

Bringing Your Dog or Cat from the USA to Costa Rica

A relocation guide from the Tiffany Russell Group

Moving to Costa Rica with a pet is one of the most common questions we hear from clients, and the good news is that it is absolutely doable. It just takes some planning, a couple of vet visits, and enough lead time to get the paperwork endorsed. Here is the process, step by step.

Official USDA APHIS pet travel page for Costa Rica:

aphis.usda.gov/pet-travel/us-to-another-country-export/pet-travel-us-costa-rica

Step-by-Step: What You Need to Do

1. Let your vet know as early as possible that you are relocating to Costa Rica with your dog or cat.
2. Schedule your pet's official exam with a USDA-accredited veterinarian within **14 days** of your departure date. This exam is what your Costa Rica health certificate is based on.
3. Ask your vet whether they will provide the health certificate form or whether you should bring it with you.
4. Your vet needs to document the following on the certificate:
 - Rabies vaccination (dogs and cats)
 - Dogs vaccinated against distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, and leptospirosis
 - Cats vaccinated against feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, panleukopenia, and feline leukemia
 - Internal and external parasite treatment, completed within 14 days of travel
5. Confirm the exact address you are heading to in Costa Rica, along with your departure and arrival airports. Both go on the certificate.
6. Costa Rica requires the international health certificate to be signed by your vet, then endorsed by USDA APHIS Veterinary Services. Ask whether your vet is USDA accredited; many now process this electronically through the VEHCS system.
7. **The certificate must be electronically endorsed before you travel.** Book this appointment 3 to 4 weeks ahead, since USDA endorsement appointments fill up quickly. If nothing is available in time, certificates can sometimes be handled by mail; ask us and we'll point you in the right direction.
8. Make several copies of the signed, endorsed certificate: one for your carry-on, one for your checked bag, and one left with family back home.

IMPORTANT NOTES

- The vet exam must fall within **14 days** of your departure to Costa Rica, with parasite treatment and the health form completed in that same window.
- Double-check with your airline directly. Some carriers require the exam to have happened within 10 days of travel, which is tighter than Costa Rica's own rule.
- If this is your pet's first-ever rabies vaccination, it generally must be given at least 30 days before arrival in Costa Rica. A pet already current on rabies typically does not need to restart that clock, but confirm the timing with your vet.

Need a Hand With the Move?

Relocating to Costa Rica is a big move for the whole family, pets included. Coordinating timelines, paperwork, and finding a pet-friendly home once you land is exactly the kind of thing the Tiffany Russell Group helps clients navigate every day.

Reach out any time: tiffany@tiffanyrussellgroup.com

Requirements are set by the Costa Rican government and USDA APHIS and can change without notice. This guide is provided for general planning purposes; always confirm current requirements with a USDA-accredited veterinarian and the official APHIS page above before you travel.