

The Dog Days

GTP

THE INSIDER
GUIDE TO
GROUP TRAVEL

Group Travel Planet



A William Wegman Weimaraner catches 40 winks on a pet bed the photog designed for Hilton Hotels.

Courtesy William Wegman for Crypton Fabrics

Prepping for a trip used to mean paying a neighbor to keep an eye on Fluffy and Fido while you were gone, but today's four-legged friends can go (almost) anywhere. Here's a guide to hitting the road with your pet.

BY MARGARET LITTMAN

When packing their suitcases, it seems that more and more travelers are tossing in a favorite toy for their beloved pets. The Travel Industry Association estimates that more than 29 million Americans have taken their furry friends with them on vacation in the last three years. The American Automobile Association says the number of pet-friendly accommodations in the U.S. increased by 28 percent between 2003 and 2006. And that trend looks to continue.

The reasons why are many. The popularity of the “staycation”—traveling closer to home to save on transportation costs—is one: It’s easier to take pets with you when you drive rather than fly. And the fact that many pet owners treat their companions like members of the family means they don’t want to leave them out of the fun. (Some intrepid folks do travel with bearded dragons or pot-bellied pigs or rabbits, but when hotels, campgrounds, and airlines say “pet-friendly,” they generally mean dogs and cats.)

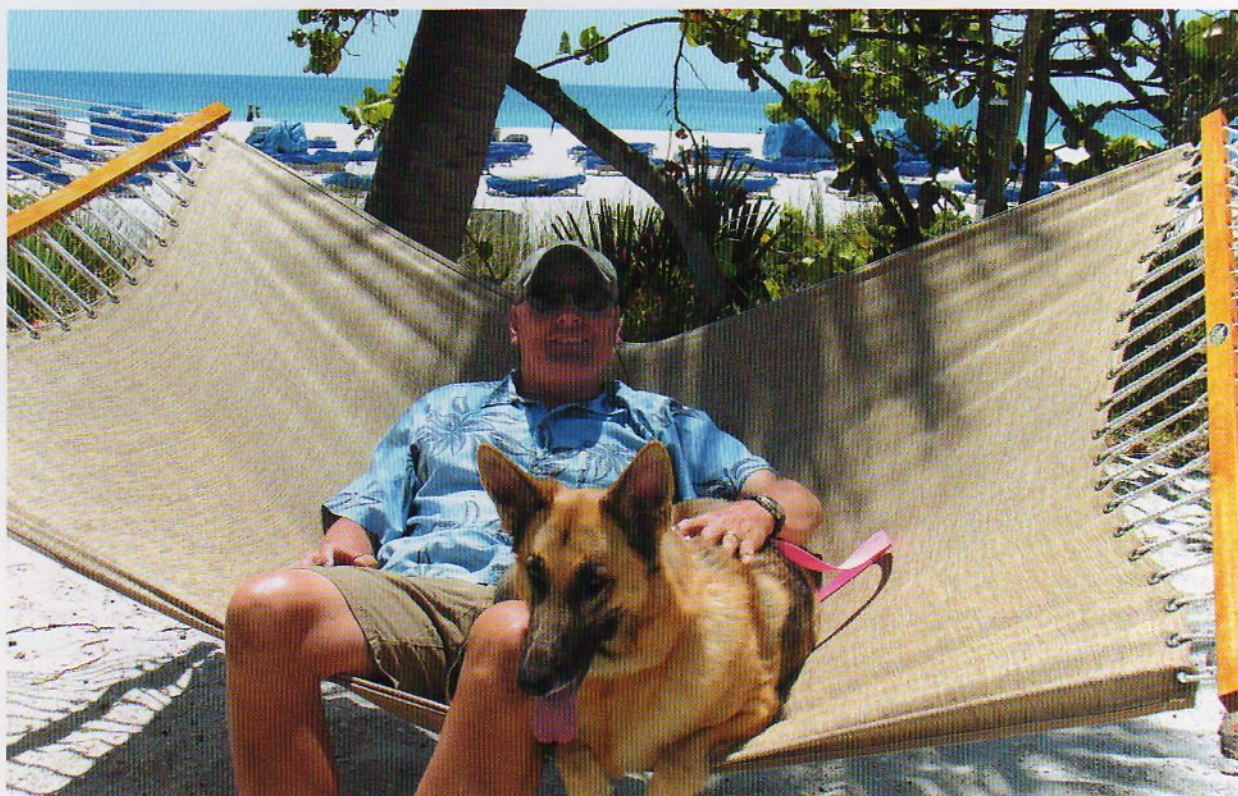
“Most dog owners feel that dogs are people, too,” explains Annie Williams, camp director of Camp Fideaux, a weeklong pet-friendly excursion near Sun Val-

ley, Idaho. The camp, which includes lots of hikes in the Sawtooth Mountains, is one of a growing number of options for groups who want to take to the road with their animal companions. Some, like Camp Fideaux, consist of organized tours and activities. Others are of the pull-it-together-yourself variety, dependent on your availing yourself of local dog parks, beaches, and outings like the bring-your-dog days at major-league baseball stadiums (many teams, including the Pittsburgh Pirates and Chicago White Sox, have these days once or twice a season).

