

Dogs and Camping

You may be considering taking Rover along on your next camping trip. After all, if you enjoy connecting with nature maybe he will too. Most people use the services of family or a kennel to take care of the beloved family pet when heading outdoors but taking him along can be enjoyable for both of you. There are both pros and cons to settling in under the stars with man's best friend at your side.

The major decider on taking the dog or leaving him at home may be the restrictions that your chosen camping location has on domestic animals. Some parks prohibit dogs in the camping area entirely and that will impose some restrictions on where you camp. If there are wild animals in the area you are camping, and there usually are even if you don't see them, you must be sure that you can keep your dog totally under control. All dogs, even the sweetest ones, can cause severe stress to wildlife if not kept carefully under control at all times.

Remember to also consider the individual characteristics of your dog and be considerate of other people. A noisy dog, or a badly trained dog can be a nuisance for other campers in campgrounds, on trails and even in the backcountry. A very shy dog or an aggressive dog could become stressed and even a danger in a busy campground.

Call the Ontario Provincial Parks office (1-800-668-2746) to ask about the current state of their dog policy. Dogs are allowed in all the parks however, if you plan on camping with your dog please let them know when you are making your reservation, as there are designated campsites for those bringing dogs. Dogs must always be leashed in Provincial Parks, except in designated areas. Some parks may have further restrictions. Visit www.ontarioparks.com for more information on dogs in individual parks.

There are even companies dedicated to canoe tripping with your dog. And they promise lots of off-leash time with your pooch. www.dogpaddlingadventures.com is a Markham-based company offering canoe adventures for you and your dog; they have more than a dozen trips planned for July and August in Algonquin Park alone and they offers trips in all four seasons.

Pros of taking a dog camping:

The best reason for including the family pet in your camping plans is that that she will likely have a good time. Dogs are very adventuresome and they love checking out the new sights and smells that proliferate in the woods. The last time you took your dog to a new dog park or on an unfamiliar route around the city, you probably noticed that there is nothing like something new to sniff, to get a dog's heart beating faster.

Having your dog along on the trip will allow you to relax. For dedicated dog lovers there is nothing more upsetting than thinking that your furry friend is at home pining for you while you are out having fun. It's even worse if you are uncertain of the caregiver you've chosen for your trusted friend. Never leaving home without her is a solution to that fear. With a dog companion by your side, you'll never be alone and it makes walking more fun. Sometimes they can even lead you to things on the trail that you might have otherwise missed.

Cons of taking a dog camping:

There is a downside to taking your dog camping. Your dog will be very excited and he might be more difficult to control when exposed to the stimulation of the great outdoors. There could be things that frighten the dog and potentially cause her to bolt into the woods. Dogs can be excited or conversely frightened by a new environment and an older dog might be easily exhausted by the newness of it all.

You will also find that you may worry about your dog getting lost, which can be extremely stressful, and you will need to keep in mind that your dog needs to be checked on routinely. Similarly, keep in mind that your dog might be noisy and may even get hurt by falls or wild animals. And you could be so distracted by concern over your dog that you fail to consider your own safety.

You will have to take dog-specific supplies with you. At a minimum you will need his water bowl and food bowl and cans of food or kibble which adds to the weight of your supplies and it's unlikely that he's going to carry it! If you're backpacking you will need to be able to carry everything comfortably. You may want to outfit the dog with a canine life vest and have a carbiner-type clip that can give you hands-free control of your pet.

Finally, do you know beforehand how well your dog sleeps away from his normal environment? If he is happy to settle down on his bed wherever you place it at home, you shouldn't have too many problems. If you usually crate your dog at night, you may want to reconsider taking him along.

Think long and hard about all of these factors before you take your dog camping. Ideally, consider your dog's personality and his inclination to obey; these two factors should affect your decision. Remember that if you bring a dog camping that you need to do your utmost to make sure that he is safe and happy and that the people and animals around him are likewise.