

A Dog-Friendly New England Nook

Discover a unique urban playground in Providence.

Lisa McElroy

Providence, Rhode Island — it's often overlooked as a vacation destination, especially given its larger urban neighbors to the north and south. Still, over the past decade or two, Providence has grown into a hip, happening New England city. Residents will tell you that the dog-friendly parks, beaches, hotels, and restaurants make Providence a place you'll want to visit with your dog.

I'm a Providence transplant, moving here four years ago with my family. Although my ancient Standard Poodle Thurgood can't manage to explore much anymore, my wirehaired Dachshund Beans and I love to get out and about. Beans is a hungry and curious explorer, and he keeps me running. Here are some of our favorite Providence destinations.

Where to play

Don't miss Rhode Island's annual outdoor extravaganza: WaterFire Providence! Running from spring to fall on weekend evenings, this unique Providence festival and living art exhibition — surrounding more than 100 bonfires burning on water — is heaven for dogs. Beans loves to run up and down the banks of the Providence and Seekonk Rivers, snarf snacks people have dropped at the food kiosks, smell the cedar and pine burning on the rivers, and move with me to the beautiful classical and world music we hear as we walk. Humans love the gondola rides and glowing river fire pits — nice warmth on a spring evening for those of us without a built-in fur coat. (401) 272-3111; www.waterfire.org

Another must-see is Roger Williams Park with its 430 acres of rolling green grass; dogs can run through most of it! Beans likes to wade in the ponds and chase the geese. Another great park? Colt State Park, about 15 minutes from Providence in Bristol, is right on the water and absolutely breathtaking with its minimally constructed stone walls, open fields, and views of Narragansett Bay. Dogs must be leashed at all times as I learned when Beans barreled his way through a wedding one day. (401) 253-7482; www.riparks.com/colt.htm

Where to eat

Decatur Lounge, voted Best Providence Watering Hole for Dogs in 2006 allows dogs inside! (401) 351-5492; www.decaturlounge.com

If you're into independent coffee shops with great coffee — Beans and I often frequent them — try Coffee Depot in Warren, a funky, fun place with games, books, wireless access, and dogs galore. The friendly, dog-loving baristas hand out dog treats to canine visitors, who are mostly seen sleeping under tables while their people play chess or read the paper. (401) 247-0352

And Woof! located in Bristol will remind you of the doggie bakery on the popular Providence TV show. Beans can't get enough of Woof's tasty treats! (401) 253-5755; <http://stores.woofbakery.com>

After you've both had a good snack, check out the latest pet apparel for those chilly April days at Shaggy Chic Pet Boutique in Wickford, a quintessential New England town about 30 minutes outside of Providence. (401) 667-7273; www.shaggychicpets.com

Where to sleep

Beans and I love comfy, original accommodations. The Cady House, a classic revival house on Providence's historic East Side, fits the bill. Dogs are allowed in the spacious garden apartment. (401) 273-5398; www.cadyhouse.com

Another option? The Providence Marriott Downtown is centrally located and welcomes furry friends, even offering pet perks and a pet travel kit which includes a brush, toy, puppy pads, bowls, and doggie bed. Dogs cost an extra \$49 per stay. (866) 807-2171; www.marriottprovidence.com/pets/pets.asp

Whether it's scenic beaches, wide-open parks, cozy coffee houses, or classic hotels you're looking for, you and your canine companion will have no shortage in Providence.

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