Animal Instincts

While adding pets to your group vacation can be fun, it’s not all a walk in the park cautions Jamie Damato, a trainer for the Animal Planet network and the owner of AnimalSense, a Chicago dog-training firm. “You can’t just assume your dogs will all get along,” she says. Introducing the dogs to one another on neutral territory, finding a way to keep them separated during feeding time, and having a plan B in case they don’t co-mingle are essential planning tasks. Damato notes that cats often scare more easily and aren’t pack animals like dogs. She also says that when traveling with a group of pet owners, it makes sense to discuss potential issues in advance. A simple e-mail with everyone listing “five things you should know about my pet” is a good way to cover possible complications like food aggression.

Websites such as PetsWelcome.com can help you find places to go and things to see with your pet. Travel to Boston, for instance, and your well-behaved pooch can ride the ferries, on a carriage, and even the subway. In Orlando, you can dine out with your doggie—in restaurants’ outdoor eating areas—thanks to a bill signed by Governor Jeb Bush back in 2006. Note, however, that regulations on things like dog parks and beaches vary and may change often, so it’s best to verify all info before you go. Some cities, including Chicago, require paid permits before a dog can go to an off-leash park. Others, such as Nashville, simply



Man's best friend has it made in the shade at the TradeWinds Island Grand Resort in St. Pete Beach, Florida.

require evidence of vaccinations and for visitors to abide by posted rules.


When it comes to bunking down with your best mate, fortunately, finding a pet-friendly hotel is easier than ever. Many websites—both third-party and proprietary—now have searchable options for pet-friendly accommodations. Good sites to start with include HomeAway.com, VRBO.com, and Dog FriendlyHotels.org.

No matter what you find online, it pays to verify the info with a phone

call and get everything in writing. While certain chains, including Loews and Best Western, are considered pet-friendly, franchised locations of some chains may have different policies or fees. Also, many hotels set aside certain rooms as pet-friendly, and they may fill up before the rest of the hotel does.

Hilton Hotels and Resorts (www.hilton.com/pets), for one, has a new pet-friendly program for travelers with both cats and dogs in more than 200 Hilton hotels across the Americas.

Upon check in, pets and their owners will receive a welcome package, designed for the hotel chain by noted artist William Wegman (best known for playful pics of his Weimaraner dogs), that comes complete with food and water bowls, organic pet treats, biodegradable bags for canine clean-up, and other amenities. There are plenty of other options out there, too, many of which have the same kind of perks. Here's a roundup of some of the most interesting:



Pet Packing List

When traveling with your pet, you need to remember certain essentials to help ease any animal-related anxiety. So don't forget:

- **Something that smells like home.** A familiar blanket, T-shirt, or pet bed will help make a strange room seem comfortable.
- **Interactive toys.** They'll help keep your cat or dog from obsessing about the new sights and sounds.
- **A harness or seat belt if traveling by car or bus.** Something that keeps your dog safely in place protects both you and him.
- **A crate.** This gives your pet a safe place to sleep when you're out and about without him. Make sure it's plenty big enough.
- **Cleaning supplies.** Even perfectly trained pets can have accidents in strange environments.
- **Extra ID tags.** Take tags, even disposal paper ones, on which you can write your phone number and hotel information.
- **Medical records.** Your rabies certificate might be required to enter certain dog parks and other venues.

Boston's stylish **Liberty Hotel** (www.libertyhotel.com) is just blocks away from a dog park, so you can exercise your four-legged friend before going shopping on Beantown's famed Charles Street.

The **Hotel Gansevoort** (www.hotelgansevoort.com) in New York's Meatpacking District allows dogs of all sizes. For an additional \$40 fee, dogs get a customized gift box, with his or her name, a monogrammed dog bed, treats, toys, and more.

Stowe, Vermont, is home to the Green Mountain wilderness and the **Topnotch Resort and Spa** (www.topnotchresort.com). No wimpy pet beds here: Cats and dogs get fun treats and use of inflatable pet beds, not to mention their own massage treatments.

Doggie Happy Hour is one of the fun activities planned at the **Hotel**

Monaco in Alexandria, Virginia (www.monaco-alexandria.com).

For those who want to bring the pets along but don't necessarily need to spend 24-7 with their furry friends, there's the **Grand Traverse Resort and Spa** (www.grandtraverseresort.com) near Traverse City, Michigan. Dogs have a fenced yard in which to stay and play, with beds and toys and soon-to-be-installed webcams, so you can see what they're up to even when you're in your room.

Denver's **Oxford Hotel** (www.theoxfordhotel.com) permits travelers to bring almost any kind of pet with them.

