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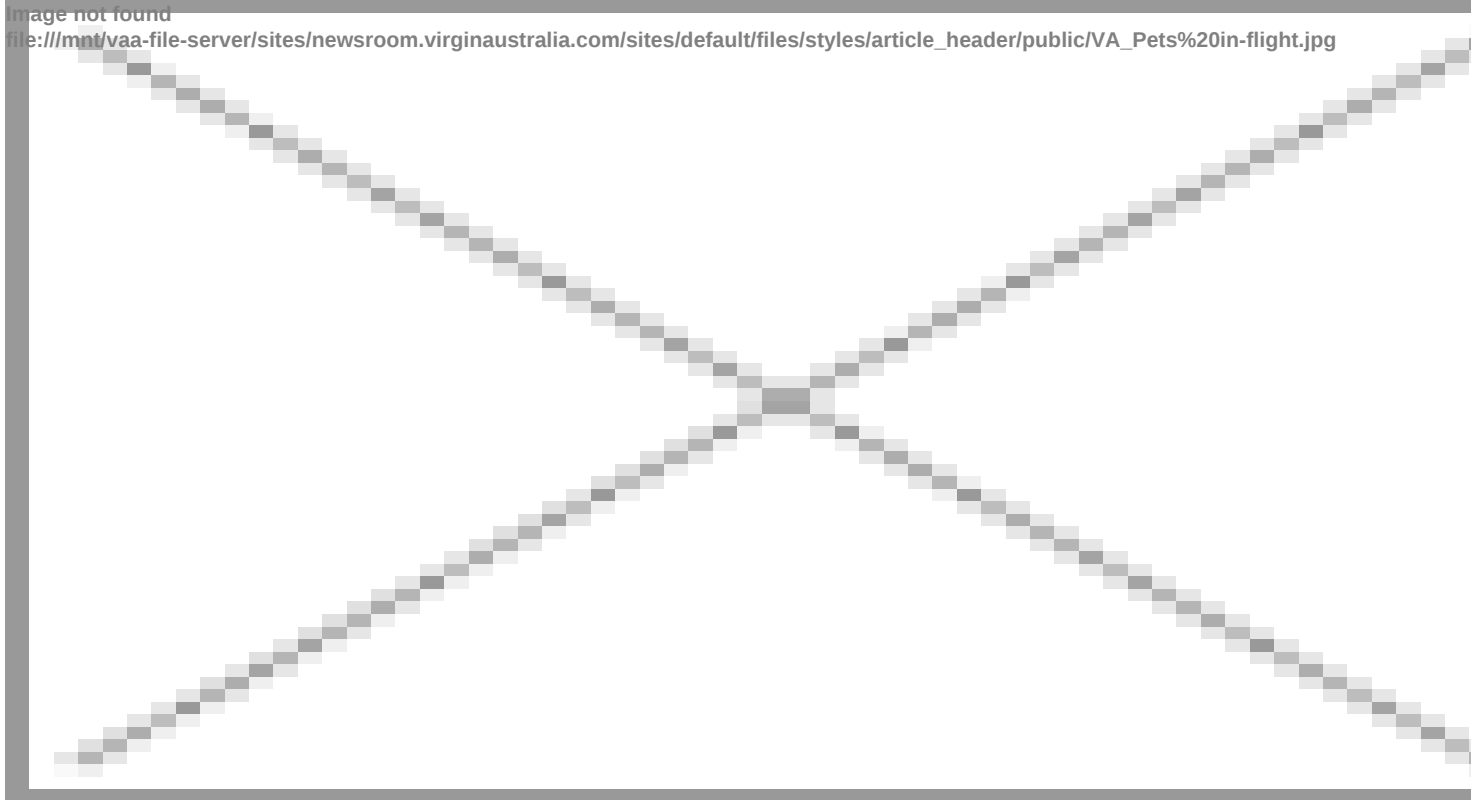
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Cat's out of the bag: Virgin Australia signals intent to launch nation's first-ever pets in cabin flights ^[2]

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Thursday 7 March 2024: Virgin Australia has announced its intention to be the country's first airline to operate flights with pets onboard under a plan unveiled today.

The Australian-first service, which will have pet-lovers rejoicing around the nation, is subject to regulatory approval, and is expected to launch within 12 months.

In a social media survey of Virgin Australia's Facebook followers in 2021, 85 per cent of respondents voted in favour of the airline launching pets in cabin flights. In more recent research conducted by Virgin Australia with Australian pet owners, nearly 70 per cent of respondents advised they would travel with their pet in the cabin, with 57 per cent saying they would fly more regularly if the service was a reality.

Almost all major carriers in North America offer a pets onboard service for domestic flights, including United Airlines and Air Canada.

Proposed pets in cabin in-flight experience

For the comfort of all guests, Virgin Australia has today announced a number of parameters for pets in cabin flights:

The service will be limited to small cats and dogs on specific domestic routes;

Pets will be restricted to a limited number of designated rows and will not be allowed to roam freely or sit on laps;

Pets must also be carried in a Virgin Australia approved pet carrier under the seat in front of the owner for the duration of the flight.

CEO Commentary

Speaking at a press conference at Melbourne Airport, Virgin Australia Group CEO, Jayne Hrdlicka, said Virgin Australia is thrilled to finally reveal its plans to be the first Australian airline to offer pets onboard flights.

"Our love for animals has always been in the Virgin Australia DNA and we are excited at the prospect of taking off with Australia's first-ever pets in cabin flights," said Ms Hrdlicka.

"Overwhelmingly, our guests tell us they want to travel with their pets, and we are now on a journey to make that a reality. It's something that commonly happens overseas and is proven to work well.

