

Relocating Your Pet to South Africa



A practical guide for importing dogs and cats, including permits, veterinary testing, air travel, quarantine and arrival clearance.

Personally managed by Julia | Fly Your Tail

South Africa is a permit-led destination.

The veterinary import permit and the health certificate issued with it determine the exact requirements for the individual animal, country of export and route. Because the permit determines the exact veterinary and quarantine conditions, the detailed testing schedule and flight arrangements should be finalised only after it has been reviewed.

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The essentials before you begin

Dogs and cats entering South Africa require prior authorisation from the national veterinary authority. Health conditions can differ by country of origin, disease status and whether post-arrival quarantine is required.

Import permit	A veterinary import permit must be obtained before the pet is shipped.
Application timing	Current 2026 regulations require the application to reach the authority at least 30 working days before the animal leaves the country of export, unless the authority waives the period.
Health certificate	The official veterinary health certificate must be completed in English by an authorised veterinarian within the period stated on the permit; the government guidance commonly specifies within 10 days before departure.
Original documents	The original import permit, original health certificate and all supporting records must be presented at the port of entry.
Quarantine	Quarantine is not identical for every origin. When required, it must be reserved with the State Veterinarian at the arrival port before the permit is issued.
Travel method	Airline policy determines whether the pet can travel as accompanied baggage or must travel as manifested cargo. Many international routes use cargo.

Why the country of export matters

- South Africa can impose different disease tests and quarantine conditions according to the exporting country's animal-health status.
- A dog exported from one country may require a different test panel from a dog of the same breed exported from another country.
- Transit through another country does not automatically change the official country of export or remove the permit conditions.
- The exact permit and certificate issued for the shipment take precedence over general online checklists.

Every pet receives an individual requirements plan.

Requirements can differ even between pets travelling from the same country. Fly Your Tail reviews the documents issued for your pet and builds the preparation schedule around those conditions.

Step-by-step relocation pathway

1**Eligibility and origin assessment**

Confirm species, breed, age, ownership, country of export, proposed airport, travel method and whether quarantine is likely.

2**Apply for the veterinary import permit**

The correct application form, proof of payment and supporting information are submitted to the national Import Export Policy Unit.

3**Reserve quarantine where required**

When quarantine applies, Fly Your Tail coordinates availability with the State Veterinarian at the port of entry and arranges the supporting confirmation required for the permit application.

4**Review the issued permit and certificate**

Fly Your Tail converts the permit conditions into a clear dated timeline for veterinary tests, treatments, documents and transport arrangements.

5**Complete laboratory testing**

The required samples are collected and sent to laboratories accepted under the permit conditions, with the original or certified reports retained for entry clearance.

6**Complete vaccinations and treatments**

Rabies vaccination, parasite treatments and any additional veterinary measures are completed within the time windows stated in the permit.

7**Official health certification**

An authorised veterinarian completes the South African

certificate and the exporting-country veterinary authority endorses it where required.

8

Airline and cargo preparation

Fly Your Tail coordinates the route, airline acceptance, travel kennel, export clearance, cargo booking and destination handling.

9

Arrival inspection and quarantine or release

The veterinary import control officer checks the originals. The pet is transferred to quarantine when required or released after clearance.

VETERINARY PREPARATION

Vaccination, testing and sample logistics

South Africa's permit may require only the core entry documents for some origins, while other origins are subject to an extensive disease-testing panel. The list below illustrates requirements that can appear; it is not a universal checklist.

Core items commonly reviewed	Additional dog tests that may be specified
• Permanent identification or microchip details where required • Valid rabies vaccination certificate • Clinical examination and official health certificate • Internal and external parasite treatment • Original laboratory reports and supporting declarations • Pregnancy, reproductive status or fitness-to-travel statements where applicable	• <i>Brucella canis</i> • <i>Trypanosoma evansi</i> • <i>Babesia gibsoni</i> • <i>Dirofilaria immitis</i> • <i>Leishmania</i> species • Other tests listed on the individual permit or health certificate

Rabies antibody testing

- A rabies neutralising antibody titre test is not identical for every South African import.
- When the issued permit requires RNATT, follow the specified laboratory, result, sampling and timing conditions exactly.
- The microchip number, vaccination details and blood-test report must be consistent.
- A rabies titre report prepared for another destination may not automatically satisfy the South African permit, so the laboratory, result and timing must be checked for this specific journey.

