



BOW WOW!

THE SCOOP ON FETCHING PROPERTIES THAT WELCOME ATTENDEES' PETS TO COME, SIT, AND STAY

By Elizabeth Anderson Lopez

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The surge in pet adoptions during the pandemic and the increase in remote workers who never have to leave their furry friends have some people less willing to travel without their pets. Among pet owners, 95 percent say their pets are family members, according to a survey published by the Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI). Those people need a really good reason to travel without them. Fortunately for planners, more properties are opening their doors to pets, and that can attract attendees who don't want to choose between their companions and conventions.

"People are continuing to spend more time with their pets than ever before," says Talene Staab, brand leader for Home2 Suites by Hilton. "Pet-friendly accommodations have become such a key factor for travelers considering where to stay with their cats and dogs, and also for planners who consider venues for meetings and events."

Recognizing the trend, Hilton expanded its pet-friendly offerings last year and is welcoming four-legged guests "with open arms and belly

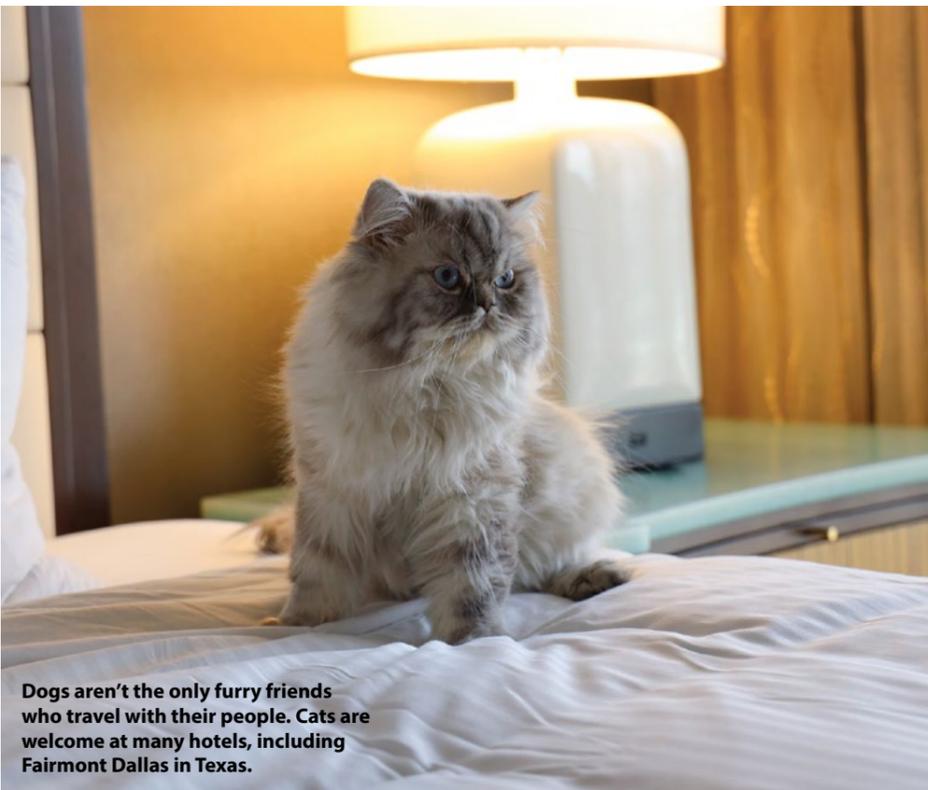
rubs" at more than 5,000 hotels across the United States and Canada, according to the hospitality giant's website. Nearly 85 percent of U.S. Hilton properties now allow cats and dogs, including the brands Canopy, Embassy Suites, Hampton, Hilton Garden Inn, Home2 Suites, Homewood Suites, and Tru, Staab says.

