# Tips for Taking a Guide dog to A Convention

Are you and your guide ready for the 2018 National Federation of the Blind Convention? If you are new to taking a guide dog to a convention, you’ll want to be prepared to take on what can be a challenging experience. Hey, don’t get me wrong! We all love a good convention. The seminars, the division activities, the general sessions, and the exhibit hall are all exciting. But, all these same activities can be overwhelming to newcomers whether they be four footed guides or their handlers. The crowds are often loud and dense- full of people who are likely to be preoccupied with finding meeting rooms and visiting with friends. It’s easy for guide dogs to become distracted and stressed. It’s also easy for our dogs to be hit by swinging canes or stepped on. So, to help prepare for these challenges, CAGDU members have put together a list of convention tips.

Below is a list of tips for using a guide dog during an NFB convention. These tips have been provided by CAGDU members who are NFB Convention veterans.

Tips from Shannon Dillon

1. Stand back from the elevator before boarding to give people time to get out and avoid your dog being trampled. “As you enter, say something like “getting in” so people hear where you are and so they know you are there and are hopefully less likely to trample your dog.
2. When exiting an elevator, say something as you exit like “getting out” so people know you are coming out and they don’t rush in and trample your guide dog.
3. Travel during off times. Go a little early or a little late to meetings so you can travel when there are fewer people traveling.
4. Use your cane to work your way through crowds and put your dog behind you so that your dog is protected from being trampled. Working with crowds in a big city is entirely different from working in crowds at the convention and you have to protect your dog a lot more.
5. When sitting in the rows in the meetings, particularly general session where there are a ton of people, try to squeeze your dog under your chair or protect it with your feet and listen and watch for people coming through the rows who might step on your dog. People cut through the rows to get to a different isle, or they are trying to find a seat in the row you are sitting in. Let them know you have a dog on the floor in the isle. Like anywhere, some people are cool; some are jerks. You cannot depend on them to watch out for your dog’s well-being.
6. Keep your dog’s shoes in your purse or travel bag. If you go to lunch or dinner outside the hotel, you may not always want to go back to get them but it is almost always above 90 degrees in Orlando so you almost always need shoes during the day if you go outside where there is not shade.
7. When eating in a place where your dog doesn’t fit under the table, particularly in spaces where people eat but there is a lot of foot traffic, be careful to pay close attention to people around you walking near your dog. There are people with poor mobility or who are new to blindness, and they may step on your dog. Don’t count on other people to be considerate of your dog. I’ve had my dog tucked away behind a table next to a wall and a person was intent upon walking back behind the table where someone wouldn’t ordinarily walk. People don’t always understand they are walking where a person doesn’t ordinarily walk so be vigilant for your dog’s safety and you may have to tell the person they are walking into a corner or somewhere they can’t get out of to protect your dog.
8. When getting on or off and escalator, remember to give plenty of space between yourself and the people in front of you. I have more problems with this at conventions that I do traveling with millions of people on public transit in the Bay Area. Assume people ahead of you on the escalator will take a longer time to get off of it. Give plenty of extra time before getting on with your dog so you know they are far enough ahead of you that you will have space to get your dog off the escalator.

Tips from Tina Thomas

1. Remember to relieve your dog more frequently while at convention. There’s lots going on and the dog might become overly stimulated from all of the walking, so allow your dog to relieve as often as needed. An empty dog is a happy dog.
2. Allow your dog some down time. Conventions are very stressful for both human and dog, so, just as we need down time, your dog needs the same.
3. You might want to pack your dog’s favorite toy or favorite blanket to make him/her feel more comfortable while staying in a strange place with people who it doesn’t know and or just to give the dog something to do at night when your both relaxing in the room.
4. You might want to pack some Nature’s Miracle or other stain remover for accidents as well as paper towels for easy clean-up.
5. Make sure you give your dog there Heartworm and Flea medications before you travel or put it in your carry-on so that you can give it to the dog once you arrive at convention.
6. Be a little more lenient with your corrections with the dog. As was stated before, conventions are very stressful and somethings are going to happen that are not part of the dog’s routine and the dog will be in close quarters with other people and dogs so things can get a little hairy.
7. Keep in mind that in some cases, you nor your dog has not been to that particular place and you will have to navigate and give the dog proper commands. Don’t be hard on the dog if he/she doesn’t automatically take you where you want to go.
8. Have a blast at Convention!

Tips from Allison

Well, what can I say that hasn’t already been said? Shannon and Tina have covered just about everything. But, here are a couple of ideas of my own.

1. Pack most of, if not all of your dog’s food in your carryon bag. The last thing you need is to find that your luggage is lost and with it your dog food.
2. Before your trip, divide the dogfood into individual meals. I always measure out the meals into zip lock bags. I also always take at least 2 extra meals in case something happens that delays my return home.
3. Take a doggie rain jacket. It usually will rain at least once during the Orlando convention, and both you and your guide will be glad to have protection against getting wet if you need to leave the hotel during a down pour.

Thank you Tina and Shannon. With these tips, we can all prepare ourselves and our guides to traverse the crowds and the hotel. Now let’s start packing!

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