



Matching pet owners with receptive hotels

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Pets have been at the forefront of the lodging industry recently. A few months ago it was Starwood Lodging's press release announcing the roll out of their "Love That Dog" program. Loews Hotels has initiated its "Loews Loves Pets" program that includes not just a welcome letter from the general manager to its guests with pets, but also pet room service menus, pet-walking and pet-sitting services, and the adoption of special cleaning procedures designed to remove allergens from the guestroom after the pet has departed. Even a New York Times piece in October notes that four of Paris' most luxurious hotels, including the Four Seasons-George V, have thrown open their doors to pets and the travelers who accompany them.

But just how do pet owners find lodging accommodations that will be receptive to them and their furry traveling companions? In the past two years there has been a proliferation of pet-friendly intermediaries that seek to match up travelers with pets and those hotels and inns who will welcome them with their animal in tow.

Most of these intermediaries can be found through the Internet. Very similar to such hotel booking search engines as Travelocity and Expedia, these reservation websites are linked to hotels through global distribution systems such as Sabre and Apollo, thus allowing the intermediaries to check for real time availability and package or space allotment at individual properties.

And much like the leading independent hotel websites, these pet-friendly intermediaries collect their revenues not from the guests who book reservations, but from commissions collected from individual properties after the guest's/pet's hotel stay. Typical commissions are 10 percent of booked room-rate revenues. The inter-mediaries also charge nominal fees from hotels to qualify and list their property on the intermediary booking site.

Finally, the pet-friendly intermediaries offer additional services to pet owners such as pet-etiquette tips for traveling, first aid advice for traveling pets, traveling paraphernalia for pets, and online bulletin boards advertising upcoming pet events in various cities. Essentially, these pet-friendly intermediaries have become the travel agents for pets and their masters.

The following intermediaries and books specialize in matching pet owners with lodging accommodations:

- BringYourPet.com (www.bringyourpet.com)
- Petswelcome.com (www.petswelcome.com)
- Pets On The Go! (www.petsonthego.com)
- Travel Pets (www.travelpets.com)
- Pets Allowed Hotels (www.pets-allowed-hotels.com)
- InterPet Explorer (www.interpet.explorer)
- "Traveling with your pet – the AAA PetBook," available from the Automobile Association of America
- "Vacationing with your pets: Eileen's directory of pet-friendly lodging in the United States & Canada," by Eileen Barish ✧

(Dr. William D. Frye, whois executive editor of The Rooms Chronicle, is an assistant professor of hotel management at Niagara University and travels extensively through-out the world. He may be reached at e-mail: wfrye@roomschronicle.com)