



SO YOU WANT TO BE A  
BALAM FOUNDATION  
FLIGHT ANGEL  
• • FLIGHT ANGEL FAQ • •

This is a guide to help you understand what to expect from this role. It will not answer every question you have regarding every situation. But we want you to have as much comfort and clarity as possible in advance of volunteering to be a Flight Angel.

### THE BALAM FOUNDATION MISSION STATES:

THE BALAM FOUNDATION is dedicated to ending animal suffering in Mexico's most impoverished communities. By offering free sterilization to cats and dogs - as well as providing rescue, TNR, foster care, and adoption - we make a difference for the most vulnerable stray animals.

THE BALAM FOUNDATION TRANSPORTS AND ADOPTS OUT CATS TO FOREVER HOMES IN THE UNITED STATES & CANADA

## RULES OF THE POSITION

While all of the following are discussed in detail below, these are the top expectations to be a Flight Angel:

- 1 You must be good with cats, meaning responsive to their needs
- 2 You must have a cell phone which is operational in the U.S. and/or Canada
- 3 The Balam Foundation will determine if it is in the best interests of the cat(s) to overnight in a hotel enroute to their final destination
- 4 The Balam Foundation, in consultation with you and the Adopter, will book and pay for your flights, your shuttle, and the hotel if necessary
- 5 You will need to pay the cat carrier fee(s), and if necessary, the hotel pet fee. These costs will be reimbursed by the Balam Foundation with presentation of the hard copy receipt of payment.  
It is your responsibility to pay for any checked baggage
- 6 You must return the cat carrier to the Balam Foundation



# HOW DO I BECOME AWARE OF A FLIGHT ANGEL OPENING?

The first step in adopting out cats to homes north of the border is to find a good match between an adopter up north and one or more of our cats/kittens here. That is done by members of the Balam Foundation team.

You will first learn of a Flight Angel need when that match has been approved and a request is sent to the Flight Angel WhatsApp group. Alternatively, you may be contacted by someone you know who is aware of this opportunity or see the opportunity on social media posts.

It is expected that any Flight Angel will be good with cats, meaning able to adapt to and care for situations that occur, like a cat vomiting, peeing or pooping in their carrier during travel. Airlines require that cats remain in the carrier while in airports and planes unless an animal relief area is available. This may require you to improvise on how to clean them up without removing them from the carrier.

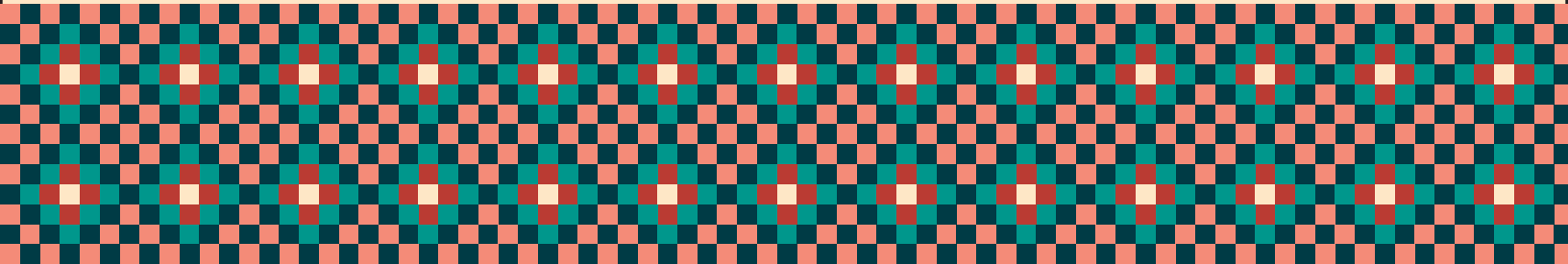
Staying alert to the cat/kitten's needs is the most important role a Flight Angel plays.