"Almost 70 per cent of Australian households have a pet, so this announcement is really significant for a large proportion of the country. It's also a great thing for pet-friendly accommodation providers who will benefit greatly from increased connectivity and the ease for travellers to fly with their pets. It really will be a whole new economy for pet travel in Australia.

"Pets on flights is another example of Virgin Australia leading the way with new and improved service offerings and first-to-market experiences for our guests.

"Innovation has always been a hallmark of Virgin Australia. We were the first airline in the country to offer online check-in. This year we were the first Australian airline to launch baggage tracking and a fully integrated self-service disruption management tool. It's this innovation and first-to-market drive that underpins who we are in the market," she said.

Melbourne Airport CEO, Lorie Argus said the airport was looking forward to helping Virgin Australia deliver the Australian-first.

“We’ve been investing significant effort into providing relief areas for assistance animals and these facilities have ample capacity to serve Virgin Australia’s new guests,” she said.

“Animals being carried on board Virgin Australia flights will be required to remain in their approved pet carriers at all other times within the terminal.

“We expect the pets in cabin concept will prove a popular offering and we look forward to working with Virgin Australia to make it a reality.”

More details on pets in cabin flights, including available routes, and the cost for bringing a pet onboard, will be announced in due course.

No changes to assistance animals

The proposed pets in cabin flights will not result in any change to approved assistance animals being able to travel in the cabin of Virgin Australia aircraft at no additional cost. The existing procedure for assessing the eligibility of these assistance animals to travel onboard will not change. Additionally, Virgin Australia will continue to offer pets to be transported as cargo through approved pet carrier services, as this remains an important part of the Virgin Australia pet offering.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

For the comfort of all guests and crew, pets will be limited to a small number of designated rows on eligible routes and will not be allowed to roam freely or sit on laps. Animals must also be carried in a Virgin Australia approved pet carrier under the seat in front of the owner for the duration of the flight.

Virgin Australia will charge a fee for guests who are eligible to bring their pet onboard.

The service is subject to regulatory approval and is likely to launch within 12 months, pending planning and stakeholder consultation.

Virgin Australia will continue to offer pets to be transported as cargo through approved pet carrier services. More information, [here](#). ^[7]

Approved assistance animals will continue to be able to travel in the cabin of Virgin Australia aircraft at no cost.

Virgin Australia has always been an advocate of their furry guests transported in the cargo hold, such as:

Chad the Virgin Australia Baggage Handler from Perth, turned dog whisperer, who talks to pets before he loads them onto flights. [View](#) ^[8].

Pip, the stranded dachshund reunited with its owners following a global adventure amid the pandemic. [Read](#) ^[9].

Q&A

When will pets be accepted on VA flights?

It's a big project that's subject to regulatory approval and we expect the service will launch within the next 12 months. We will keep you updated once we know more. In the meantime, we will continue to offer pets to be transported as cargo through approved pet carrier services. More information, [here](#) [10].

Will I be able to take my pet?

This will depend on what type of pet you own, its size and the route you are travelling on. We are still working through the specific rules of the service, but can confirm that only small dogs and cats will be allowed onboard, which must be able to fit comfortably in Virgin Australia approved pet carriers, stowed under the seat in front for the duration of the flight.

Virgin Australia will continue to offer pets to be transported as cargo through approved pet carrier services. More information, [here](#) [10].

I have allergies, will I be able to travel on VA?

It's really important to us that there is minimal impact to guests who are not carrying a pet, and for this reason we will be using the next few months to design a safe proposition with strict rules. Pets will be limited to a small number of designated rows and will not be allowed to roam freely or sit on laps.

Cabin airflow dynamics (air circulating from top to bottom), the renewal of cabin air 20-30 times per hour and use of hospital grade HEPA filtration in our aircraft (which capture greater than 99% of airborne particles) mean the risk of allergy-triggering particles being circulated on-board is low. VA currently has robust systems for guests who have severe allergies to identify themselves via the MEDA process, so that risks for these guests can be mitigated and arrangements are put in place prior to travel.

The service has worked effectively in North America and Europe for many years and we are confident we will do the same in Australia.

Why can't my pet sit on my lap?

It's really important to us that guests who are not carrying a pet are minimally impacted, and for this reason, and the safety of all guests and crew, pets will not be allowed to roam freely in the cabin or sit on their owner's lap.

How do I book my pet to travel with me? / How much will it cost? / Which routes is it available on?

We intend to work through these details in the coming months. Pending stakeholder feedback and regulatory approval, we anticipate we will launch pets in cabin flights within 12 months.

Virgin Australia will continue to offer pets to be transported as cargo through approved pet carrier services. More information, [here](#) [10].

Can my Assistance Dog continue to travel in the cabin at no cost?

There will be no change to the way assistance animals travel onboard Virgin Australia flights

and we will continue to offer this service free of charge. If you intend to travel with an assistance animal, please see [here](#) ^[11] for more information.

FOOTNOTES

*In a survey by Animal Medicines Australia in 2022, it was found that 69 per cent of Australian households own a pet, with almost 29 million pets calling Australia home. Read the full report “Pets in Australia: A survey of pets and people”, [here](#) ^[12].

** Virgin Australia market research in April 2023 of 643 Australian travellers. Out of the 426 pet owners, 286 selected more than zero to the question “If it was allowed by the airline, how often would you most likely fly with your pet(s) in the cabin?”. 164 pet owners selected they would take at least one extra return flight a year to the question “Would being able to fly with your pet in the cabin increase the number of flights you take per year? - Selected Choice”.

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