



Pet Relocation GUIDE



Paws In
Paradise
SWFL



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Moving Your Pets To Paradise

by Paws In Paradise SWFL

Welcome To Paradise!



🐾 Welcome to Your "Paws in Paradise" SWFL Relocation Guide

Hi, I'm Karen Fowler, a Southwest Florida Realtor® and lifelong animal lover. Through Paws in Paradise SWFL, I help pet lovers find homes and communities where every member of the family — including the furry ones — feels right at home.

Moving can be exciting, but it's also a big change — especially for pets. I created these guides to make your transition smoother, safer, and more comfortable for both you and your four-legged family members.

Relocating to sunny Southwest Florida — with its stunning beaches, vibrant communities, and year-round warmth — is an incredible adventure. For pet owners, though, it requires a little extra planning. I understand that your furry, feathered, or scaled companions aren't just pets; they're family.

To support you every step of the way, I created two complementary resources: the Paws in Paradise Pet Relocation Guide and the Paws in Paradise Pet-Friendly Home Guide. One helps you prepare your pet for Florida's unique climate, health, and safety needs, while the other focuses on finding truly pet-welcoming homes and communities.

From navigating HOA pet policies and Emotional Support Animal guidelines to locating dog parks, trusted veterinarians, and emergency pet care, these guides are designed to give you confidence and peace of mind throughout your move.

Welcome to paradise — where palm trees sway, tails wag, and your next adventure begins.

Finding Your Perfect Pet-Friendly Home 🏡🐾

Relocating your pets successfully is about more than health, safety, and comfort — it's also about finding a home that truly welcomes your four-legged, feathered, or scaled family members.

While this guide focuses on preparing your pets for life in Southwest Florida, the Paws in Paradise Pet-Friendly Home Guide is your go-to resource for:

- Identifying genuinely pet-welcoming homes and communities
- Navigating HOA pet rules and breed restrictions
- Exploring neighborhoods with parks, trails, and nearby amenities for pets
- Tips for making a new house feel like home for your pets

Together, these guides give you a complete roadmap for a smooth, safe, and happy transition — from the move itself to settling into the perfect pet-friendly home.

📖 To check out the Paws in Paradise SWFL| Pet Friendly Home Guide, head to my website and download a copy at: <https://pawsinparadisewfl.com/moving-with-pets/>

Preparing For The Move!

A little planning goes a long way when it comes to moving with pets. Here is some information to help make the journey a little more stress-free for everyone.

Before You Move

Schedule a Vet visit

Make sure your pet's vaccines, prescriptions, and health records are up to date.

Update microchips and tags.

Add your new address and contact information.

Pack a "pet travel bag"

Include water, food, bowls, a leash, toys, a bed/blanket, litter and cleaning supplies.

Check travel requirements

Airlines, hotels, and rentals all have different pet policies - confirm ahead of time.

Keep routines as normal as possible

Feed, walk, and rest at familiar times to reduce anxiety.



Pro Tip: If your move involves flying, some airlines limit pet travel during hot months — book early and confirm breed-specific rules.



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4–6 Weeks Before Moving Day

TASK	SWFL Specific Details
Schedule Vet Visit & Health Check	Schedule a full exam and update all core vaccinations.
Obtain Necessary Documentation	Request copies of all medical records, a signed rabies certificate, and a written list of all medications and dosages.
Prepare for Rabies Requirement	Ensure your pet's rabies vaccination is current; this is non-negotiable for entry into Florida for dogs and cats.
Stock Up on Medications	Ask for a 30–90 day supply of prescriptions and written refill instructions.
Verify Local Pet Policies	Check county (Lee, Collier, Charlotte) requirements for dog licensing and local leash laws. Review HOA, condo, or rental pet policies for any breed, size, or number
Prepare Carriers/Crates	Start acclimating your pet to their crate or carrier, making it a comfortable place to rest.

10–30 Days Before Moving Day

TASK	SWFL Specific Details
Get Official Health Certificate	Schedule a vet appointment to obtain an Official Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (OCVI), which must be issued by a licensed vet, typically within 30 days of travel.
Update ID & Microchip	Crucial: update your pet's microchip registration with your new Florida contact information. Order a new ID tag with your new phone number.
Start Prevention Transition	Begin year-round heartworm, flea, and tick prevention. Florida's mosquito season is long and intense.
Create Pet Emergency Kit	Assemble a hurricane-ready to-go-bag with 3–7 days of food/water, meds, medical records, and a recent photo.
Plan Pet-Friendly Evacuation	Identify pet-friendly hotels or shelters outside the potential hurricane impact area (June to November).

