

A pet peeve becomes a pet project

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When Tammy McCarley and her fiancé adopted a yellow Labrador retriever, they wanted to take the pooch, Sienna, with them on weekend trips.

They quickly bumped up against the challenges facing most roving pet owners.

"We could find dog-friendly inns, but when we got there we couldn't figure out what to do with her," said McCarley, who lives in Manhattan. "It was really tough."

McCarley decided to start a business, Blue Sky Dogs, dedicated to organizing dog-friendly vacations for people and their pets. Two years later, the business is thriving with dog-centric group vacations to the Catskills and Block Island that include human-canine adventures such as canoeing and day hikes.

"Even in the year I've been doing this, more and more inns are dog-friendly, more restaurants let you sit on the patio with your dog," she said.

McCarley has tapped into the booming pet travel industry, which experts say includes 20 million pets that went on vacation with their owners last year, a 33 percent increase from 2003.

The marketplace is responding as businesses try to cash in on this niche of the \$36-billion pet industry, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association. Stores are selling specialty harnesses, seat belts, collapsible water bowls and waste-disposal contraptions such as portable potty turf and disposable kitty litter boxes designed to create a more human-friendly traveling experience.

More hotels are pet-friendly these days, with upscale chains such as Starwood offering luxurious dog beds and amenities like plush dog robes, doggie toys and canine massages. The more affordable Motel 6 chain uses its pet-friendly policy in advertising to lure customers. It allows guests one well-behaved pet, which recently included Dottie, a 3-month-old baby lowland gorilla from the Columbus Zoo, who stayed in the motel on her way to an appearance on "Late Show With David Letterman."

Airlines are cashing in, too, with frequent-flyer plans for pets and their owners on both United and Midwest.

Dr. Kim Langholz, a veterinarian at Iowa State University, cautions owners to plan for their pet vacation. Research vaccination requirements, stock an ample food supply and make sure pets such as ferrets and pit bulls are legal at destination spots - or wanted.

"As much as you love your animal, are you sure your friends and family will really welcome your pet into their home?" Langholz asks. "It's much easier to have fun on vacation when you've planned ahead."



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DOG-FRIENDLY GETAWAYS

Even when you have your dog in tow, there's no need to sacrifice charm and amenities in your lodging. Here are three small, luxury inns in popular getaway locales that accept dogs. Be sure to let them know you will be bringing your pet at the time you book, because the number of pet-friendly rooms is limited.

The Delamar Greenwich Harbor, Greenwich, Conn.: Dogs get a bottle of artesian water at check-in, along with a personalized ID tag and other amenities. Dogs can't weigh more than 30 pounds, however. Of the extra \$25 charge each night for a dog, \$5 is donated to a local dog adoption service. Doubles from \$269 a night; 866-335-2627, www.thedelamar.com.

Southampton Inn, Southampton, N.Y.:

Charges \$29 a night extra for dogs. Doubles start at about \$149 a night; 800-832-6500, www.southamptoninn.com

The Inn at Essex, Essex, Vt.: Dogs allowed with additional fee of \$25 a night, plus a \$300 refundable damage deposit. Doubles from about \$159 a night; 800-727-4295, www.vtculinaryresort.com.

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