

Doggie Day Spa

The latest trend for the pampered pooch.

Sally Deneen

Herbal body wraps and aromatherapy aren't just for people anymore. Pets tired from romping at L.A. Dogworks indoor dog park can enter the company's Zen Den for a massage or an oatmeal wrap.

At New York Dog Spa and Hotel, services such as shiatsu massages and pedicures, complete with pink nail polish, mimic a four-star hotel experience. And at Happy Tails Dog Spa in Vienna, Va., a Hydrosurge tub, akin to a whirlpool bath, creates soapy water and bubbles that ripple throughout the bath, making patron Sally Brice's three Australian Shepherds especially fluffy.

"They come out smelling beautifully," says Brice who likens the results at Happy Tails to the canine equivalent of going to a hair salon.

Spa services for dogs exemplify the trend of the humanization of pet products, a phenomenon that encourages the transformation of boarding kennels into pet hotels and traditional grooming services into spas, says Bob Vetere, president of the American Pet Product Manufacturers Association.

Boarding kennels are now adding luxury services, such as massage therapy. Five years from now, these will likely be standard offerings at most kennels, predicts Jim Krack, executive director of ABKA, a kennel and doggie daycare association. "Massage therapy is establishing itself as a legitimate service offered by boarding kennels," he says.

Life at the canine spa varies from place to place. Some locales resemble traditional grooming salons that simply tout the term spa, while others, including many big-city establishments, offer extravagant pampering.

At the New York Dog Spa and Hotel, the term "spa" deserves extra emphasis, as deep-tissue massages, hot-oil treatments, pedicures, conditioning baths, and coming soon, hydrotherapy pamper pets. Dogs enjoy two walks per day, plus leash-free romps with daycare friends. On summer nights, boarders snooze in heavily air-conditioned suites.

Dale VanPamelen opened the spa in 1998 and believes it was one of the first places to offer several dog services under one roof, including daycare, boarding, training, massage and veterinary care. Dogs can even see an on-site animal allergist, then visit the boutique for canine paté or a hand-knitted sweater.

At L.A. Dogworks, pets can receive aromatherapy oil treatments in a slate-and-bamboo relaxation room, or head to the hydrotherapy room for muscle-toning on an underwater treadmill. Andrew Rosenthal opened L.A. Dogworks in October 2004 after he grew frustrated searching for a place to keep his three Greyhounds while he traveled. Today his 7,500-square-foot retreat offers massage, daycare, grooming, training, and cage-free boarding in a furnished Dog Den, complete with a large plasma TV that shows Animal Planet programs.

Rosenthal is considering expanding to other West Coast cities, just as Happy Tails Dog Spa owner Amy Nichols hopes her current franchise drive expands her spa to 25 locations in 2006, up from five in 2005. Daycare is the heart of Nichols' business, not the beauty makeovers she offers during the holidays.