No Dog Left Behind

During the past week, I attended a hotel investment conference in Los Angeles and stayed at Le Montrose Suite Hotel just off Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood. While I was in the lobby, a guest walked past me and into the elevator accompanied by a large poodle on a leash. Call it a sign of the times. Today, more and more hotels are allowing, even encouraging, guests to bring their pets with them.

Le Montrose Suite Hotel, operated by our sister company, Outrigger Lodging Services, caters to many Hollywood celebrities, some of whom arrive with a pet in tow.

"Not a problem," says general manager Claudia Jackson. "We charge them a reasonable fee to cover special cleaning and have them sign an agreement that they will be responsible for any damage. The program has been well received and we have had few issues except once when a room attendant opened a guest room door and watched in horror as the guest's pet scooted between his legs and escaped down the corridor. We mobilized all staff and finally were able to return the pet to his owner!"

With the proportion of U.S. households with at least one pet now at 63 percent, up from 56 percent in 1988, it's no surprise that pet-friendly hotels are becoming more common. www.petswelcome.com and www.bringyourpet.com are just two of several Web sites that offer a partial state-by-state listing of pet-friendly hotels. Hotels listed on the sites include W, Marriott, Choice, Intercontinental, Holiday Inn, Baymont, Accor, Kimpton, and Doubletree. Travel writer Stephanie Abrams (www.sabrams.com) has announced that she will write a quarterly column on traveling with pets for Fido Friendly magazine beginning with the March issue.

According to an article in the New Hampshire Union Leader, some hotels go all out to pamper guests' four-legged companions and offer "oversized pet pillows, as well as gift packages, which include toys, identification tags, bones and turn-down treats, just like the mints left on their masters' pillows. Some hotels even have a licensed dog masseuse on staff."

Most hotels have limitations on the size and kind of pets that are acceptable.

- At Le Montrose, dogs must be 25 pounds or less.
- At the Sonnenalp in Vail, Colorado dogs cannot be left alone in a guest room. If the owner wants to go out, say to go skiing, the hotel will help find a dog sitter who will keep the pooh company while the owner is on the slopes.
- The Regency Hotel in New York City requires guests who check in with a pet to wear a pager, so they can be quickly contacted if a pet needs assistance while the owner is out of the room.
- The Kimpton Hotel Group not only allows pets, but will even provide a goldfish in a bowl to guests traveling alone who feel pet-deprived. Kimpton's Hotel Monaco in Denver has a resident dog that roams the lobby and front desk areas all day long. Guests love to pet it and say hello.

There are lots of stories about hotel guests and pets over the years.

- Some are obviously publicity stunts, such as the time in the 1940s when cowboy movie idol Gene Autry checked into Nashville's Hermitage Hotel with his co-star Champion, a horse, at his side.
- Some are legends, probably embellished along the way. For example, according to Historic
Hotels of America, “in the first half of the 20th century, live alligators graced the fountains of the Palm Court at the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond, Virginia. Travelers apparently purchased the ‘gators as pets in Florida’ and then, while driving back north had second thoughts and left them at hotels such as The Jefferson along the way. Bellmen would find them reclining upon the hotel’s luxurious lobby furniture.”

- A reliable source informs me that New York hotel queen Leona Helmsley once asked Las Vegas casino mogul Steve Wynn to check out of the Helmsley Palace Hotel because Wynn insisted on keeping a small dog in his room. Later, however, there must have been a change in policy, because the Helmsley Palace hosted entertainer Michael Jackson, along with his pet monkey. Helmsley hotels are now rated pet-friendly. In fact, when I checked into Helmsley Park Lane Hotel a few years ago, I was pleased to be greeted by Leona’s own pet dog in the lobby. (Incidentally, the new Wynn Las Vegas, like most major Las Vegas hotels, does not allow pets with the exception of “service animals,” such as guide dogs for the visually impaired. However, there are many smaller Las Vegas properties that are pet-friendly.)

Outrigger and OHANA Hotels & Resorts currently do not accept guests’ pets, except Seeing Eye dogs accompanying the visually impaired. Because most of our guests arrive by air and both Hawaii and Australia have strict pet quarantine laws, few of them are accompanied by pets, and there has been little demand for pet accommodations. However, the Outrigger-OHANA pet policy is subject to review from time to time and may change in response to the market.