International veterinary sample logistics

- Some permit conditions require samples to be processed at a specified or recognised laboratory.
- Serum, EDTA blood, blood smears or other specimen types may be required, depending on the tests.
- Packaging, temperature control, courier restrictions, customs documentation and laboratory receiving hours must be coordinated before collection.
- Fly Your Tail schedules testing backwards from the planned flight date, allowing sufficient time for courier transit, laboratory reporting and any necessary document corrections.

Laboratory logistics are an important part of the journey.

Correct timing, specimen preparation and courier coordination help prevent avoidable delays to the planned travel date.

PERMIT AND QUARANTINE

How the authorisation process works

Veterinary import permit

- The application form depends on whether the pet will be imported under quarantine, further control or non-quarantine conditions.
- The completed form is submitted with proof of payment and any required agent authorisation or supporting documents.
- The permit is issued for a limited period and for the described consignment.
- The permit is not a substitute for the veterinary health certificate; both are required.
- The Department states that routine issuance can take several working days after veterinary approval, but planning should allow for the statutory application lead time and possible queries.

When quarantine is required

- The importer or agent must contact the State Veterinarian at the chosen port of entry.
- The State Veterinarian confirms availability and completes the quarantine section needed for the application.
- An indemnity declaration and proof of the prescribed quarantine fees may be required.
- The quarantine duration and procedures are set by the permit and the applicable protocol.
- Some higher-control origin countries may be assigned a post-arrival stay, commonly around 14 days in relevant protocols, but this must be confirmed from the issued permit.
- Additional testing, treatment or an extended stay may be ordered if documents or health findings are not satisfactory.

Quarantine requirements vary by origin and permit.

Some pets may not require quarantine, while others may be assigned a post-arrival stay.

Fly Your Tail confirms the applicable requirement after reviewing the country of export and the issued permit.

Transport, inspection and release

Airline planning

- The airline makes the final decision on acceptance, route, aircraft, breed restrictions and travel-kennel suitability.
- Many pets arrive under manifested-cargo procedures, especially when travelling unaccompanied or on airlines that do not offer checked-baggage carriage.
- The kennel should meet the airline's requirements and applicable IATA Live Animals Regulations.
- Seasonal heat restrictions, aircraft type and transit handling must be checked before the booking is confirmed.
- Sedation is generally discouraged for air travel and can result in airline refusal.

Port-of-entry documentation

- Original veterinary import permit
- Original veterinary health certificate
- Rabies vaccination certificate
- Original or accepted laboratory reports
- Quarantine confirmation and indemnity documents when applicable
- Air waybill, customs documents and any CITES or other permit required for the species

Arrival sequence

- The pet is held under airline or cargo control until the veterinary import inspection is completed.
- The veterinary officer verifies the animal, original documents and compliance with the permit.
- Customs and cargo-release procedures are completed after or alongside veterinary clearance.
- A quarantined pet is transferred under the approved arrangement to the designated facility.
- A pet not subject to quarantine may be collected or delivered once veterinary, customs and cargo formalities are complete.

PLANNING TIMELINE

A practical preparation sequence

4-6 months before	Fly Your Tail assesses the country-specific requirements, laboratory availability, rabies status, route and likely quarantine pathway.
At least 30 working days before export	The formal permit application should reach the South African authority by this stage. Complex and quarantine cases should begin earlier.
After permit issue	Fly Your Tail prepares the exact testing, treatment and documentation schedule from the issued permit and certificate.
3-6 weeks before	Longer-lead laboratory sampling, international courier shipments and preliminary airline arrangements are completed where applicable.
Final weeks	The remaining tests, parasite treatments, quarantine confirmation and travel-kennel review are completed.
Within the certificate window	The final clinical examination and official veterinary certificate are completed within the period stated on the permit, commonly within 10 days before departure.
Travel day	The original documents travel with the shipment as required, with copies retained by the owner and receiving agent.
Arrival	Veterinary inspection, customs clearance, quarantine transfer or release and final delivery.

