

Atlas A-list

We searched coast to coast to find the 40 best dog-friendly towns.

By Susan Chaney

It's not easy to find the best place in the country to be a dog, but we're always up for a challenge. So for our 6th annual DogTown USA® contest, we looked at two dozen dog-friendly qualities for the many places nominated by readers and other cities in our database.

Cities earned points for everything from their dog parks, shelter adoption rates, and licensing programs to their canine activities and businesses that welcome dogs. This year, criteria that vary with canine population, such as the number of veterinarians and dog trainers, were adjusted to allow all cities to compete equally regardless of size.

Points were also awarded for non-dog activities, such as hikes, downtown walking tours, harbor cruises, beaches, and parks that residents can enjoy with their canine companions, and the percentage of dogs who get preventive care and are spayed or neutered.

Cities also had a better chance of winning if they have 24-hour veterinary care available, are close to a veterinary school, have holistic veterinarians and natural pet supply stores, and if restaurants allow dogs to join their owners on patios for meals.

And now, after months of researching and crunching the numbers, we have a winner. Congratulations to Provincetown, Mass., a place that proves it's good to be a dog.

1. Provincetown, Mass.

Provincetown may be small, but it's a huge hub of dog love. That's why the Massachusetts home of 2,997 people and 551 canines is our 2010 DogTown USA®.

How can such a little place win DOG FANCY's big contest? Simply, Provincetown does a lot right when it comes to dogs. It takes dedicated people to create a town that's truly friendly to its four-footed population.

Resident Candace N. has been helping move Provincetown in the right direction since 2006. The owner of two Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, she helped lift a ban on dogs on the beach and community trails instituted after a rabies outbreak, pushed for the revitalization of the town's animal-welfare committee, and cofounded Pilgrim Bark Park, which coincidentally placed second in DOG FANCY's America's Best Dog Park contest this year.

Her goal? To make Provincetown the "ultimate canine home and resort." To that end, she found an untapped fund that's now being used to install a dog drinking fountain in front of town hall. And as part of the welfare committee, she's helping update the town's animal ordinance to further protect canines.

Candace says the best thing about her town is its options. "There's just so much to do with your dog." You can go on a sunset cruise, go whale watching, or take your dog on the parasailing boat with you. Candace says the town is also extremely welcoming.

It doesn't hurt that virtually every business in Provincetown allows dogs to shop along with their owners. And no canine shopper goes hungry or thirsty while downtown. Biscuits and bowls of water welcome them wherever they go.

Despite all that doggie goodness, the biggest plus for Provincetown may very well be the nearby Brewster branch of the Animal Rescue League of Boston. The shelter finds homes for virtually every dog who crosses its threshold. Now that's dog-friendly!

2. Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif.

Last year's DogTown USA® winner in the small-town category is one of the dog-friendliest cities in the United States. It's home to actress Doris Day's historic Cypress Inn, and a beautiful mile of coastline is open to the city's 900 resident and

50,000 visitor dogs all year long.

3. Madison, Wis.

This 2007 runner-up city moved up to No. 3 this year. Four off-leash and 11 on-leash year-round dog parks, plus 120 miles of walking trails, give canine and human residents plenty of space. Dogs further benefit from the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine.

4. Benicia, Calif.

Benicia is home to only 2,000 dogs, but they're living the good life. Eight veterinarians stand by, ready to give medical care; summer canine walks, training classes, and competitions bring dog lovers together; and the Canine Coalition protects dog owners' rights and educates the public about owner responsibility.

5. Fort Bragg, Calif.

With a dog for every other human citizen, there's no doubt about Fort Bragg's canine acceptance. Twenty-two of 29 hotels welcome dogs, and every restaurant patio lets people eat with their pets at their feet. Local model Hairy Putter, a Cairn Terrier, even writes a blog about fun activities in town.

6. Lincoln City, Ore.

This town loves its dogs — and all dogs — so much that its voters recently approved an additional property tax to keep the county animal shelter open. The city of 8,200 people and 3,000 dogs also offers seven miles of coastline for canine and human fun.

7. San Diego

Big-city DogTown USA® in 2009, this seaside city is pretty much doggie paradise. More than 300,000 dogs call it home. Eighty-five percent of them get preventive care, and 84 percent are spayed or neutered. The San Diego Humane Society has a modern, adoption-friendly facility to encourage potential pet owners.