Moving Day and Travel

TASK	SWFL Specific Details
Carry Key Documents	Keep printed and digital copies of the Rabies Certificate and OCVI easily accessible during travel.
Secure Travel	Transport your pet safely secured in your own vehicle (if possible) or follow all airline carrier rules. Never leave pets unattended in a parked vehicle.
Secure Pets	Put pets in a quiet, closed room, or use a trusted sitter during loading and unloading.

First Week in Southwest Florida

TASK	SWFL Specific Details
Locate Emergency Vet	Find the nearest 24/7 veterinary clinic for emergencies. (Listed in this guide on Pages 5-6)
Establish Care with New Vet	Book a new-vet visit within 1-2 weeks to establish care, transfer records, and discuss local parasite preventatives.
Get Local Pet License	Apply for your county pet license (Lee, Collier, or Charlotte) right away. This requires proof of rabies vaccination.
Pet-Proof the New Home	Secure fencing/gates, check for gaps, and pet-proof before allowing your pet free roam. Be mindful of nearby waterways/canals due to wildlife.
Rebuild Routine	Start with one calm room to allow your pet to decompress, then quickly rebuild their regular feeding, walking, and play schedules.



Key Southwest Florida County Pet Licensing

All three Southwest Florida counties require dogs and cats over four months old to be vaccinated against rabies and licensed and is recommended but not required for ferrets as well. Licensing is mandatory for pets residing in the county for a certain period (e.g., 15 days in Collier County, 30 days in Lee County, 28 consecutive days in Charlotte County).

For easy access, below are the official links and key licensing details for the three main counties in Southwest Florida: Lee, Collier, and Charlotte.

COUNTY	PET LICENSING LINK	UNALTERED 1-Year Fee (Approx.)	ALTERED PET (Spayed/Neutered) 1-Year Fee (Approx.)
Lee County	https://www.leegov.com/animalservices/licensing	\$35.00	\$15.00
Collier County	https://www.collier.gov/Resident-Resources/Domestic-Animal-Services	\$100.00	\$15.00
Charlotte County	https://taxcollector.charlottecountyfl.gov/animal-licensing	\$35.00	\$17.00

Important Licensing Details:

Rabies Proof is Required: You must provide a copy of a current rabies certificate from a veterinarian to purchase a license.

Fees Encourage Sterilization: Fees for unaltered (non-spayed/neutered) pets are significantly higher in all three counties to promote pet sterilization.

Late Fees Apply: If you do not purchase a license within 30 days of the pet's rabies vaccination or moving in, late fees will be assessed. In Collier County, a license must be purchased within 15 days of moving in or obtaining a pet.



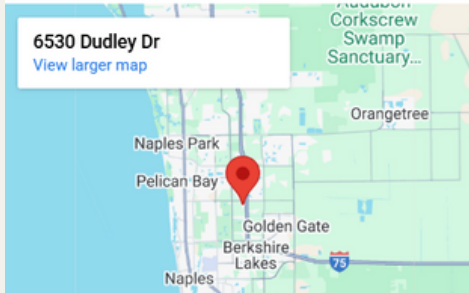
(239) 294-6829 | PawsInParadiseSWFL@gmail.com