Costs to budget for

- Veterinary import permit fee and bank or courier charges
- Quarantine reservation, accommodation and government services where required
- Veterinary consultations, vaccinations, tests and laboratory fees
- International sample courier and customs costs
- Travel kennel and preparation materials
- Airline freight, origin handling and export customs
- South African veterinary inspection, cargo handling and customs clearance
- Quarantine collection, release and final delivery

Your quotation is prepared for the individual journey.

Fly Your Tail checks the current permit, quarantine, airline, laboratory and destination-handling charges before preparing your relocation quotation.

RISK CONTROL

Common mistakes that delay South African imports

Booking before the permit: The permit conditions may change the tests, route, quarantine and earliest viable travel date.

Using a generic disease panel: Only the tests and methods required by the issued documents should be treated as controlling.

Late sample collection: International laboratory shipments and reporting can take longer than expected.

Incorrect specimen type: Serum, EDTA blood and smears are not interchangeable.

Microchip or identity discrepancies: The animal, vaccine records, laboratory reports and health certificate must identify the same pet.

Missing original documents: Copies may not be sufficient at the port of entry.

No quarantine reservation: The permit may not be issued, or the pet may not be accepted on the planned date.

Certificate outside its validity window: The final certificate must be completed within the permit's stated timeframe.

Uncoordinated cargo arrival: Veterinary office hours, cargo storage, customs and quarantine transfer must be aligned.

Assuming the same rules apply to every origin: South Africa's requirements are explicitly country- and permit-specific.

Your South Africa relocation checklist

- The correct import application form has been identified for your pet.
- The permit application and payment have been submitted within the required timeframe.
- The issued permit and veterinary health certificate have been checked carefully.
- Quarantine is confirmed when required.
- Every required test, specimen type and laboratory matches the permit conditions.
- Rabies vaccination and identity records are consistent.
- The final veterinary certificate and government endorsement appointments are correctly scheduled.
- The airline accepts the pet, kennel and route.
- The original documents will arrive with the pet or authorised receiving agent.
- Arrival inspection, customs, quarantine transfer and delivery are arranged.

How we support a South Africa relocation

Fly Your Tail can coordinate the entire relocation or selected specialist stages. Every case is personally managed by Julia, with one point of contact across the permit, laboratory, veterinary, airline and arrival process.

- Origin-country and quarantine assessment
- Veterinary import permit application support
- Permit-to-timeline interpretation
- Veterinary disease-panel planning
- Blood, serum, EDTA and smear sample logistics
- Coordination with authorised or specified laboratories
- Health-certificate preparation and government endorsement
- Travel-kennel sizing and airline compliance review
- Airline cargo, origin handling and export-clearance coordination
- South African veterinary inspection, quarantine and final-delivery planning

Planning a move to South Africa?

Send Fly Your Tail your pet's species, breed, age, weight, measurements, current country, vaccination history, target city and preferred travel date. Julia will assess the permit, testing, quarantine and transport pathway for the individual case.

Official references used for this guide

South African Government - Import animals and animal products

<https://www.gov.za/services/import/import-animals-and-animal-products>

Department of Agriculture - Animal Health application forms

<https://www.nda.gov.za/index.php/publication/439-animal-health>

Department of Agriculture - Veterinary import permit contacts

<https://www.nda.gov.za/index.php/publication/445-animal-health-contact-us>

Government Gazette - Animal Health Regulations, 29 May 2026

https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202606/54757reg12002gon7524.pdf

Department of Agriculture - Import procedures for animals and animal products

<https://www.nda.gov.za/images/Branches/AgricProducHealthFoodSafety/food-import-and-export-standards/highlights-and-events/import-procedures-for-animals-and-animal-products.pdf>

Important disclaimer

This guide is general information prepared in August 2026. South African veterinary permit conditions, disease requirements, quarantine rules, tariffs, airline policies and port procedures can change. The veterinary import permit and veterinary health certificate issued for the individual shipment take precedence. Fly Your Tail verifies the applicable requirements for every case before travel.