8. Virginia Beach, Va.

With 71 percent of its 48,710 dogs licensed, Virginia Beach ranks as the big city with the best licensing program. But it's not all serious. There's plenty of beach access, the annual K-9 Karnival, a summer film festival, and Woofstock, a vaccination and adoption event.

9. Sioux Falls, S.D.

Sioux Falls has an extensive park system, giving dogs plenty of space to exercise while their owners enjoy the outdoors. It also has a Woofstock dog festival with contests, activities, and live entertainment. And at the end of summer, dogs are invited to join the fun in community pools.

10. Salem, Ore.

The town's residents are friendly, courteous, and welcoming, and they extend those attitudes to dogs, too. It's only 40 miles to the Oregon State University College of Veterinary Medicine, where sick pets can take advantage of the latest veterinary breakthroughs and treatments.

Other tail-wagging towns

To celebrate DOG FANCY's 40th anniversary, we wanted to name 40 great cities for dogs. Here are 30 more cities, listed alphabetically, that qualify as super-dog-friendly.

11. Anchorage, Alaska

Human population: 290,588

Dog population: 65,878

Highlight: Modern metropolis, but with vast city and state parks like the pristine and dog-friendly Chugach State Park, hundreds of miles of trails, and year-round outdoor adventure opportunities.

12. Ann Arbor, Mich.

Human population: 114,000

Dog population: 5,000

Highlight: Bountiful Bowls, a Humane Society of the Huron Valley program helps owners in need feed their dogs. Arbor Brewing Company, located just off Main Street, welcomes dogs at its sidewalk tables.

13. Annapolis, Md.

Human population: 36,524

Dog population: 7,000

Highlight: This saying about America's Sailing Capital pretty much covers it: "All you need to feel at home here is a good boat, a good hat, and a good dog." Watermark's cruises of Annapolis Harbor and Chesapeake Bay are open to dogs accompanied by owners.

14. Austin, Texas

Human population: 786,484

Dog population: 120,000

Highlight: A perfect mixture of friendly personalities and a city-within-a-park philosophy. The Driskill Hotel welcomes dogs with its Pampered Pet program, featuring a custom pet bed, spring water, and a souvenir toy.

15. Bellingham, Wash.

Human population: 78,905

Dog population: 5,000

Highlight: Many outdoor venues for great dog-human exercise and fun. Sehome Hill Arboretum's 180 acres of natural forest habitat are open to leashed dogs who can follow miles of trails.

16. Billings, Mont.

Human population: 104,000

Dog population: 23,652

Highlight: The nonprofit Yellowstone Valley Animal Shelter Inc. took over the city shelter in early 2009, and has made great strides in increasing adoption rates, hosting low-cost spay-neuter clinics, and getting the community to work together for dogs' benefit. May's Petapalooza features a costume parade and a variety of contests.

17. Boulder, Colo.

Human population: 99,466

Dog population: 25,145

Highlight: The commitment of Boulder's residents to keep dogs happy and healthy. Boulder Book Store welcomes dogs into the store while owners browse the shelves.

18. Burlington, Vt.

Human population: 38,897

Dog population: 3,000

Highlight: Wilderness, woods, lakes, and hiking trails. Waterfront Park's dog park gives canines a place to romp leash free at the edge of Lake Champlain.

19. Briarcliff Manor, N.Y.

Human population: 9,895

Dog population: 3,200

Highlight: You can't drive through downtown without seeing all kinds of dogs out with their owners. The town's recreation and parks department even offers dog-obedience classes.

20. Charleston, S.C.

Human population: 111,978

Dog population: 25,600

Highlight: The Audubon Swamp, formerly a freshwater reservoir, is a black water cypress and tupelo swamp, with boardwalks and bridges, that let you and your leashed dog see all kinds of animals, birds, and reptiles in their natural habitat.

21. Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Human population: 45,790

Dog population: 17,000

Highlight: A city-humane society partnership means virtually all abandoned and lost dogs find new homes. Dogs and their owners can also enjoy local nature areas like Tubbs Hill or the Kootenai Humane Society's annual Dog Daze event, featuring food, games, and canine-themed contests.

22. Colorado Springs, Colo.

Human population: 372,437

Dog population: 87,055

Highlight: An abundance of dog-friendly hotels, four off-leash areas, scenic trails, and open spaces.

23. Coral Springs, Fla.

Human population: 125,000

Dog population: 40,000

Highlight: Steven G. Paul Dog Park serves as a model for other cities wanting to offer dog parks to their residents. The Gold Coast Grill offers seafood and a place where your dog can accompany you while dining.

