



Traveling with Your Horse: Caring for Your Horse Away from Home

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Any time spent with horses is enjoyable, but there is something particularly fun about taking your steady steed on an off-farm adventure. Traveling with your horse, whether to a show, trail ride, or other experience, is a great way to show off your horseback riding skills, to test what you and your horse have learned in training, and certainly to socialize with other horse-loving friends.

This publication offers simple tips on good health and safety practices for managing your horse when away from home.

Arrival

If your trip is for a short trail ride or a one-day horse show, you may plan to keep your horse tied to the trailer when you are not riding. Plan to arrive early so you can find a good parking area. Look for a spot that will offer some shade and that will be relatively quiet. Also, try to find a place where the ground is level and not muddy. In the days before the event, make sure that you accustom your horse to standing tied for at least an hour.

A horse that does not tie well can also be kept in the trailer when you are not riding, but be aware that the trailer can get very hot.

At many events, horses will be able to stay in stalls. When you arrive, find your horse's stall and make sure it is suitable. Because your horse will be spending a lot of time in the stall, it is imperative that all health hazards are removed. Before putting your horse in a stall, make sure it is free from nails, broken boards, protruding objects, holes, and other potential dangers that could cause harm. Make sure the stall door works properly and opens fully, and check that the metal bars are intact.

Water

All horses should have at least one five-gallon bucket—and preferably two—mounted in their stalls. Each bucket should be full of clean, fresh water that is changed at least once per day. If a horse has a habit of dunking hay or grain into the water bucket, you will need to be extra attentive to ensure the water is always clean. All buckets should be hung; a bucket sitting on the ground can be easily overturned. This not only leaves the horse without water and at risk of dehydration, but it also increases the risk of injury if the horse steps through the metal handle.

Ideally, the stall will already have a place to hang the water bucket, but bring some extra hardware and proper tools in case they are needed. Make sure that the water buckets are hung at a height that is comfortable for drinking, but not so low that the horse can put a leg in the bucket. If you are using a double-ended snap to hang the bucket, be sure the spring releases are pointed toward the wall; it is easy for horses to get lips or eyelids caught if the spring releases are facing out (Figure 1). Wrapping the ends of the bucket handle (where it turns back onto itself) with either an adhesive bandage or some form of tape (duct tape, for example) can also keep a horse from being injured (Figure 2).

Water is the most important nutrient for your horse. A concerted effort should be made to provide your horse with plenty of fresh, drinkable water. Some horses do not drink enough water when away from their homes (and their typical water sources), which can cause dehydration and lead to impaction colic. Colic



Figure 1. The wrong way to hang a bucket, with snaps turned toward the horse and not the wall.



Figure 2. Duct tape wrapped around bucket handle ends.

can be an expensive and life-threatening medical emergency. If your horse does not like to drink strange water, you can either bring water from home in a clean, plastic container or you can mask the water's taste by adding sports drinks, molasses, or any other flavoring your horse may like. However, if adding something to the water is your plan, you need to train your horse to drink the flavored water weeks in advance at home. See [Traveling with Your Horse: Trailer and Truck Packing \(ASC-252\)](#) for more information.

Some people like to bring water from home. If that is your plan, it is important to bring enough water for your horse for the entire time you will be away. New, unused plastic gas cans are often used to transport water, since they are easily carried and sealed. Camping stores often sell collapsible water jugs that are convenient to store as well.

Luckily, most horses drink fresh tap water even when away from home, but it is still a good idea to take some water with you, in case you are in a location where there is no water source.

Feeding

A change in the quality or quantity of food, or a change in the feeding schedule, can increase your horse's risk of colic. Because of this, it is imperative that a horse's feeding routine while traveling mimics the home feeding routine as closely as possible.

