



Trends & Insights

The rise of the pet-friendly filter

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What you can learn from a dog-friendly hotel that marketed its way through the pandemic

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Eric Suesz
Click. Magazine Writer

For travellers around the world, 2020 was a massive disruption. But for pets? It may have been the best year ever. They got to spend extended amounts of time at home quarantined with their human families. And, with the pandemic shifting travel focus to vacations within drivable distances, many pets were able to travel with their owners.

"During the pandemic, we've seen a lot more people travelling with their pets," says Tarundeep Singh, Product Manager at Booking.com. "With more people driving to their destination, it's easy for them to bring their pets along for the ride."

A growing, healthy market

Pet ownership has increased since the beginning of the pandemic, in particular in the US, the world's biggest pet market. Many US-based animal shelters have reported a [surge in pet adoptions](#) since the pandemic began, and the market for the products pet owners consume continues to grow.

According to the American Pet Products Association's [most recent survey](#) of pet owners, 67% of U.S. households own a pet. These pet owners continue to spend more every year, with an estimate of 99 billion US dollars spent in 2020, up by 3% from the previous year.

Pets on the platform

And even though the pandemic curtailed most travel, one striking detail about pets and travel is how popular the pet-friendly filter has been. The use of the filter has been on an upward swing in the last two years and reflects one of Booking.com's key [Travel Prediction 2020](#) for an increase in pet-friendly travel. But its use has more than doubled since the beginning of travel restrictions. "The pet-friendly filter is the third most-used filter in the facilities section," says Singh. "Behind swimming pools and parking."

Pets have always been an important aspect of travel on the platform and catering to them has clear benefits for partners. In addition to reaching a wider audience of bookers, it can help you compensate for low bookings during the off season. Pet owners are also generally prepared to pay more to bring their four-legged family members along, which means you can charge a higher rate or pet fees by meeting their very specific needs.

But it's worth pointing out a few of the challenges of running a pet-friendly accommodation. Dogs can shed quite a bit of hair during a stay, so managing that fact of life is key, especially if your property has carpeted floors. To meet this need, some partners invest in special equipment or a cleaning crew that has expertise in cleaning up after pet stays.

The dog-obsessed value proposition

One accommodation provider with years of expertise at hosting pets is the Staypineapple hotel chain. "We like to say we're not just dog friendly - we're dog-obsessed," declares Michelle Barnet, CEO and Founder of the chain of ten US-based hotels. The company's origins can be traced back to her own travels when she consistently experienced exasperated looks at hotel check-in desks whenever she showed up with her two Siberian Huskies. "Animals are the glue that brings humanity together," she says with conviction. "They are

Takeaway

- Use of the pet-friendly filter on Booking.com has more than doubled since the beginning of travel restrictions
- The pandemic saw a surge in pet adoptions and the American Pet Products Association estimates a healthy 3% increase to the 99 Billion dollar US pet market in 2020
- Transparent pet fees are a key differentiator for guests at the Staypineapple dog-friendly pet chain, which allows two pets with one set fee
- Pet owners pay close attention to nearby pet-friendly locations near accommodations, pet-specific amenities and unique offerings like Staypineapple's option to leave pets in the room while exploring the city

family and should be welcomed on a vacation.’



Many partners are pet-friendly - but some go deep and make it a unique value proposition.

One thing that sets Staypineapple apart from hotels is its pet fee policy. “Our guests are always looking for a reasonable pet fee, and the value they can get with that pet fee,” explains Barnett. One way they try to make that value apparent is by charging a single pet fee - even for guests who bring two pets. For partners, it’s important to be transparent about these details to avoid dashed expectations at check-in. If you charge a separate fee for each additional pet, make sure you include that detail in [your fine print](#).

What do pet owners want?

What do travellers with pets look for? “Just like a human and choosing a hotel or a place to stay,” says Barnett, “they want to make sure their pet is comfortable”. She says pet owners typically begin their search for accommodation by looking for pet-friendly activities in the area like a place to walk their dog in a nearby park. After that, she firmly believes pet-friendly amenities make a big difference. “To make sure pet owners feel the value, we include a pineapple-themed dog bed in the room, treat tins and poop bags.”

They also offer a special value proposition to guests. They actually encourage them to leave pets in the room while exploring the city. “That is something I think that’s unique to us,” says Barnett. “We have our own door-hanging sign that explains to our staff that there is a dog in the room and that the owner is out exploring the city.”

Marketing to the pandemic

Of course, all of that guest exploration has lessened in the past year. “Like all hotels, we’ve been highly impacted by the pandemic.” Each of their hotels is located in the heart of an urban centre near convention centres and areas where guests can walk to restaurants and go shopping. “All of those things went away,” she says. “That being said, we’ve kept our hotels open the entire time.”

With the recognition that guests were pivoting to road trips, they worked to tailor their marketing to meet this guest need. “In the locations where we offer parking, we offered parking and pet fee packages together,” she notes. “We also did a big campaign around road tripping this past summer with videos and graphics of a dog’s head hanging outside of a car window. We were able to keep our hotels alive with our fun, cheeky brand, while still getting the message across about safety and sanitation.”

**Based on the share of filter users who used the “pet-friendly” filter, comparing the average use of the filter across 2019.*

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Click. Magazine Writer