was full and I couldn't add my animals at a later date; they said they would offer a written guarantee of a free transfer to another flight but that it had never happened before and that there was always space.

Paperwork from Laos to Thailand

Technically you need an export permit for Laos, but in practice this is only necessary if you are flying from Vientiane as no one cares/checks at the Friendship Bridge. Dr Khamdeng will do the paperwork and health certificate for the export permit for 250,000kip. It takes about two weeks to process but is only valid for a month so you need to time its submission carefully. You need to provide a copy of your passport, dog microchip number, vaccination record, age, breed, colour, weight and sex.

You need an import permit for Thailand if you have three dogs or more, or are staying more than six months. If you arrive at the airport customs will give you a receipt which you can use to get your export permit. If you enter by land at Nong Khai you can get a transit permit if you really want it, but Nong Khai animal control say it is not necessary (we phoned them and spoke to BKK too) and when I applied for my export permit from Bangkok they weren't interested in any travel paperwork once they released I entered by land.

Laos to Bangkok

I got a lift across the border to Nong Khai where I was met by Christian Arthur Richards who had driven up to meet me. You can find him on facebook – his profile picture is a van. He charges 8baht a km and works on a round trip bases. He was lovely with my dogs and helped with translations at the vets and holding animals etc.. It took us about ten hours to reach Bangkok.

I stayed at Ploy Khumthong Boutique Resort about 2km from the airport. They are very pet friendly and charge 700baht per night per dog. Rooms are nice and they have a pool. I arrived late Monday night, did my export paperwork on Tuesday, had Wednesday as a backup day in case there was a problem, and flew lunchtime Thursday.

Bangkok paperwork

I spoke with the animal quarantine department that is located in the cargo terminal of the airport who said that if I was only going to Europe I didn't need to see a vet before coming to get my export permit. The animal quarantine people would charge 250 baht for the export permit and the Appendix IV form you need to enter Europe and the UK. However, for the UK you also have to have a vet administer a tapeworm tablet no more than 120 hours before you enter the UK, so I did have to see a vet before going (I used Sukhumvit 51 vet). The total for the drugs, administration and paperwork at the vet was about 3500 baht for two dogs. I also bought my extra large dog crate from the vet for 4900 baht.

After seeing the vet (this took about 30 mins to do the health certificate) I went straight to animal quarantine. They are very strict on the originality of your paperwork, especially the rabies titre test. They originally rejected one of mine because the lab had forgotten to stamp it as original, despite me having the vet copy and original envelope. Luckily the lab had sent a copy of the paperwork directly to my email account so I was able to show them that as well and then they accepted it. But be very sure that your paperwork from the lab is original or you'll have problems.

It took about 45 mins at the office, and then I had to go away and return in the afternoon to collect the paperwork. This bit was smooth and cost 500 baht in total.

BKK Airport

The hotel offered a shuttle to the airport and helped get my luggage, dogs and crates into the airport. The KLM check in staff provided the stickers for the crate and were very nice and helpful. I dropped the dogs off at oversized baggage and then went through immigration to watch to make sure they were loaded onto the plane. When I got on the plane I asked the cabin staff to confirm with the pilot that he knew there were two dogs on board as he needed to keep their cabin pressurized. They were happy to do this and even showed me a print out of the information feed from the hold halfway through the flight to show they were ok and comfortable.

Arriving in Europe

I flew into Amsterdam, and collected the dogs from oversized baggage after about 30 mins. I then went to customs with all of my paperwork, and they checked the microchips and went through all of the paperwork very thoroughly. Originally they didn't see the lab I used on the official list; they found it eventually, but don't try to cut corners on that stage. If you are travelling to the UK make sure they stamp the Appendix IV form to allow onward travel. There was no charge for this and it took about 45 minutes.

Amsterdam to the UK

I then went to the Hook of Holland (about one and a half hours drive from the airport) to catch the ferry to England. The ferry takes six hours and is the only way you can enter England if you are a foot passenger with dogs – none of the other routes allow it. I was met by my Dad who crossed from the UK, and a return trip with a small campervan cost \$400. It is cheaper one way, for cars and for foot passengers. It has small kennels on board that you can book (this is better than leaving your dog in the car as once the ship starts to sail you can't access the car deck) and a small outside space where you can take your dog during the crossing. At departure customs they go through your paperwork, check the microchip number and give you a green thing to hang in your car. This means that on the other side you don't get stopped and are free to drive off into the sunset with your pet!

It is undoubtedly one of the most stressful things I have done, but as long as you are prepared and allow enough time to sort problems it is very doable, and if booked in advance not ridiculously expensive (I only booked three weeks before I left). And those furry faces are definitely worth it!