The move has paid off. The "pet friendly" filter was the third-most-engaged booking search feature on Hilton's website, with the number of people using that filter increasing by double digits last year, Staab notes. "We don't foresee it slowing down anytime soon, especially as travelers look for every opportunity to bring their pets on the road," she says.

Purr-fect for planners

Booking pet-friendly hotels benefits planners in several ways. Because today's attendees are being more selective about the meetings they attend, being able to bring a pet can be the tipping point, especially for those who have older animals or pets with medical conditions and people who don't want to board their pets.

Joshlyn Davis/Courtesy Fairmont Dallas



Dogs aren't the only furry friends who travel with their people. Cats are welcome at many hotels, including Fairmont Dallas in Texas.

Including pets in events also is a great icebreaker to get attendees engaged and networking. Animals can help ease the stress of returning to in-person gatherings and enhance attendee wellness; research shows interactions with pets help with stress management and mental health, according to HABRI.

Additionally, pet owners likely will be more focused and present knowing they'll see their fur babies in a few hours instead of a few days.

Several Southern hotels are pet-friendly spots where people can bring their Spot to experience some doggone good amenities.

"Fairmont Dallas provides accommodations to pamper your furry friend," says Dave Martinez, director of sales and marketing for the Texas hotel. "Dogs can enjoy a Puppuccino from the onsite Starbucks or treats made just for pets by the Fairmont Dallas pastry team."

The hotel works to help dogs have a ball. "The hotel's spacious ballrooms allow for a setup of small and easy dog courses for attendees to meet other dogs and walk through the circuit with their dogs," Martinez says.

Thompson San Antonio – Riverwalk in Texas is a "pet-friendly hotel that treats furry friends

to amenities such as a dog bed, bowl, and dog toy," says Melanie Bruce, the hotel's director of sales and marketing. And with advance notice, the hotel can arrange for a dog walker.

Dogs at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina are similarly bowled over with a pet bowl and bed when their people check in at the Cambridge, Md., property. The idea is "to make their stay as comfortable as possible," says Cari Ruppert, the resort's director of sales, marketing, and events. To give guests peace of mind, each dog also receives a tag with the resort name and phone number, and the resort is near a pet-sitting service and an animal hospital, Ruppert notes.

At The Park on Main in Highlands, N.C., swag isn't just for attendees. "Pet snacks are always available in the lobby," says Pat Walsh, the hotel's general manager. Guests are greeted by Mr. Pickles, a Scottish terrier belonging to the property's owner. Mr. Pickles serves as the hotel mascot, and his likeness appears throughout the hotel—including on dog cookies. Four-legged guests receive a toy, designer dog bowl, and a dog bed made to withstand chewing. Every guest room comes

SIZE MATTERS: SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before contracting with a hotel, planners should ask a few questions about pet restrictions.

Not surprisingly, size matters and so does quantity. Many hotels have size limits (typically by weight), a maximum number of animals allowed per room, or both.

Additionally, some hotels charge pet, damage, or cleaning fees by the stay or by the night, which can be non-refundable. See if an event sponsor would be willing to cover some of the extra expenses so attendees who bring their pets aren't paying more than others.

Remember the old real estate adage: location, location, location. Ask where pets are permitted on the property and under what conditions. Some hotels limit dogs to specific areas, such as guest rooms, hallways, the lobby, and outdoors.

Find out if dogs must be leashed at all times.

Check to see if there is a specific turn-down time. "In consideration of our other guests, we request that guests' pets have a bedtime curfew of 9:30 p.m. in order to keep noise levels to a minimum in the evening," says Cari Ruppert of the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay in Cambridge, Md.

Having a pet in a guest room can affect housekeeping, especially if the animal is left unattended. The Park on Main in Highlands, N.C., asks guests to put the do not disturb sign on the door and ensure the front desk has a contact number for them when they are not in the room. If housekeeping is requested, guests must be present or pets must be out of the room.

Service animals accompanying guests with disabilities can be exempt from these restrictions.

