

Dog-Friendly Resorts

Resorts roll out the red carpet for canine guests.

Kim Campbell Thornton

When Jane and Jim Lloyd of Indiana, celebrated their 13th wedding anniversary, they wanted to take along a special guest — Biscuit, their 18-month-old Golden Retriever-Poodle mix.

Jane Lloyd remembered reading about a bed-and-breakfast in North Carolina for people and their dogs — the Dog House Resort. She made a four-day reservation for the anniversary celebration.

“We had such a wonderful time,” she says. “Roger [Roberts], the innkeeper, welcomed us as soon as we arrived and showed us to our room. They had a special bed for Biscuit, and a toy and treats for her.”

Very important pooches

Forget celebrities. Dogs are the new VIP guests. Hotels and resorts don't just permit pets anymore, they offer them amenities that were unheard of five or 10 years ago. At Las Ventanas al Paraiso, a Rosewood Resort in Los Cabos, Mexico, you and your dog can lounge on a private beach, each with your own cabana. Dogs dine on made-to-order meals or relax beneath the soothing hands of a pet massage therapist or groomer.

According to the American Animal Hospital Association's 2004 Pet Owner Survey, 67 percent of respondents traveled with their pets, and 43 percent stayed in hotels with them.

Inns and bed-and-breakfasts were the first types of accommodations to recognize the potential of a pet-friendly policy, according to Chris Kingsley, president of pet travel website petswelcome.com. As small or family-run businesses, they were more likely to talk to guests about their needs.

“They realized early on that people wanted to take their pets with them on vacation,” Kingsley says. “They saw it as an opportunity to set themselves apart.”

Books on traveling with dogs became more popular. Pet owners turned to them to find not only pet-friendly lodgings, but also parks and restaurants. The trend snowballed, with the Internet pushing travel with pets to the next level. Pet owners can now go to any number of websites to find pet policies for a variety of hotels and locations.

Recognizing pet potential

As the market began growing, hotel chains saw the potential and began promoting their pet-friendliness. They recognized that pet owners were a growing and viable market and began offering more and more amenities to attract their business, Kingsley says. Now, many hotel chains — both budget-conscious and high-end — have at least some hotels that are pet-friendly and many that are pet-fantastic.

At Starwood hotels and resorts — select Sheraton, W Hotels, and Westin properties — the Love That Dog program provides pet guests with designer beds, food and water bowls, and temporary ID tags with the hotel's contact information. Dogs who stay at one of the five W Hotels in New York can even get an appointment for an in-room massage by a licensed dog massage therapist.

Biscuit certainly seemed to enjoy her first taste of vacation travel. She played in the Dog House Resort's dog park with resident canines Rex and Rena, and loved the novelty of being able to hang out with her people all day.

The Lloyds look forward to traveling with Biscuit again. Their stay last fall was to have included a canoe trip on the New River, but windy and cooler-than-normal weather forced them to postpone it. They had plenty of other activities to keep themselves and Biscuit busy, however.

“We went hiking in the West Jefferson State Park, toured the antique and novelty shops, visited surrounding towns in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and had wonderful dinners at restaurants recommended by Roger. The Dog House Resort offers free pet sitting if you are going out somewhere you can't take your dog,” Lloyd says. “We can't wait to go back this year and do the canoe trip.”



Kim Campbell Thornton is a freelance writer in Southern California.