

Dog-Friendly Summer Travel Destinations

Hit the road with your dog, then hit the water with these great summer getaways.

Cherie Langlois

Has summer's furnace breath turned your formerly fun-loving dog into a lazy, tongue-lolling couch potato who refuses to venture outdoors? Of course you know the best antidote, at least for any water-crazy canine: an emergency trip to a place where your pet can plunge into cool, crystalline waters after a stick or ball. In fact, you'd like to do the same, sans stick. Unfortunately, it's getting harder to find waterside havens that allow dogs during summer or outside of limited early morning and late afternoon hours. Many ban pooches entirely. But don't despair or wilt: Here are four refreshing destinations that welcome dogs to their shores.

First Landing State Park Virginia Beach, Va.

Lucky canines can cavort year round along the sandy shore of this popular East Coast jewel set on the Chesapeake Bay. Here, where our country's first colonists landed 400 years ago, leashed dogs and their people have the opportunity to swim together. The nearly 3,000-acre park features 19 miles of dog-friendly hikes, including a boardwalk swamp trail beneath trees dripping Spanish moss. Visitors can fish, crab, and launch canoes and other small craft at the Narrows boat ramp.

"Almost everyone who works here has dogs, so it's very pet-friendly," says employee Brenda Mueller, who swims at the park with her water-loving Labrador Retriever mix, Daisy.

Take proof of your pet's rabies shot, be aware that no lifeguards patrol the beach, and watch for jellyfish.

Parking and swimming fees: \$2 to \$4. Reserve two-bedroom cabins with decks, grills, air conditioning, and more for \$678 a week during summer, Virginia residents; \$753, non-residents.

Info: (757) 412-2300; www.dcr.state.va.us/parks/1stland

Guadalupe River State Park Spring Branch, Texas

Thirty miles north of San Antonio, dogs find cool sanctuary from the fierce Texas heat along the Guadalupe River's cypress-shaded banks. At this almost 2,000-acre park situated amidst the ruggedly beautiful Hill Country, leashed dogs accompanied by their bipedal companions can swim in the river's clear waters, hike five miles of trails, and camp. You can enjoy fishing, canoeing, tubing, and outdoor nature programs on Saturday nights, and your dogs are welcome, too.

"We love having dogs here as long as their owners obey the rules," says Bill Beach, assistant office manager. That includes keeping your dog on the appropriate length leash, cleaning up after him, and preventing Blue from lifting a leg on someone's beach towel. Be sure to carry proof of your pet's rabies vaccination and look out for rattlesnakes. Entrance fee, \$6 per person. RV camping with hook-ups, \$18; regular tent sites, \$14; \$12 for walk-in tent sites. Make advance reservations at (512) 389-8900.

Info: (830) 438-2656; www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/guadalupe_river/

Kohler-Andrae State Park Sheboygan, Wis.

On the southern edge of Sheboygan, this busy, 1,000-acre state park lets leashed dogs play in Lake Michigan's brisk waters along a lovely segment of white-sand beach that stretches about half a mile from the nature center north to the park boundary. Canines can also join their humans on several hikes through sand dunes and wetland areas rich with bird life.

"It's amazing how many pet owners come here," says Mary Kultgen, a visitor services associate who has three Shetland Sheepdogs, including one ambitious dog who enjoys "herding" waves. "We see a lot of Labs and [other] retrievers." Be aware that the lake can get rough on windy days. Entrance fees: \$7 for residents; \$10 for non-residents. The park's campground (\$13/state residents; \$15/non-residents) and several Sheboygan hotels offer dog-friendly lodging.

Info: (920) 451-4080; www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/specific/ka

Long Beach Peninsula

Long Beach, Wash.

Chasing seagulls and Frisbees, digging in sparkly sand, sniffing out crab shells: what more could a dog ask for? For humans, too, breezy beach fun abounds along this finger of land jutting nearly 30 miles north between the Pacific Ocean and Willapa Bay, from kite-flying and lighthouse-gazing to festivals like July's SandSations, featuring a sandcastle contest and pet parade. Dogs can even enjoy supervised, leash-free play on beaches outside the five state parks and city of Long Beach — where they can also visit, but must be on an 8-foot leash.

Rip tides, sneaker waves, and floating logs pose dangers here: Don't swim or wade deeply — ditto for your dog — and stay alert at the water's edge. Watch out for cars; people are allowed to drive on most of the beaches in this area.

Many peninsula hotels allow pets; my family — including Treeing Walker Coonhound mix Pippin — loved our relaxing, spacious accommodations. A short dune trail led us to a doggie paradise where Pippin sent sand and water flying as he raced across an uncrowded expanse of silvery beach.

Info: (800) 451-2542; www.funbeach.com

What's left for your re-energized dog to do after cooling his paws in a river, lake, or ocean? Well, there's always that most popular and attention-grabbing canine waterside activity: a good, vigorous roll on a decomposing fish. So remember to pack a towel and some fragrant shampoo in your beach bag, just in case!

Cherie Langlois is an avid traveler and Washington-based freelance writer who enjoys playing at the beach with her Coonhound mix, Pippin.