24. Helena, Mont.

Human population: 70,000

Dog population: 40,000

Highlight: Dogs are allowed to be dogs, but they're also part of the community. The Helena Montana Kennel Club promotes responsible dog ownership by offering classes to all dogs and owners, donating supplies to the local humane society, and even offering a scholarship to a student studying to become a veterinarian.

25. Fargo, N.D.

Human population: 94,000

Dog population: 53,580

Highlight: Many dog-loving community members who work on behalf of dogs. Canines can also enjoy both the Village West Dog Park and Yunker Farm Dog Park.

26. Fort Collins, Colo.

Human population: 130,000

Dog population: 19,500

Highlight: Colorado State University College of Veterinary Medicine right in the city. The town even honors a local canine legend – stray Collie mix, Annie, who in 1934 was adopted by town railroad workers — during the annual Annie Walk & Pet Fest.

27. Hampstead, Md.

Human population: 6,700

Dog population: 2,200

Highlight: Every town park is essentially an off-leash park — try Hampstead Municipal Park's loop trail.

28. Huntington Beach, Calif.

Human population: 196,620

Dog population: 48,694

Highlight: One-mile-long dog beach where dogs can run leash free at the Pacific Ocean's edge. A local dog lover drives the doggiebus, a free shuttle that takes owners and pooches to the Huntington Dog Beach.

29. Iowa City, Iowa

Human population: 67,831

Dog population: 16,000

Highlight: A progressive community when it comes to animal welfare. Summer of the Arts brings together Iowa City's residents and visitors — both human and canine — for outdoor concert and movies series, plus jazz and art festivals.

30. Long Beach, Calif.

Human population: 496,000

Dog population: 103,000

Highlight: Haute Dogs organization presents events like the Howlo'ween parade that features dogs and owners in costume and the Interfaith Blessing of the Animals. Dog Beach Zone allows off-leash play.

31. Minneapolis

Human population: 390,131

Dog population: 107,727

Highlight: The strength and quality of pet owners, plus five designated off-leash parks.

32. Palo Alto, Calif.

Human population: 58,598

Dog population: 12,000

Highlight: A friendly community. Baylands Preserve offers dogs and owners 15 miles of nature trails, and three parks have off-leash areas.

33. Park City, Utah

Human population: 8,000

Dog population: 1,700

Highlight: People in Park City just love dogs. Hank and Bullitt's K9 Adventures, a canine fitness club, takes Park City dogs out into nature to do what they do best: run, play, sniff, and explore.

34. Phoenix

Human population: 1,512,986

Dog population: 768,000

Highlight: Hiking along dog-friendly trails such as Mohave Trail and Thunder Bird Park, five dog parks, and over 60 dog-friendly hotels.

35. Portland, Ore.

Human population: 582,130

Dog population: 147,162

Highlight: Oregon continues to demand that people treat pets with compassion and respect, enacting some of the toughest animal protection laws in the country. The annual Doggie Dash marathon attracts thousands of pooches and their people.

36. Raleigh, N.C.

Human population: 392,552

Dog population: 99,237

Highlight: Umstead State Park's 5,000-plus acres are easily accessible from different areas of the city. Lilly's Pizza is pet

friendly, and they'll even provide a bowl of water for your thirsty four-legged pal.

37. Sanford, Fla.

Human population: 60,000

Dog population: 10,000

Highlight: A large and devoted following of dog lovers successfully convinced the city to open its dog park, the Paw Park of Historic Sanford. Nearby Paw Park Place offers grooming, a boutique and bakery, and hosts Yappy Hour socials once a month.

38. Santa Barbara, Calif.

Human population: 90,473

Dog population: 5,800

Highlight: Year-round beautiful weather. The 70-acre Douglas Family Preserve gives owners and dogs stunning ocean views. The town also offers a family-g geared obedience camp.

39. Seattle

Human population: 600,000

Dog population: 125,000

Highlight: Businesses, including bakeries, daycares, and sitting services, cater to dogs and their owners. The city also hosts the annual Furry 5K Fun Run and Walk to benefit the Seattle Animal Shelter.

40. Waukesha, Wis.

Human population: 67,800

Dog population: 25,000

Highlight: Hard-working, community-minded, compassionate people with a tie to the land and their animals. Petlicious Dog Biscuit Bakery serves dog-friendly treats and hosts fun events for dogs and their owners.

Susan Chaney is the former editor of DOG FANCY and a freelance writer and editor in Southern California. Her mixed breed, Max, loves to visit dog beaches.