

Passport for pets

If leaving behind your beloved pet while you holiday causes heartache, there's a new breed of pet-friendly destinations to try.



YOU MAY BE familiar with the dilemma: getting everything sorted for the trip, packing your bags – and having to deal with the sad, hurt looks coming your way from the family pet. Despite being 'just' animals, they seem to know exactly what's going on. And while dogs are so happy to see you when you get back that they quickly forgive your abandonment, all cat lovers know how well they can hold a grudge!

Well, the good news is it's now easier than ever to take your pet on holiday. In fact, some pet groups recommend it. The Petcare Information and Advisory Service believes it can be beneficial for both pets and people to enjoy a holiday together – particularly if it is for a longer period. "Pets are

very much a part of the Australian family, with more than 53 per cent of households having a dog and/or a cat. Pets provide companionship and are a way of getting to meet other people so – for older people – it is particularly important to maintain these benefits," says spokesperson Susie Chaseling.

"In the past, it was common for cats and dogs to be sent to boarding kennels when the family went away on holiday, however people are now recognising pets can adapt well to travel and there are increasing options for people wishing to take their four-legged friend on holiday.

"Our advice is to do your research before you leave home. There are many websites that have information on pet-friendly accommodation, with

everything from caravan parks to luxury hotels," says Susie.

The hotel market is well served by global accommodation websites such as www.wotif.com, where you can often use 'pet-friendly' as your search criteria. Or if you have a preference for a particular hotel chain, you can generally find out through its website whether it allows pets. If that information is not readily available, email the corporate office or the individual hotel to clarify whether your pet will be welcome. Both **The Observatory Hotel** in Sydney, and **Lilianfels Blue Mountains Resort & Spa** in Katoomba, NSW, for example, offer pet-friendly rooms at an additional charge of \$50 per night. Visiting dogs and cats may not weigh more than 20 kilograms, but do receive a pet bed

and bowl and a dinner chosen by their masters from a Scooby Doo room service menu that includes Pluto's Favourite (braised cubed steak with chunky vegetables) and Jerry's Catch (grilled boneless salmon with green beans, egg and potatoes) at just \$20 a dish.

Spokesperson Kimberley Salt says, "Among The Observatory Hotel's canine regulars over the past six years is a really cute little Maltese cross called Charlie. Other guests have included Bubba the Maltese terrier, and Chi-Chi and Paris, both Chihuahuas."

But what if you want to stay somewhere with a little more character? How can you find a romantic bed and breakfast or beach house? There are several websites that can help you to find something out of the ordinary. Many contain helpful general information about travelling with pets as well.

Using a holiday site such as www.takeabreak.com.au allows you to search for pet-friendly accommodation Australia-wide, and it puts you directly

with you, and some are even happy to babysit while you head out."

Another option is www.lovemelove.mydog.com.au, a website that specialises in pet-friendly holiday rentals by the sea. Started by Balmain businesswoman Christine Lewis in 2007 with just one house – her own – it now boasts more than 70 lovely abodes. "Love Me Love My Dog came about because I hadn't had a holiday in 20 years. Having three dogs, I just couldn't find suitable accommodation. Just because I wanted to take my dogs on holiday didn't mean I wanted to stay in a kennel! So I thought, 'Now there's an opening for a new business!' People get so excited when they find one of our houses on the internet and realise they can go on a beach holiday and take their best friend with them," says Christine.

Houses must have secure fencing, allow dogs inside, offer doggie sun beds in the garden, toys, food and water bowls. Property owners are also asked to have local vet numbers on hand and supply name tags with holiday addresses

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in touch with the operators, giving you the chance to ask all the questions to ensure the property is right for you and your pet.

Jill Collins, spokesperson for Take a Break, says the site was started in 2003 by two Canberra sisters and their husbands to cater for travellers looking for accommodation at the boutique end of the market. It currently lists more than 11,000 properties – B&Bs, guest houses, farm stays, even houseboats, of which about 25 per cent are categorised as pet-friendly.

"Once upon a time, pet-friendly accommodation meant an old kennel on the veranda, along with a water bowl and a half-chewed ball, if you were lucky," says Jill. "These days, many properties allow you to have your dog or cat inside

and phone numbers for you to attach to your dog's collar while there. "You can never be too safe," says Christine. "Being a lifelong dog lover, I know what matters, what you need and what you want in your search for the perfect pet-friendly holiday."

Once you have found the perfect place for the whole family to stay, remember to add your pet's needs to the packing list. Many properties have clean and comfortable beds available, but for comfort and a sense of security, it is best to take your own if it can be easily transported.

Update your pet's vaccinations and pack essentials such as tick/flea/worm treatments, as well as any other relevant medication, toys, doggie-do bags, leads and collars and comfort items.



Charlie, a Maltese cross, is a regular guest at Sydney's Observatory Hotel.

Make sure your pet is micro-chipped and has an ID tag on their collar with clear contact details. It is always wise to have a mobile number on the ID tag, as there is not much point in people calling your home number to say they have found your pet when you may be away in another state. It is also a good idea to have a couple of recent photos of your pooch or puss, in the unhappy event of them being lost.

Make sure your pet is used to travelling in the car and plan your journey so you stop every couple of hours. This is good for the driver and a necessary break for your pet. It allows pooches to stretch their legs and have a toilet stop, and cats appreciate the fresh air and lack of motion, even if it isn't practical to allow them out of their travelling crate.

Taking your pet with you while flying within Australia is quite a bit more complicated than taking a driving trip – but not impossible. Several airlines, such as **Virgin Blue** and **Qantas**, will transport your pet in a specially designed crate, for a reasonable cost. Make sure you check out the costs and conditions for pet travel on airlines – it usually means an earlier check-in time to make sure your pet is settled before the flight. *Bon voyage!*

Useful websites

- www.petnet.com.au
- www.observatoryhotel.com.au
- www.virginblue.com.au
- www.qantas.com.au