Courtesy Hilton Worldwide



These dogs are ready to dive into meetings and events at pet-friendly properties.



Many major brand hotels won't send your dog packing, including more than 5,000 Hilton Worldwide properties.



Betsy is one of a pair of golden retriever 'canine executive officers' at The Betsy Hotel who welcome guests and their pets to the Miami Beach, Fla., property.

with a dog towel and dog mat. Crates are available, and the hotel can arrange dog-walking services with advance notice. Special dog-related events take place year-round, including Mr. Pickles Howl-o-ween Costume Party.

Talk about pampered pooches, the concierge team at Florida's The Betsy – South Beach can arrange spa services that include a couple's massages for guests and their dog. The Miami Beach hotel is a dog haven.

"Guests arriving at The Betsy - South Beach always receive a joyous welcome from the hotel's four-legged CEOs (canine executive officers), golden retrievers Betsy and Rosa," says Deborah Plutzik Briggs, the hotel's vice president of arts and community. "Betsy and Rosa even host a weekly CEO Cocktail Hour every Friday at 5 p.m. in the Lobby Bar where you're invited to bring Fido and enjoy a glass of Betsy Rosa beer, a special lager-amber created for and served exclusively at the hotel with a side of water (in a dish) provided for the doggie."

Canine guests also get homemade treats created by the hotel's pastry chef. The Betsy offers dog-walking services and has pet-supply stores and pet services nearby.

At The Betsy, dogs can join their owners for meeting sessions. "Dogs of all sizes are welcome to stay in rooms and traverse the entire property; they are also invited to attend conference programming in our meeting spaces," Briggs says.

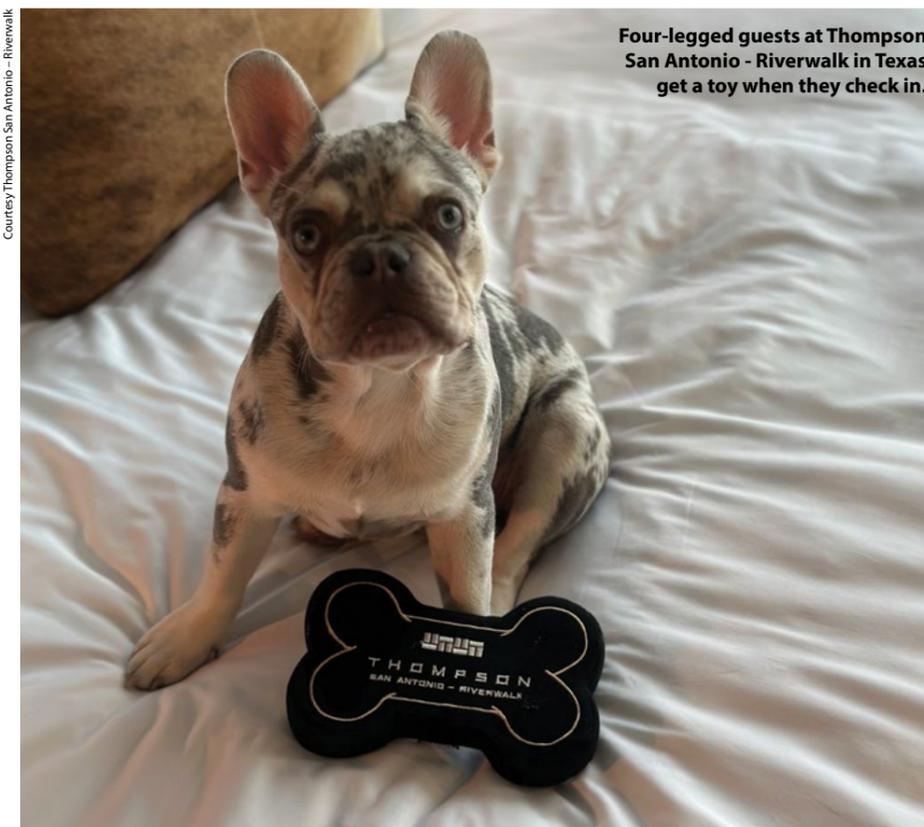
Walk the dog

Attendees can get outside and explore the host city while walking their dog—another benefit of hosting a pet-friendly meeting or event.