24 Hour Emergency Pet Hospitals

Collier County | Charlotte County | Lee County

(239) 263-8010
6530 Dudley Drive
Naples, FL 34105

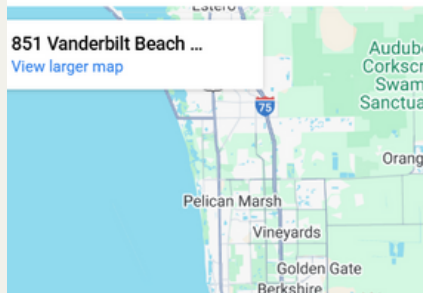
Emergency Pet Hospital



Emergency Pet Hospital

(239) 306-8600
851 Vanderbilt Beach Rd
Naples, FL 34108

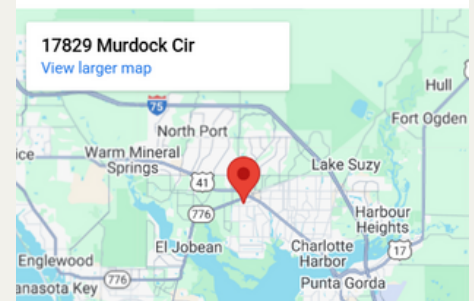
UrgentVet



UrgentVet/Naples

(941) 255-5222
17829 Murdock Circle
Port Charlotte, FL 33948

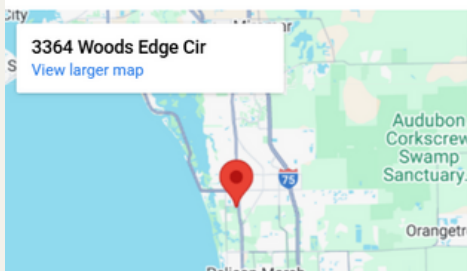
Veterinary Emergency Clinic



Veterinary Emergency Clinic

(239) 260-4100
3364 Woods Edge Circle
Bonita Springs, FL 34134

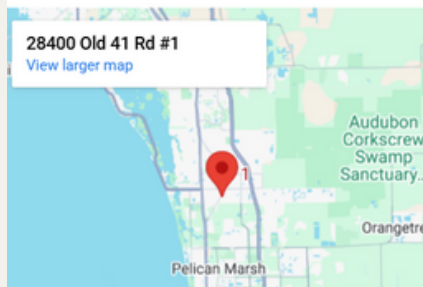
Fetch



Fetch/Bonita Springs

(239) 992-8387
28400 Old 41 Rd 1
Bonita Springs, FL 34135

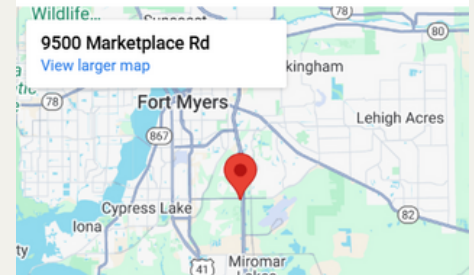
SWFL Vet Specialists



SWFL Veterinary Specialists

(239) 947-0588
9500 Marketplace Rd
Fort Myers, FL 33912

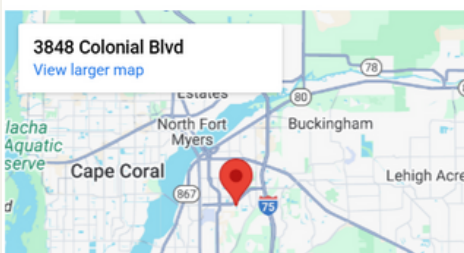
BluePearl Pet Hospital



BluePearl

(239) 308-9770
3848 Colonial Blvd
Fort Myers, FL 33966

Connect With Fetch



Fetch/Fort Myers

(239) 722-2100
6880 Daniels Pkwy, Ste 2
Fort Myers, FL 33912

UrgentVet



UrgentVet/Fort Myers

Click Photos for Direct
Access to Individual
Hospitals



Click here

Pet-Friendly Hurricane Preparedness in SWFL

The most important rule is: If you evacuate, take your pets with you. Leaving them behind dramatically decreases their chance of survival.

1. The Pet Emergency "Go-Bag"

Assemble a disaster kit that can last for at least three days during an evacuation and ideally two weeks for sheltering-in-place at home.

Identification & Records:

Current ID tags on the collar with up-to-date contact info.

A current microchip with updated information is essential, as tags can fall off.

Photocopies of vaccination records, rabies certificate, and medical summaries in a waterproof container.

A recent photo of you with your pet to prove ownership if separated.

Food, Water, and Supplies:

A 3-day minimum supply of food and water in sealed containers.

Bowls, manual can opener (if needed), and a two-week supply of all medications.

- Litter, litter box, scoop, newspapers, plastic bags, and paper towels for sanitation.
- Leashes, harnesses, and comfort items like a blanket or toys.

- Carrier/Crate:

- A sturdy, impact-resistant carrier or crate large enough for the pet to stand up and turn around.
- Label the carrier with your pet's name, your contact info, and medical details.

2. Evacuation and Shelter Planning

Public shelters are a last resort; your first plan should be a friend's house or pet-friendly lodging outside the evacuation zone.

