

## DogTown USA® 2006

### **The City of Roses tops the list of dog-friendliest towns in 2006.**

*Kyra Kirkwood*

"Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam, be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." These words by John Howard Payne echo in the barks of dogs living in canine-friendly towns and cities throughout the United States.

In DOG FANCY's second annual DogTown USA contest, we researched, ranked, and rated cities across the nation to discover the best of the best. During our evaluation, we considered access to top veterinary professionals, dog parks, and canine-friendly businesses, as well as shelter-euthanasia rates and owner responsibility. No bone was left unburied.

Although our top cities vary in location, climate, and general atmosphere, nearly all have one thing in common: Dogs are not just possessions, but family members. So where is DogTown USA this year? We chose Portland, Ore., for its unmatched geography, trend-setting attitude, and general canine-centric perfection. Discover dog-friendly Portland, plus six runners-up cities in no particular ranking.

Portland, Ore.  
Dogs: 136,332  
People: 554,130  
Highlight: Best all-around city for dogs in America

"What better place to be a dog than Portland?" asks Portland Mayor Tom Potter. "Dogs of every shape and size are welcome everywhere in the City of Roses. Actually, City of Dogs might be a better name."

What is there not to say about this jewel of the Pacific Northwest? The clean, crisp climate (rain included) mixed with close proximity to both ocean and mountains, as well as the bustling, culture-rich atmosphere, may explain why Money magazine named oh-so-green Portland America's "best big city," and Men's Journal crowned it the best place to live.

And now dogs raise their paws in agreement. "It's like heaven here, just beautiful," says Barbara Baugnon, public relations director for the Oregon Humane Society. "[Dogs] are everywhere in this town."

Activities for dogs and owners in Portland are as vast as the Pacific Ocean. Forest Park, all 5,000 acres of wooded and trail-laden bliss, is one giant dog paradise, as are the 33 city-maintained parks with established off-leash areas. Waterfalls, nature trails, and lush gardens entice both owner and pooch.

Organized events include the cult-classic Doggie Dash, with 2,000 dogs a year participating in this fun run. The Pug Crawl fundraiser for the Oregon Humane Society features a costume contest, parade, Pug kissing booth, retailers and, of course, pub fare.

Portland residents set trends — Mixed Breeds are hip, doggie daycares spring up faster than Starbucks stores, 60-plus trainers and behaviorists operate within the city, and pet B&Bs and salons are plentiful.

Adoption is also huge in Portland. "Portlanders are so willing to adopt from us, we have a hard time staying full," Baugnon says.

Last year, nearly 3,300 homeless dogs, many of which were taken in from other shelters nationwide, found homes. Working together, OHS and Multnomah County Animal Services adopted out a total of 6,936 dogs, and in 2005, the Multnomah County euthanasia rate dropped to nearly "no-kill" status.

"Portland residents will find room in their hearts and homes for dogs in need," Baugnon says. "People come [here] every day and they find true love."

Oregon's passion for dogs also means that it possesses some of the toughest anti-cruelty laws in the nation, and Portland employs two full-time humane investigators with full police authority. In 2007, OHS plans to build the Animal Medical and Learning Center, providing 24-hour medical care for shelter animals, as well as behavioral training.

"We are really proud of our love of animals," Baugnon says.

## Runners-Up

Sanford, Fla.

Dogs: 10,235

People: 49,250

Highlight: Community atmosphere

This historic little suburb, situated outside Orlando on the banks of Lake Monroe, was not only picture-perfect enough for filmmakers of *My Girl* starring Macaulay Culkin, it's also high on the canine approval listing.

This charm-filled and close-knit community isn't just a beautiful place to raise a dog, but a genial one as well. Scores of businesses are dog-friendly, as are all restaurants with outdoor dining, thanks to the Dixie Cup Clary Local Control Act signed by Gov. Jeb Bush in June.

Add to that the award-winning Paw Park of Historic Sanford, a growing number of pet-centered businesses like Paw Park Place dog wash and bakery, the picturesque Sanford RiverWalk park, plenty of natural resources, scores of comprehensive animal-protective legislation, extensive community and civic support, and a very low owner-turn-in rate at the shelter (84 dogs on average), Sanford scores high. What really creates a wag in residents' tails is the quantity and quality of dog activities — from the Howl-o-ween in the Boneyard costume party to the American IDog contest.

"We're nutty about the dog thing," says Christine Dalton, community planner for Sanford. "The events not only bring the dogs together, but the community together as well."

Albuquerque, N.M.

Dogs: 256,000

People: 495,571

Highlight: Pro-animal city government

New Mexico is a vast land of stunning vistas, gorgeous mountains, and the winding beauty of the Rio Grande. It's also home to Albuquerque and some of the most pro-animal city officials around.

Meet Sally Mayer, city councilor for District 7. Since her election in 2001, Albuquerque has become more compassionate toward animals, especially in 2006 with the passing of Mayer's much-toiled-over HEART (Humane and Ethical Animal Rules and Treatment) ordinance. Highlights include mandatory spay and neutering (owners wishing to keep intact animals may purchase a permit), annual litter permits, mandatory permanent ID (i.e. microchips), and concise health and safety regulations.

"I believe animals have the right to be treated humanely," Mayer says. "Do unto your animals as you would like to be done unto you."

Also included in HEART is the Safe Haven law, which requires adoptable animals to be kept for at least two weekends at the shelter. Even if this means sending dogs to private boarding kennels due to lack of shelter space, the council is willing to do it, Mayer says. In 2006, the city planned to open two shelter substations in local malls, increasing visibility and enabling shoppers to fall for dogs outside shelter walls.