Ideally, a horse should have constant access to hay while in a stall. Traveling can be stressful for horses, even sometimes causing them to develop gastric ulcers. Always having hay available will diminish the chance of your horse developing ulcers or colicking. Eating hay can encourage horses to drink more water as well, which will help prevent dehydration, a major concern for horses that travel. Make sure to bring the hay your horse typically eats at home on your adventure; an abrupt change in hay is the leading cause of colic in horses.

Slow-feed hay nets, which have smaller holes than traditional hay nets, are great for horses that need to consume a limited amount of hay, whether for health or performance reasons. These hay nets slow down the horse's hay consumption, ensuring the hay is available for longer periods. If you decide to hang a hay net, be sure to secure it high enough that the horse cannot put a leg through the net and risk being injured (Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 3. A hay net hung too low.



Figure 4. A low-hanging hay net can entangle and potentially injure a horse.

Bedding

If your horse will stay in a stall, make sure it is properly bedded with shavings, straw, or your bedding of choice. Some shows will require you to use a specific type of bedding. You will know there is enough bedding in the stall when none of the stall flooring is visible. Research shows that horses lie down more frequently when stalls are well bedded, which helps them rest and recover from physical exertion. Each stall should be picked several times a day to remove soiled bedding and uneaten hay. You may need to add additional bedding to the stall if the show or trail ride takes place over multiple days. Some event planners will ask you to order the bedding when you send in your entries and stall request. If you can afford it, order more than you think you will need. You can always take an extra bag or bale home.

Stall Card

All stalls housing horses should have a clearly written stall card that displays the horse's name along with the exhibitor's and owner's names and contact information, listing where they can be reached during the competition or event. The stall card is of the utmost importance in case the horse gets hurt, becomes ill, or needs to be removed from the showgrounds because of severe weather or fire.

General Safety

If it is hot enough to use a fan, you must use a fan with a three-pronged plug; this will help prevent fires. Mount the fan from the rafters or to the stall front, and ensure that your horse cannot reach any of the moving parts or the cord. Staples, zip ties, or heavy-duty tape can help secure the cord outside the stall.

Every horse should have an easily accessible halter and lead rope in case an emergency arises. These can be hung on the stall door or, in the case of the halter, left on the horse. Halters left on horses overnight should be properly fitted, with no loose pieces that can get hooked on any part of the stall, stall guard, buckets, or a hoof. It should be made of leather or at least have a leather crownpiece so it will break away if it gets caught on something and the horse panics. It is a good idea to have a nameplate on your halter. If your horse and others get loose or have to be moved when you are not there, the nameplate will allow the horse to be identified later. Alternatively, you can attach a tag to the horse's halter with its name and your contact information.

Stall guards (sometimes called webbings) should only be used while you or someone you trust is near your horse. Horses should not be left unattended with just a stall guard to encourage them to remain in the stall. No matter what type of stall guard you use, remove it from the stall when you are preparing to leave the barn for the evening. This practice will prevent the horse from getting a leg caught between the stall guard and the stall door.

Feed, hay, tack, grooming supplies, and tools should be stored away from horses and not scattered about the aisle, where they can present safety hazards to both horses and humans. Extra bedding and hay should be stacked neatly and kept away from inquisitive muzzles. Clean, clutter-free aisles are especially important in case of an emergency evacuation.

Concentrate feed should be kept in tightly sealed containers, away from any horse's reach.

And finally, make sure to have a first-aid kit easily accessible for emergencies. For more information on what to include in a first-aid kit for horses, check [Traveling with Your Horse: First-Aid Kits \(ASC-253\)](#).

Conclusion

Going on an adventure with your horse can be exciting—if you are prepared and have set your horse up for success. Following these guidelines increases the likelihood of keeping your horse safe and healthy while away from home.

Publications in this series:

[Traveling with Your Horse: Caring for Your Horse Away from Home \(ASC-251\)](#)

[Traveling with Your Horse: Trailer and Truck Packing \(ASC-252\)](#)

[Traveling with Your Horse: First-Aid Kits \(ASC-253\)](#)

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