- Know Your Zone: Locate your evacuation zone and route well before a storm.
- Pet-Friendly Lodging: Book hotels or motels that accept pets early, as they fill up quickly. Check resources like [Pets Welcome](#) for listings outside the projected strike area.
- County Pet Shelters (The Last Resort):
 - Lee County (Fort Myers/Cape Coral): Has a Mandatory Evacuation Pet Shelter (M.E.P.S.), often located at South Fort Myers High School. This is only for residents in mandatory evacuation areas. Owners must stay at the shelter with their pets.
 - Collier County (Naples/Marco Island): Your current County Rabies/License Tag automatically pre-registers your pet for the Pet-Friendly Shelters. Admission is first-come, first-served, and you must remain with your pet.
 - Charlotte County (Port Charlotte/Punta Gorda): All County-staffed shelters are generally pet-friendly. Check local media for open locations, as capacity is limited.
- Shelter Requirements: Designated pet shelters typically only accept dogs and cats, require a current license/rabies tag, and mandate that the owner provide a sturdy crate and all supplies.

Special Considerations for Exotic and Large Animals

Public pet-friendly shelters in SWFL typically only accept common domestic pets (dogs and cats). Owners of exotic animals, birds, reptiles, or large animals (like horses or livestock) must arrange alternative sheltering plans well in advance.

1. Birds, Reptiles, and Small Mammals

These animals have highly specific environmental needs that must be maintained during an evacuation to avoid stress-induced illness.

Secure Transport: Transport birds in a secure travel cage and reptiles or small mammals (hamsters, rabbits) in secure carriers. Snakes can be temporarily transported in a pillowcase but require secure housing upon arrival.

Environment Control: Include essential cage accessories in your kit, such as:

Heating: A heating pad, hot water bottle, or battery-operated heat source for reptiles.

Misting: A plant mister to periodically moisten birds' feathers in warm weather.

Perches/Bedding: A perch for birds, and ample bedding for small mammals.

Food: Dry food (pellets for birds/reptiles) is preferred over fresh produce or live prey for travel. Birds should have a timed feeder to ensure they eat daily, as their metabolism is fast.

Labeling: Label the carrier with feeding instructions, medical needs, and the name/number of your exotic animal veterinarian.

Reptiles and amphibians may not be accepted at mainland shelters. You should confirm acceptance with any shelter or lodging before arrival.

2. Large Animals (Horses, Livestock, Pigs)

The key to protecting large animals is early evacuation and thorough preparation.

Evacuation: If you are in a storm-surge area or floodplain, a precautionary evacuation is strongly advised. Heavy traffic and high winds make trailer transport unsafe once winds reach 40 mph.

Shelter-in-Place: If you cannot evacuate:

The safest place is a large pasture with high ground to avoid post-storm flooding.

DO NOT leave large animals in barns, as collapsing structures are a leading cause of death.

Identification: Permanently label animals with ID tags, a non-toxic grease pencil, or spray paint with your phone number. Halter all horses before the storm hits.

Kit: Your kit should include extra halters, leads, wire cutters, a two-week supply of feed in waterproof containers, and official documents (like Coggins tests for horses).



Pet-Friendly Lodging for Evacuation

The safest and most comfortable option is to find a hotel, friend or relative outside of the storm's projected path. Always call the specific hotel property directly to confirm their current pet policy and availability, especially during an emergency, as policies may be temporarily relaxed or strictly enforced.

1. Helpful Search Tools and Websites

These online resources specialize in finding pet-friendly accommodations and are invaluable during evacuation planning:

“Bring Fido” and the corresponding app are highly-rated resources that let you filter hotels by pet size (including large dogs) and whether they charge a pet fee.

Petswelcome.com lists hotels along the Gulf Coast of Florida and often includes details on pet fees and weight limits.

Major travel sites like Expedia and Booking.com allow filtering by 'pet-friendly' amenities.

2. Hotel Chains Known for Pet Policies

While policies can vary by individual location, the following chains often have pet-friendly rooms, making them good starting points for your search along I-75 evacuation routes (which head north towards Tampa/Orlando or west toward the Panhandle):

La Quinta by Wyndham: Many locations are pet-friendly and some reportedly allow up to two dogs per room with no security deposit or pet fee.

Motel 6: Generally known for welcoming dogs, with some locations allowing pets to stay free.