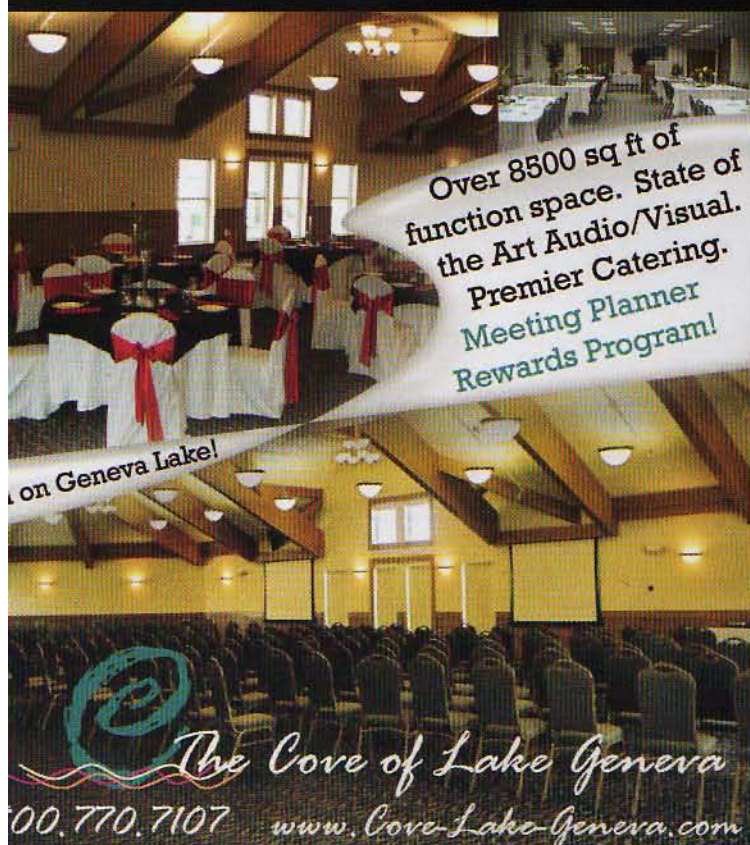
Gulf Shores, Alabama, is a group-travel mecca, thanks to its many beach houses that accommodate large parties. Some companies there, like **Sunset Properties** (www.sunsetproperties.com), rent pet-friendly digs on the far

end of the Gulf's peninsula, where the white-sand beaches are pet-friendly.

The **TradeWinds Island Grand Resort** (www.justletgo.com) in St. Pete Beach, Florida, has a host of pet-friendly perks, including a special room service menu off which you can order delicacies like Kitty Kasserolle and Mutt Meatloaf.


California's San Jacinto Mountains are a canine's dream, and close enough to enjoy from a home base at the **Viceroy Palm Springs** (www.viceroypalmsprings.com).

The **Hotel Indigo** (www.midtownatlantahotel.com) in Atlanta offers a weekly canine cocktail hour with complimentary dog treats and water bar (not to mention a doggie menu with sirloin steak and grilled chicken), as well as pet photo ops in the signature Hotel Indigo chair. **GTP**

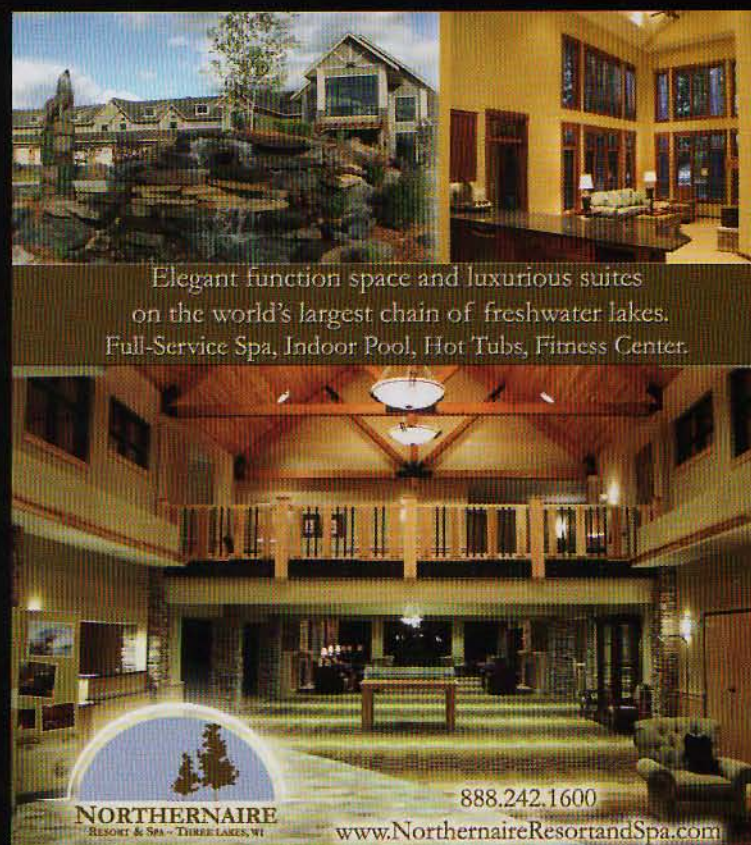


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