

Finding the best vacation spots with Spot

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What's a family vacation without the entire family?

You don't want to leave Maggie at home, even if she is your dog¹ or especially if she is your dog.

While there are more and more kennels out there that have gone doggy-resort-style, it's becoming increasingly common for Maggie or Mr. Mugs to travel with you.

Angela Wu is the founder of Pet Friendly Canada. Her website, Petfriendly.ca is a directory that plans pet travel to its frustration.

"When we started the directory back in 2001, most of the dog owners we met were surprised to find out that their dogs were welcome on vacation with them," says Wu.

Ten years later, though the industry has blossomed, she finds a lot of people still assume roadside motels are the only place to leave pets behind. "I think people still assume that if they're not welcome in a place, then the pets aren't welcome either," says Wu. "But that's not true."

More and more establishments are actually catering to pets, Wu explains, offering extra services like a list of nearby dog parks and pet supply stores. Then there are the places for the lap-dog of luxury: they may offer pet-sitting, private doggy beds, food and water bowls, and a special menu just for your tail-wagger.

But no matter where you're going, the dog travel expert advises a basic travel kit for your furry baby: towels, a toothbrush, bedding, required medications, a supply of regular food and water, and an extra leash just in case.

If you're looking for something more al fresco, like hiking, canoeing, or even skijoring (cross-country skiing with your dog along with delicious campfire meals prepared for you), that's available too. Kathryn Howell is co-owner of Dog Paddling Adventures - Canada's first outdoor adventure company specializing in serving dogs and people.

Howell finds that the dog vacation industry is growing, but acknowledges its restrictions. "We see how many places that welcome dogs, but put so many limitations on the type of dogs, size of dogs or where they are welcome."

So always call to confirm that your furry friend meets your accommodations' guidelines.

Dog Paddling Adventures, however, does not have size limitations. "A truly dog-friendly spot is key for this industry," says Howell.

Howell.

And, don't worry if your pooch has never canoed before, a doggy lifejacket - a must - will keep your pup cool and says 90% of her clients experience this type of trip for the first time and learn very quickly that they can run, play and just have fun.

More than just a respite, she believes the vacation can be a life-changing experience for the dog and his or her family. She has had so many rescue dogs come out on trips who have never been socialized or given the chance to experience another dog with their humans.

"It is amazing to see a dog, who may start out aggressive or scared on a trip, come out a few times and turn into a friendly and well-socialized dog."

From Vancouver to St. John's and everywhere in between and beyond, there are many holiday possibilities with your dog. Still, much like a trip with a baby or children, you will have some extra planning to do.

So, make your next family vacation the best family vacation, doggonit.

Pet vacation tips with the help of Angela Wu and Petfriendly.ca:

Use a seatbelt harness for your pooch (plus a backseat booster seat for the smaller ones to see out the window) and make sure to protect their eyes when indubitably sticking their snouts out the car.

Even if your accommodation allows pets to be left unattended (though many do not), try not to. If you must, note where the pet is staying and give a number where you can be reached.

Make sure to put your cell number on your dog's collar tag.

Bring all documentation, a recent picture, and check with a vet before leaving to ensure your little one is healthy and has all the vaccinations needed for the destination.

Petiquette is important. Always pick up after your dog, keep him with you, don't permit him to disturb other guests and wipe off muddy paws before entering a room.

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