Red Roof Inn: Most of their properties welcome pets, with many locations not charging a pet fee.

Hilton Brands (Hampton Inn, Home2 Suites, Homewood Suites): Many Hilton-affiliated hotels, including those in Fort Myers along I-75, are pet-friendly, though pet fees may apply.

Extended Stay America: These hotels often have apartment-style accommodations and may be better for longer stays during an emergency.


Crucial Tip: When booking, ask about the hotel's specific pet policy regarding weight limits, number of pets allowed, and any non-refundable pet fees or deposits.





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Finding the Perfect Pet-Friendly Home

When it comes to buying or renting with pets, not all properties are created equal. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

 Fenced yards or screened lanais for safe outdoor time

 Nearby walking trails, dog parks, or beaches

 Pet-friendly flooring like tile or vinyl

 Neighborhoods or HOAs with clear pet policies

As your Pet-Friendly Realtor®, I'll help you find homes and communities that welcome pets with open arms. From single-family homes with fenced yards to condos with pet-friendly amenities, we'll find the perfect match for your lifestyle and theirs.


Looking for a home where your pets can truly live their best life? I know just the place.

Settling Into Your New Home

The move is over — now it's time to help your pets feel at home in paradise.


Tips for a smooth transition:


Set up a familiar space with their bed, toys, and bowls before they arrive.

 Stick to regular feeding and walking times.

 Introduce one room at a time so they don't feel overwhelmed.

 Take it slow with outdoor time — Southwest Florida heat can be intense.

 Be cautious near water; canals and ponds can have wildlife.

 **Pro Tip:** If the pavement is too hot for your hand, it's too hot for their paws! Schedule walks early or later in the day.



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Legal Protections: Service Animals vs Emotional Support Animals

In Florida, the distinction between a pet, an Emotional Support Animal, and a Service Animal is governed by two different federal laws, which greatly impact a community's pet policy.

FEATURE	Service Animal (SA)	Emotional Support Animal (ESA)
Governing Law	Primarily the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)	Primarily the Fair Housing Act (FHA)
Function/Training	Individually trained to perform a specific task directly related to the owner's disability (e.g., guiding, alerting to seizures).	Provides therapeutic emotional support by its presence to alleviate symptoms of a disability, and no special training is required.
Housing Access	Required to be permitted as a reasonable accommodation, even in communities with strict "no-pet" or breed/size restrictions.	Required to be permitted as a reasonable accommodation, overriding pet fees, size, and breed restrictions.
Public Access	Guaranteed access to all public accommodations (stores, restaurants, transport).	Not guaranteed access to public spaces; restricted to pet-friendly venues and housing.
Documentation	Housing providers cannot request documentation of training or the disability itself.	Housing providers can request reliable documentation from a licensed healthcare practitioner to support the disability-related need.
Fees	Cannot be charged a pet fee, pet deposit, or pet rent.	Cannot be charged a pet fee, pet deposit, or pet rent.



Southwest Florida has many Pet-Friendly Communities. I have listed a few below.


Navigating Pet-Friendly Home Communities

The number one challenge for pet owners buying in Southwest Florida is the Homeowners Association (HOA) or Condominium Association pet policies. While single-family home communities are generally less restrictive (often limiting to a two-pet maximum), condos and high-rises often have very strict rules.

Key Pet Policy Restrictions to Anticipate

When reviewing community documents, look out for the following common restrictions:

- Weight Limits: A very common restriction, with limits often set at 25 lbs to 50 lbs.
- Number of Pets: Most communities limit the number of pets to one or two per household.
- Breed Restrictions: Certain breeds (like Pit Bulls, Rottweilers, or German Shepherds) may be banned entirely due to insurance liability concerns.
- Pet Registration: HOAs may require you to register your pet, providing their name, breed, and size.

 **Pro Tip:** Always confirm the current pet policy with the HOA/Property Manager directly, even if the listing says "pet-friendly," as online information can be outdated.

Important Note on Condos & High Rises:

Beach Area Condos: Condos directly on or near the beach in areas like Park Shore and The Moorings in Naples often have strict size limits or a complete no pets allowed policy.

Large Dogs: If you have a large dog, be aware that your options may be severely limited, especially in condos. You may need to focus exclusively on single-family home communities that allow large dogs.

