

# Joining the pet set



**Paw service:** pooch goes walkies with a dog walker aboard the *QM2*.

The boarding kennel just won't do for pampered pets these days.

**Rachael Oakes-Ash** finds some more glamorous options

**B**ABIES are so five minutes ago. The ultimate accessory of the millisecond is the pooch.

Pet travel has gone upmarket, especially in canine-friendly North America and Europe.

Airlines, hotels and specialty dog services are a fast-growing trend in the travel industry abroad.

United Airlines allows pooches to fly up top with their owners on domestic flights in the United States, though Fido and friends must remain in their designer kennel, stored under the seat in front, for the flight.

Continental Airlines offers a similar service in lieu of carry-on cabin baggage. But a maximum of one pet is allowed in business and first class and no more than four pets in the economy cabin.

Passengers flying to London from America with Continental need not worry about pesky quarantine time.

The airline is part of Britain's Pet Travel Scheme, which allows domesticated pets to travel between accredited countries without quarantine.

For Qantas passengers this means no waiting time to play fetch with Fido when travelling from Australia to London via Singapore.

However, only service dogs are allowed in the cabin, the rest have to be checked in below.

But where does pooch bed down when he arrives?

Check into dog-friendly Four Seasons hotels across America and your four-legged loved one will be greeted with heart-shaped dog biscuits, squeaky faux newspaper toys, dog bowls with paws for feet and a welcome letter from the hotel for the truly educated canine that can read.

The luxe Fairmont Hotels of Canada understand the separation anxiety pooch owners can feel when leaving puppy behind.

Several of its hotels employ resident hotel dogs for guests to treat like their own.



**Doggie brag:** pooches lap up the luxury in front of the fire at Little Nell.

Fairmont uses retired guide dogs and puppies in training as house dogs. They mingle well with guests who have brought their own.

Dogs and snow go hand in hand at many ski resorts.

Princess pooches at Little Nell hotel in Aspen have their own room-service menu and upon check-in Princess receives her own bling, an identification tag with the hotel's address. She can join a group exercise class with the hotel dog walker, or may prefer personal training. There's even a stylist on hand for her coiffure.

Farther north in British Columbia at Whistler Mountain, the Westin's infamous Heavenly Beds are extended for Rover with the trademarked Heavenly Dog Bed.

The annual "Ruff Weekend" sees dog lovers descend upon the hotel.

If your dog's name is Westin, and you can prove it, you score a Heavenly Dog Bed and matching dog bowls.

And Rover could work for his supper. If he wins the crazy tricks competition the room for the weekend is free.

Even Cunard cruise liner, the *Queen Mary 2*, allows pampered

pets on board. Doggy biscuits at turndown, a QM2 dog coat, Frisbee, name tag and a portrait with pet owners are just some of the extras.

In Europe, hotel brands Sofitel and Hilton take care of dogs and their accompanying humans.

Most restaurants in France allow canine guests, so long as they are well behaved and lie quietly under the dining table.

Closer to home, most farm-stay holidays and some bed and breakfasts allow room for the family dog, but they usually have to sleep outside.

Boutique hotel, The Medusa, in Sydney's Darlinghurst, has several dog-friendly courtyard guest rooms and claims to be the only luxury hotel in Australia that allows guests and dog to sleep under the one roof.

Health and quarantine regulations in Australia restrict the number of dog-friendly hotel services available and quarantine means you can take Fido on holiday in Europe, but you'll have to wait 30 days to get him back when you return.

But be warned, with all this pampering your canine will be demanding upgrades and a turndown service when he gets home.

No more "ruffing" it for him.

## Lie under the beer taps and get a skin full

**Mike Bruce** discovers every beerlover's dream

**I**T SOUNDED like some bizarre Homeric fantasy — Simpson that is, not the ancient Greek poet chap.

But the Czech news report was explicit. At a small, family brewery in West Bohemia, you can bathe in a tub of beer.

Not only that, you get to drink beer while doing so — something about health benefits. This had to be done.

Within 48 hours a car was hired and we were driving the 160km from Prague to Hotel U Sladka in Chodovar Plana, a small village close to the historic spa town of Marienbad.

The blurb at reception assures us that as far back as Roman times the curative effects of beer baths were recognised.

Yeah, whatever. I just want to sit in the beer. We are ushered into the swanky new cellar that houses the baths — large metal tubs, all with elegantly tall, brass beer taps at their heads.



**Mmmm, beer bath:** you also get to drink it.

The bath spa is a one-to-one mixture of water and the iron-rich local mineral water, a paste of seven secret dried herbs, dollops of active brewer's yeast and "dark bathing beer".

The bathwater is, predictably, a foamy brew of Yarra-like colour and a little cool for my liking. As I begin to add some hot water, hostess Klara comes running, telling me that I musn't change the temperature.

"Can I put my head under?" I ask.

"Of course, it's very good for the hair."

The smell is sort of Abbotsford (brewery) meets horse stable.

Undeterred, I put my head under. As I almost lose myself in some mid-20s booze fantasy, I resurface to find Klara standing before me with a glass of the brewery's non-pasteurised lager — apparently an important element of the spa to improve digestion and "enhance the relaxation process".

So, we are soaking in a tub of beer, drinking beer while Bedrich Smetana's iconic ersatz-anthem, *My Country*, plays in the background. If there is a quintessential Czech experience this could well be it. As the foam thins and the water assumes a brackish, soupy quality, things start to happen — the skin takes on a velvety film, the water becomes warmer and the breathing becomes a little more laboured.

Despite the cackling Bavarians around us, we begin to feel truly relaxed. The prescribed 20-minute soak passes all too quickly.

Klara invites us into the relaxation room where we are cocooned in fleecy, wool blankets and rest on deckchairs for about

25 minutes soothed by soft music and low light. Hotel general manager Mojmr Proke explains that the bath causes a gradual rise of blood pressure, stimulates the vascular system and opens the pores.

The hops in the herb mixture scrub away toxins and allow the curative effects of the vitamins and proteins in the brewer's yeast to take effect.

Proke maintains the science is rock-solid and was devised by Marienbad curative specialist Roman Vokat, who tested it on a hundred patients over eight months.

We meet a German tour operator who takes regular groups to a hay-bed-and-beer-bath cure in Austria and says his clients swear by it.

Our verdict: after the bath the skin doubtlessly feels softer and the body and mind are comfortably relaxed.

Whether it was the half-kilo of pork ribs afterwards, drinking the local iron-laden mineral water, the Arctic snap in Prague or a sudden release of toxins from the bath, for days I felt decidedly out of sorts.