

15 Things You Should Know Before Taking Your Dog Boating

Article & Photos By Kate Gahs

1 Ensure Your Dog Knows Their Basic Commands

To ensure they stay safe and out of the way when you need them to be, make sure your dog knows these four commands:

- "Sit"
- "Stay"
- "Come"
- "Go To Your Place" (bring a bed onboard or teach them to go to a specific area, to get them to move to a safe place, out of harm's way)



2 Start Training Them When They're Young

Younger dogs are easier to train, quicker to learn, and more agile moving. So, when they're only a few months old, take them to marinas and boat yards to help get them familiar to the sights, sounds, and smells of boats.

Remember, the smaller the dog - the lower their center of gravity. Puppies are more likely to feel comfortable and stable on the water, then older and larger dogs.

If you're looking to take your dog out on long cruising trips, try training your dog to relieve themselves on "Pee Pads." These are AstroTurf pads designed for use in housebreaking your dog, but which can be easily cleaned and neatly stored below deck, to give your dog a place to relieve themselves while on the boat.



Special thanks to Fiona (the Golden Retriever model).

3 Be Sure Your Dog Knows How To Swim

In case of emergency, it's vital that you train your dog how to swim before taking them out on the boat. Not all dogs are natural born swimmers like Golden Retrievers or Newfoundlands. So train them to swim by gently encouraging them to walk alongside you in shallow depth water. As they become more confident, start taking them out to deeper depths.

Also keep in mind, that swimming in a chlorine pool for a dog, is a very different experience from swimming in a natural body of water. The bottom texture, currents, marine animals, and murky waters can sometimes create a scary experience for your dog. Therefore, it's a good idea to take your dog to a local dog beach to get introduced to natural water.

After they've finished swimming in salt water though, be sure to rinse them thoroughly with fresh water to remove any dirt and bacteria that can cause skin irritations and hot spots.

5 Buy A Doggie Life Jacket & Let Them Get Used To It

Many people laugh when they hear, "Doggie Life Jacket," but in fact, a life jacket for your dog is an extremely useful and potentially, life-saving device that boaters and vets highly recommend you make your dog wear while on board or swimming.

Doggie life jackets can be purchased from most boating and pet stores, and can come in a variety of colors and patterns that will make your dog safely stand out, while being a stylish pup.

When purchasing a doggie life jacket, make sure it fits your dog snugly, but comfortably, and be sure to look for one with reflective strips for visibility at night and built-in handles on the back for easy retrieval.

Before your dog goes cruising with you though, it's a good idea to give them some time to get adjusted to wearing their life jacket by letting them wear it around the house for short periods of time and letting them swim with it on.



4 Make Sure They Always Wear An I.D. Tag

Whether on land or water, your dog should always be wearing a I.D. tag on their collar. But, if you're looking to frequently taking your dog out cruising (especially on overnight trips), then it's a good idea have them wear an extra I.D. tag that details your boat's name, make, size, and color, and includes your cell phone number or other form of contact for when you're out of town.

Another good form of I.D., is having your vet micro-chip your dog. Micro-chipping not only helps identify your dog if their I.D. tag falls off, but it's also a great way to store their medical information without having to bring copies of their records on board.



6 Let Your Dog Gradually Get Acclimated To Boats

Introduce your dog to boating with these easy steps:

- Walk around the outside and inside of the boat with your dog, while the boat's still on dryland.
- Repeat this process when the boat is in the water, but remain dock-side.
- Take your dog for a short ride in a dinghy, kayak, or canoe first, so they can remain close to you have minimal distractions/hazards.
- Take longer trips, before moving to a bigger boat.

7 Practice Multiple Ways Of Getting Your Pup On & Off

Make sure both you and your dog are comfortable with getting on and off the boat together, whether you're docked alongside a pier, anchored just off-shore, or sitting on a lift.

For larger or older dogs, you may want to install specially designed hydraulic lifts or ramps on your boat, that can be folded up and easily stored when underway.

9 Keep A Dog-Friendly First-Aid Kit On Board

Along with plenty of water, also on board, should be a pet-friendly First-Aid kit that includes items such as:

- Dog-Friendly Sunscreen
- Bandages
- A Pet Specific First-Aid Manual
- Cotton balls or swabs
- Nail Clippers
- Styptic Powder or Pencil
- Ear Cleaning Solution
- Tearless Dog Shampoo
- Comb for fleas and ticks

Most of the items listed above can be purchased from pet stores, online, or your local vet.

11 Before You Go, Look Into Local Maritime Laws/Restrictions

Maritime laws vary from state to state and country to country. So, before you go off on an out-of-state cruising adventure with your dog, be sure to check on the local, state, or country regulations on pets regarding both boats and beaches.



8 Keep Plenty Of Accessible Drinking Water On Board

Just as when you're on land, your dog should always have access to plenty of drinking water to keep them hydrated. This is especially important when out on a boat, because hot temperatures and lots of sun will increase their need for water.

10 Develop A 'Dog Overboard' Plan & Practice It Often

In case your dog accidentally falls overboard, make sure not only you and your crew, but also your dog, know exactly what to do to get them quickly and safely back on board. This can be done by training your dog to swim to a specific area of the boat where you or a member of your crew is waiting, when you say a specific command.

If your dog should fall overboard, many will try to start swimming back towards the boat. So, instead of circling back as you would with humans, protect against injury, anxiety, and disorientation to your dog by turning off the engine or lowering your sails and gradually coasting or paddling towards them.



12 Plan Your Trip In Advance To Find Dog-Friendly Places

By planning your cruise in advance, whether for a single or multi-day excursion, you can make sure your dog has plenty of opportunities for bathroom breaks, stretching their lengths, and will be allowed at marinas, hotels, parks, attractions, restaurants, and beaches.

For some specific locations within the Chesapeake Bay, please see the map located on page ____.



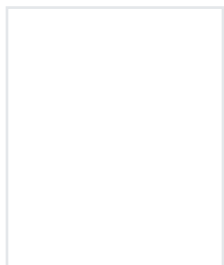
14 Keep Your Dog's First Trip Short With Lots Of Breaks

Even if you've gradually introduced your dog to boating by taking them out for short or long trips on kayaks, canoes, or dinghies, being on a larger boat can be a very different experience for your dog to get adjusted to.

So for longer trips and bigger boats, keep an eye on your dog and see how they're handling with the new environment and procedures.



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Kate is the Communications Manager for AYC's Communications Department. She has a degree in Electronic Media & Film (Communications) and certification in Graphic and Web Design. She is a member of the American Graphic Institute of America (AIGA) and before working at AYC, she was a Document Design Specialist for the Maryland General Assembly. Kate is a native of the area and grew up on the Magothy River, where she enjoys swimming, archery, and boating at her family's shore house every summer.

13 Keep Your Dog Secured When Arriving & Leaving Port

Even without a dog on board, entering or leaving a port can be a stressful and complicated process. Help keep that process as smooth as possible by assigned a member of your crew to hold on to the dog until you get safely underway. If your going on a solo cruise, either keep your dog leashed or secure them below decks.



15 Watch Your Dog Carefully & Don't Leave Them Unsupervised

As many dog owners know, dogs can quickly and stealthily get themselves into trouble. This can be especially bad when you're in the open water and a long way from home and a vet. So, be sure to keep a close eye on your sneaky pooch at all times and when in port or anchored for the night, never leave them unattended!

With lines, engine fuels, electrical components, various chemicals, and more, there are lots of potential hazards that could cause injury or harm to not only your dog, but also to you and/or your crew, if your dog were to accidentally get into them.