Albuquerque is a huge proponent of spaying and neutering, with large portions of the city budget and numerous fundraisers giving financial support to clinics to help curb overpopulation. The city council publicizes adoptable dogs during each televised meeting, and, thanks to Mayor Martin J. Chavez, the city is also approaching local businesses, asking them to foster dogs in their establishments during the day, with employees taking them home each night, to further boost adoptions and cut the euthanasia rate.

San Diego, Calif.

Dogs: 525,000

People: 1.2 million

Highlight: Excellent shelter system and pro-active dog environment

What could be more dog-friendly than a temperate climate year-round, miles upon miles of beaches, rugged nature trails, and a friendly beach-town atmosphere? San Diegans will tell you that there's nothing better, for them or their dogs.

"People have the general outlook that dogs are part of their life," says Kelsey Angus, public relations coordinator for the

San Diego Humane Society and SPCA.

Dogs can be seen everywhere in this coastal community, be it romping along a dog beach, kayaking in the bay, frolicking on Fiesta Island, or staying at the W Hotel. Even spending an afternoon at the ballpark watching the San Diego Padres hit homeruns is all part of a dog's schedule here.

But it's not all fun and games. The city's euthanasia rate is less than 20 percent, with a vast majority of owned dogs being spayed or neutered. The animal-friendly local media often hosts "pets of the week" and covers animal-themed stories. The humane society, which works hand-in-hand with the city's animal control, is big on public education, offering behavior classes, lectures, a pet-loss support group, and even the summertime Animal Adventure Camp for children.

Dogs often stay at the humane society as long as it takes to get them adopted, Angus says. "We put a lot of resources into our animals," she says, noting that the kennels themselves are located indoors and fashioned like mini-apartments instead of concrete cages. "It's not the pound of 20 to 30 years ago."

Bellingham, Wash.

Dogs: 10,000

People: 70,000

Highlight: Dog-friendly activities and volunteerism

From the sparkling ocean to the lush forests to the desert-like climate to majestic mountain ranges, Washington has almost every slice Mother Nature can dish up. Including Bellingham, and its canine-loving residents.

"People are very motivated toward dogs and dog parks and different dog activities," says Penny Cistaro, executive director of the Whatcom Humane Society.

With events such as the popular Dog Days of Summer fun run and festival, the Bark in the BallPark evening, and the Dog Day Afternoon Reading Program where kids pair up with volunteer-dog teams to practice reading skills, there never seems to be a lack of things to do.

In a town this centered on dogs, it's no surprise that even the humane society is a source of pride. On average, 90 percent of Bellingham's homeless dogs are adopted, reclaimed, or rescued, and the return rate is exceptionally low. All homeless dogs are evaluated for behavioral issues and taught crate training, leash-walking, and manners. Volunteers stroll with the dogs in public to increase awareness of the shelter's residents.

"It's helped people's perception of the type of dogs they can get from us," Cistaro says.

The local media is also a big fan of Bellingham's barking community. Be it an adoption segment on the news or a weekly cable show or even a radio spot, adoptable dogs get their 15 minutes of fame.

Palo Alto, Calif.

Dogs: 11,000

People: 60,000

Highlight: Community responsibility and geography

Being both a college town and a neighbor to trendy San Francisco has its perks, especially for dogs. This laid-back community near Stanford University boasts everything from education to picturesque landscapes, high-class shopping centers to culture-rich downtown venues. Even the city's shelter is a popular destination for residents and visitors alike.

The number of activities to do with dogs in Palo Alto is only limited by the imagination. Countless shops and restaurants are dog-friendly, as are plentiful on- and off-leash parks, trails, nature preserves, and beaches. People spend vast amounts of time outside with their dogs, enjoying the Northern California climate.

"There is an overwhelming understanding and acceptance of the dog's place in the family," says Sandi Stadler, superintendent of animal services for the city of Palo Alto. "It's a general attitude. These are members of our family. They're all part of our community. Dogs are right up there."

The percentage of dogs who receive preventative care (annual physicals, vaccinations, and routine blood tests) hovers above 75 percent, while nearly that many dogs are spayed or neutered. In the shelter system, only 12 percent of dogs, on average, are euthanized each year, and nearly three-fourths of strays find a way home.

New York, N.Y.  
Dogs: 1.5 million  
People: 8 million  
Highlight: Activities and public awareness

Dogs in the Big Apple live the sweet life, with many restaurants, shops, and parks open for their pleasure. Before 9 a.m., the king of parks — Central Park — is one giant off-leash playground for NYC pups. Many hotels even offer room service and spa-like perks to canines.

But what sets this mega-metropolis apart is its residents, along with its fast-paced push to fight needless euthanasia and overpopulation.

“People get it here. [They] take very good care of their pets,” says Mary Martin, executive director of New York City Animal Care and Control.

The public is educated about sterilization and owner responsibility, as well as adoption. Humane education is mandated in all schools as part of the curriculum. The city works to curb overpopulation from every angle, from low-cost spay and neuter programs to discouraging “fad” breeding.

But New Yorkers and their dogs love to have fun, too. Eating at outdoor cafes, romping through the fountain in Washington Square Park, embarking on a Times Square walking tour, or enjoying a horse and carriage ride through Central Park are just a few things this metropolis has to offer. Many activities, like the ASPCA Central Park Dog Walk, raise funds and awareness for humane causes. Because the majority of New York residents live in apartments without backyards, dogs are constantly socialized and trained during their daily walk-about routines, creating well-behaved companions.

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