

# Pooches' new leash of life



**Paw relation:** The Best Friend Holiday Retreat in Gippsland's Tarra Valley bills itself as the world's first dog holiday park.

Yes, you can take your lovable four-legged friend on holiday with you

**I**T'S the dilemma faced by every pet owner: How can you go off on a fun-filled holiday and leave your best friend behind?

Lucky for them, a growing number of holiday spots are throwing out the welcome mat — and doggy a la carte menus, mini bars, hydrobaths and playgrounds — for pampered animals.

Perhaps the best known in Victoria is Best Friend Holiday Retreat in Tarra Valley, Gippsland, a three-hour drive east of Melbourne.

Billed as the world's first dog holiday park, it has a hydrobath hut for dogs, dog bedrooms, a dog playground, luxury day-use kennels, off-leash areas, fenced camping and caravan sites and fenced cabins (where dogs are welcome inside).

Last year it won the coveted national Five Paw Award from *Holidaying with Dogs*, a guide to dog-friendly accommodation. Its 10th edition, released in December, lists more than 2000 dog-friendly places.

Pooch-suited accommodation can include treats, toys, poop scoopers, doggy-do bags, dog chains, leads, towels, blankets and bowls.

A growing trend is pet-friendly dining rooms.

Tarra Valley Rainforest Retreat

welcomes dogs in its dining room and has a la carte doggy menus for breakfast (banana pudding anyone?) and dinner (options include "grrrrisotto" and birthday cake).

It also has a dog hydrobath, off-leash area, pick-up and drop-off dog-grooming service and gourmet picnic hampers for you and your pet.

Wotif.com lists more than 60 pet-friendly properties in Victoria and 650 Australia-wide.

Megan Magill, a spokeswoman for the website, says three-star pet-friendly accommodation starts about \$100 a night. Many four-star places also allow pets.

Wotif.com's five most popular are Holly Lane Mews in Yarra Glen, Countrywide Cottages in Bamba, near Lorne, Advance Motel in Wangaratta, Casa Favilla B&B in Apollo Bay and El Dorado Tourist Park in Geelong.

Advance Motel offers a "pet mini bar" in your room — buy pet shampoo for \$4, a retractable dog lead for \$10 or rawhide chews for \$2 a pack.

Co-owner Michael Adams last month doubled the motel's number of pet-friendly rooms from two to four (out of 25) in response to demand.

"We have nights when the only rooms that are booked are our pet-friendly rooms," says Mr Adams, who's hosted cats and birds as well as dogs and once fielded an inquiry from a lady wanting to stay with her "pet koala". (She never did.)

Lastminute.com.au says its most

popular pet-friendly properties include Holly Lodge in the Yarra Valley, Daylesford by the Lake, Discovery Holiday Parks in Carrum Downs and Central Cowes Family Townhouses on Phillip Island.

While Tourism Victoria has yet to follow its lead, Tourism NSW recently launched pet-friendly information on [www.visitnsw.com](http://www.visitnsw.com) including accommodation, restaurants, off-leash areas and shops.

The Hughenden Hotel in Sydney's upmarket Woollahra has 12 (of 36) pet-friendly rooms — often fully booked.

It has pet-friendly dining areas in the restaurant and a chapel that offers pet-friendly wedding services.

The boutique hotel even had a joey this year — it was a hit as it joined guests at the breakfast table, albeit on a lead. A possum in a bag joined guests for brekky last year.

It's important to beware when booking that many places billed as "pet-friendly" insist dogs stay outside, so call and check first.

And some charge \$50 or more to bring a pet.

"Pet-friendly" can mean that while pets will be tolerated, they'll be far from living in the lap of luxury. Then it will be you in the doghouse.

**More:** [www.holidayingwithdogs.com.au](http://www.holidayingwithdogs.com.au);  
[www.bestfriend.com.au](http://www.bestfriend.com.au);  
[www.tarravalleyrainforestretreat.com](http://www.tarravalleyrainforestretreat.com);  
[www.advancemotel.com.au](http://www.advancemotel.com.au);  
[www.hughendenhotel.com.au](http://www.hughendenhotel.com.au)