Please go to my website to search for more options.

www.PawsInParadiseSWFL.com

Information about SWFL Cities

Pet Friendly Home Search

Collier County

Lee County

Charlotte County

Click here 

FOR PRINT COPY: Head to the Home Search Tab and Click on County of Interest

Finding Pet-Friendly Hotels & Rentals in SW Florida

Moving to Southwest Florida with your furry friend? Staying somewhere that welcomes pets can make all the difference. Luckily, there are several highly-rated apps and websites that make finding pet-friendly lodging simple — and let you filter for pet size, number of pets, and even fees.

Top Pet-Friendly Travel Apps & Websites

- **BringFido App** - Lets you search for hotels, vacation rentals, campgrounds, and more that accept pets. Filter by pet size, number of pets, and pet fees. Includes a “Pet Friendly Guarantee,” meaning the property will honor its pet policy if booked through the app.
- **Pet Friendly App** - Search vacation rentals, condos, and hotels that allow pets. Great for comparing property types and finding lodging that fits your needs.
- **BarkHappy.com** - Beyond lodging, it helps you find dog-friendly events, meetups, and restaurants. Perfect for socializing your pet in a new community.
- **DogPack** - DogPack is the essential, all-in-one companion app for the modern pet owner, combining a global social network with a powerful utility map. It allows users to instantly find over 100,000 dog-friendly locations, including parks, trails, and businesses, while utilizing real-time check-ins to see who is currently playing nearby. Beyond discovery, DogPack fosters community through social feeds and local chat groups, offers instant Lost Dog Alerts, and provides a platform to easily find and book trusted pet care services like sitters and groomers, ensuring a safe and connected experience for every adventure with your dog.
- **General Booking Platforms (Booking.com, Airbnb, etc.)** - Most major hotel and rental platforms now offer “pets allowed” filters. Always double-check the property’s pet policies and fees before booking.



Tips for Traveling with Pets

Check pet fees and restrictions before booking. Some properties limit the number, size, or breed of pets. Bring vaccination records in case the property requests them. Plan ahead: Popular destinations in SW Florida can fill up quickly, especially during peak season.

By using these apps and websites, you can ensure your move — or short-term stay — in Southwest Florida is comfortable and stress-free for your entire family, pets included!



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A Quick Note About Pet Resources 🐾

To keep this guide easy to read and stress-free to use, I've organized the most detailed local pet resources — such as pet-friendly restaurants, groomers, pet stores, parks, and service providers on my website instead of including long lists inside this guide.

This allows you to access the most up-to-date recommendations anytime explore resources by county and city. For the full, regularly updated list of Southwest Florida pet resources, simply visit my website and head to the Resources Section: <https://pawsinparadiseswfl.com/services-3/>

This way, you always have the latest information at your fingertips. If you are clicking on the interactive copy of this guide, simply click below of each resource to take you directly to that page.

Click here
to go directly
to my website



Veterinary Offices
Dog Friendly Beaches
Pet Groomers
Dog Friendly Restaurants
Pet Stores
Pet Friendly Dog Parks
Pet Shelters and Adoptions

Click here
to go directly
to the Resource
Page





Let's Find Your Pet's Paradise

Whether you're relocating across town or across the country, I'd love to help make your move as easy as possible — for both you and your pets. Together, we'll find a home that fits your lifestyle, your needs, and your furry family

I help pets and their people find their home in Paradise!

Thank you for reading your Pet Relocation Guide! For even more tips, resources, and updates, be sure to visit my website at www.PawsInParadiseSWFL.com. And don't miss my weekly blog, where I share new insights, pet-friendly community spotlights, and everything you need to make life in Southwest Florida amazing for you and your furry friends!"



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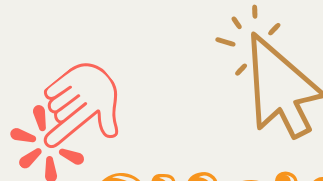


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GRI/Realtor



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Printable Checklist

Pet Relocation Essentials



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- ☐ ☒ **Vet visit completed**
- ☐ ☒ **Microchip & ID updated**
- ☐ ☒ **Travel bag packed**
- ☐ ☒ **Pet-friendly stops confirmed**
- ☐ ☒ **Favorite toys & blanket ready**
- ☐ ☒ **New home pet-proofed**
- ☐ ☒ **First-day safe space set up**