San Antonio's famed River Walk is a bonus outdoor amenity for pets. "The hotel provides convenient access to the River Walk right outside its doors, perfect for dog walks," Bruce says.

Same goes for Dallas. "Fairmont Dallas is conveniently located in the Dallas Arts District, a six-minute walk to Klyde Warren Park where there is a terrific dog park and low drinking fountains for furry friends," Martinez says. "Klyde Warren Park is shaded and has covered patios and large structures to enjoy time out of the rain and heat."

The Chesapeake Bay area also throws dogs a bone. "We have several spacious lawns and pet-friendly trails that run along the Choptank



Four-legged guests at Thompson San Antonio - Riverwalk in Texas get a toy when they check in.

River," Ruppert says. "We also have a designated dog-walk pet-relief area."

In Oklahoma, the state-of-the-art Oklahoma City Convention Center is across the street from 70-acre Scissortail Park, which has a dog park on the grounds. And the convention center is next door to the pet-friendly Omni Oklahoma City Hotel, which welcomes dogs and cats weighing less than 25 pounds.

The Betsy also has dog parks nearby. Guests at The Park on Main can enjoy the fully enclosed off-leash Mr. Pickles' Dog Park a block from the hotel, which is lit and open 24 hours a day.

Pack-building

Including pets in meeting activities breeds engagement and ensures all attendees can participate.

"Planners can incorporate pets into activities by arranging a group outing to a dog park, scenic walk, or a pet-friendly restaurant," Ruppert says. "Seasonality and weather can be a big factor when planning pet-friendly activities. Planners should ensure they've checked the weather or adjust the time of day for an event. Dogs' paws can burn if the ground is too hot, and it is essential to provide plenty of shade and water during the warmer months."

Martinez suggests sharing an area walking map with attendees so they can plan a route together. La Parada restaurant at Klyde Warren Park has a pet-friendly patio, Martinez notes. "Food trucks are at the park every day of the week during lunch, so attendees could walk over for a group outdoor lunch," he says.

San Antonio is a pet-friendly city. "Planners can incorporate dog-walking breaks into their schedules," Bruce suggests. "Many of the outdoor restaurants and shops welcome dogs on their patios while you dine. Some restaurants even have pet menus."

The Betsy also is near several pet-friendly restaurants. And the town of Cambridge features many eateries where pets are welcome.

In Oklahoma City, Bar K is a dream of a dog park that includes a bar and food for humans; Bar K also has Missouri locations in Kansas City and St. Louis.

Walking tours and botanical gardens make great pet-inclusive group outings, Briggs suggests. "There are so many places for attendees to gather in groups or solo, planned or impromptu," she says, "with The Betsy always ready to provide water bottles to ensure safe doggie and human hydration." ■

BARKING UP THE RIGHT TREE

At AC Hotel Dallas by the Galleria in Texas, dogs sleep in the lap of luxury.

For pet-specific ideas and activities, try entering a query into ChatGPT asking for a list of dog-friendly sites in the meeting destination. Or check out the following:

- 🐾 **BarkHappy.com** helps people find dog-friendly parks and restaurants and arrange pooch playdates.
- 🐾 **PetsWelcome.com** includes a road-trip planner that creates an itinerary for pet-friendly stops.
- 🐾 **BringFido.com** features more than 500,000 dog-friendly hotels, restaurants, and attractions and includes a canine concierge.
- 🐾 **GoPetFriendly.com** highlights attractions and offers travel tips and additional resources.
- 🐾 **Rover.com** lists area pet sitters and dog-walking services.