The requirements and benefits for every flight vary somewhat. An effort is made to answer all pertinent information upfront in the initial WhatsApp request. Such details will likely include the following:

- City where the cats/kittens will need to be delivered (e.g. Nashville or LAX)
- Expected general or specific timeframe (e.g. early December or December 6th or 7th)
- How many cats/kittens will be transported and their names (maybe even photos and a short bio)
- Any special requirements

Based on your availability and whether this is a desired opportunity for you to help the cats/kittens make their way to their forever home, you can respond to the WhatsApp post with a simple "Yes, I am interested." If not interested, please do not respond. We try to limit the amount of traffic that interferes with the key objective...to get our furry friends on their way as soon as practical. If you are not a part of the WhatsApp Flight Angel group, then use your contact to respond on your behalf.

Based on applicants a Flight Angel will be selected for that flight and that individual will be contacted.





## YOU HAVE BEEN THE ONE SELECTED TO TRANSPORT OUR FELINE FRIEND(S). WHAT NOW?

- You will be contacted by a member of the Balam team who will be your “co-pilot” for the journey preparation.

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- The co-pilot will request a contact phone number which will be used for setting up a WhatsApp group consisting of the Adopter (A), the Flight Angel (FA), and the co-pilot. This phone number must always be accessible during your travel in the States, either through direct dialing or through WhatsApp dialing (may require WIFI).

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- Please also provide a secondary mode of contact like an email address.

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- The **STANDARD** expectation is that your co-pilot will book, through the Balam Foundation, your air travel, shuttle travel and hotel stay overnight if required. This will be done after the Adopter has agreed to the total estimate of costs they will be expected to pay the Foundation.

- Do NOT book your own travel without clearing it through Balam.

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- Some costs are charged at the airport or after the flight has begun. For your own comfort, please investigate what these additional charges will be so that you are prepared to pay them, and also feel comfortable that you will (or will not) be reimbursed for them (see “You are at the Airport” below).

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- The Balam team will advise you if you have questions.

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- Establish contact with the Adopter. Just keep them informed of what steps are being taken to bring their furrever family member(s) to them.

## IT IS ALMOST TRAVEL TIME. AREN'T YOU EXCITED? (OR MAYBE A LITTLE APPREHENSIVE?)

- First you will need to collect your supply kit (more info ahead) and your furry traveling companions. Hopefully you have had a chance to meet them at the SMA sanctuary once or twice before travel time. Depending on your flight schedule you may need to collect them the night before your flight, with the expectation you can house your furry felines in a safe place until the trip to the airport.

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- In an effort to make this journey with minimal trauma for our babies (and for you) you will be provided a small dose of gabapentina to relax them. Are you good with giving pills to small mouths? If not, it is our experience that they gobble “churu” pasty treats. Mix the gabapentin into this treat and let them lick it up, or off your finger. They love it.

- Last food should be provided 3 hours before your kitty will go into the cat carrier. Water should be available until shuttle arrives. Churus can continue to be fed as breakfast or to assist with delivering meds.

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- Provide their sedative about four hours before the scheduled flight departure, before the shuttle arrives.

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- The shuttle arrives, your babies are not yet relaxed, they may cry. This can be very difficult for you. They do not want to be confined in a cat carrier. But begin with the end in mind. They are going to a safe place with loving humans. **24 hours of discomfort is worth a lifetime of contentment.**



# WHAT IS THE SUPPLY LIST AND WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT ON THE DAY OF THE FLIGHT?

## You will be provided with:

- a cat carrier
- baby wipes
- diaper pads
- some churus
- food
- medical record
- any medical supplies required, including some gabapentin to help relax your charges during the journey.

**Make sure you hand off the medical record to the Adopter, along with any of the supplies they indicate they do not have.**

You will be expected to return the cat carrier to The Balam Foundation at the return of your journey.

# YOU ARE AT THE AIRPORT. WHAT NOW?

- American Airlines (AA) is the preferred Balam Foundation travel partner.
- At check in for AA, you will have to pay for the cat carrier and may have to pay to check one of your bags (see Carry-on Pet policy below). You will be reimbursed for the cat carrier fee, but not for checking a bag because your luggage is more than referenced below. Save your receipt for the carrier.
- After receiving your boarding documents proceed through security. You will be required to remove your cat from the carrier to allow the carrier to go through the X-ray machine. Take your time, get a good grip, and you will be directed to extend your arms so there is space between your body and the kitties. You are through.
- Now you wait for boarding. The babies are fussing. People are looking at you. Yet they smile. All want to know why you have these sweet things with you. It really is a lovely experience sharing our mission.

- At last, you are boarding. Fit the kitties under the seat in front of you ensuring the ventilated side of the carrier is facing you to allow for maximum airflow.
- **And you are taking off!**

## CARRY-ON PETS

(AA POLICY AS OF JULY 5, 2024)

On flights with American you can bring one pet carrier as a carry-on if:

- You pay the carry-on pet fee
- Your pet stays in the pet carrier and under the seat in front of you the entire flight

### **YOU CAN BRING ONLY ONE ADDITIONAL ITEM ON BOARD WITH YOUR PET:**

- A personal item like a purse or small handbag;
- or–
- A carry-on bag that meets requirements and fits in the overhead bin

**REMEMBER, YOU CAN ONLY BRING ONE WITH YOUR PET CARRIER, NOT BOTH.**

# THE FLIGHT AND TRANSIT SECURITY AT FIRST LANDING NORTH OF THE BORDER

- What is your next concern? They are going to pee or poo during the flight...or die from fright! Likely they are still mewing as the sedative has not fully kicked in. Trust in the experience of the team and try to relax. While the bag must stay under the seat, it is perfectly acceptable to open the zipper very carefully to pet them while in transit. Careful though! Kittens particularly can rapidly squeeze through a small open space, so remain alert.

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- If they pee, you have a puppy pad in their carrier to absorb it. Ideally you will replace it asap, but you can take your time juggling them about in the carrier as you do so. But what if they POO? As we know, in general, a cat's poo can be picked up and removed. Use those baby wipes you received in your supply kit.

**PLEASE do not remove the cat from the carrier.**

The airline has the right to remove you from the flight should you break their rules.

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- Upon arrival at your first airport in the US, request a "private screening" at security. This allows you to take the cats to a private room where you can keep them safe while the security agent runs the carrier through the Xray machine.

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- Note for those who have been provided a hotel on the out-bound journey. There have occasionally been issues with cats getting inside the spring base of a bed and refusing to come out. In recognition of this possibility, it is suggested you check for any holes a cat can slip through and stuff pillows into those spaces.

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- The airline can also require a second payment of the cat carrier fee depending on the length of time between flights. It doesn't often happen, but just so you are aware (it is reimbursable, see next section).

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- Maintain contact with the Adopter and Balam reps throughout the journey through your specific WhatsApp group. Confirm your arrival status and the contact point for transfer of the kitties from your care to the Adopter's care (e.g. the airport carousel where bags from the flight will be delivered or another place you both agree on).

## HOW AM I REIMBURSED FOR MY APPROVED EXPENSES?

Receipts are required for reimbursement. Since Balam Foundation will be booking most of your travel, the only out of pocket reimbursable costs are:

- 1 Cat carrier fee at airport check in
- 2 If you stay in a hotel, you will be charged a hotel pet fee at check in
- 3 As mentioned above, there is the possibility you will be charged the cat carrier fee again when you check in for your onward journey after a night in a hotel

Please present these hard copy receipts to Balam Foundation for reimbursement. Alternatively, the adopter may volunteer to pay you when you deliver the kitties to them.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

- Follow up with the Adopter before, during, and after the journey. Once your charges have been integrated into their new home ask for some pictures to share.
- Pass the word about your incredible experience.
- Good luck becoming a Flight Angel for our wonderful SMA cats!

