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## TRAVEL

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DOG-FRIENDLY HOTELS



**ALFRESCO DINING** for pampered pooches Darby the wheaten terrier, left, and West Highland terrier Lillie, in their room's patio at the Peninsula Beverly Hills. Photo by Rosemary McClure

## BOW & WOW!

At five lodgings with reps for giving man's best friend the royal treatment, two canine food critics put the menus and other offerings to the test.

**By ROSEMARY McCLURE** >>> Oh, the joy of being a dog. Especially a dog with wealthy parents, um, I mean owners. ¶ More than a decade has passed since luxury hotels began throwing welcome parties for platinum-card-carrying pet owners. ¶ But with pets a \$50-billion-a-year industry, it was only a matter of time before they began offering dining menus that had gone to the dogs, literally. ¶ Chefs at some of America's toniest hotels have hunkered down in their kitchens to create pets-only room-service delights: ranch-raised New Zealand venison, steak and eggs scrambled with aged Tillamook cheddar, wild Chinook salmon with brown rice. ¶ But do these over-the-top pet meals really satisfy Mr. Dog? Or would he rather just gnaw on a bone? And, if he's happier with gourmet foods, which hotel has the winning recipes? ¶ These burning questions seemed like an excellent research project for my pal Darby, a wheaten terrier whose favorite pastime is eating. Would he mind becoming a food critic? I asked. ¶ Without a blink of his big brown eyes, he stepped up to the plate.

[See Pooch palaces, L4]



**A 30-MINUTE MASSAGE** is \$120 at Four Seasons' Biltmore Resort Santa Barbara, but Darby thinks it's worth every penny.

# Where dogs dine in style

[Pooch palaces from L4]

## Four Seasons Resort the Biltmore Santa Barbara

Darby loves this hotel and so do I. Perhaps we could stay a week instead of a night and research the menu in depth. On the other hand, maybe our editor would fire us.

This sumptuously landscaped oceanfront hotel, opened in 1927 as the Biltmore and still called that around town, has long been a retreat for Hollywood celebs. Bing Crosby used to knock around croquet balls on its perfectly manicured lawns.

The 20-acre property, known as much for its landmark Spanish Colonial Revival architecture as for its jungle-like gardens, gets bonus points from me (I get a vote too) because it charges no fee for pets.

Another bonus: People with dogs usually stay in a cottage instead of a room. This is like saying to my dog, "Would you prefer steak or kibble?" The cottages really put the "wow" in bow-wow—private, most with patios or balconies, with wonderful places to walk Darby just outside the door. They feature wood floors, large Spanish-tile baths and casually sophisticated Spanish Colonial furniture. When we checked in, we found a dog bed, a welcome mat with two bowls (one with a bottle of water in it, the other with doggie biscuits) and a box of cleanup plastic bags.

Darby gobbled the biscuits and gave me that "I'm still hungry" look. So I ordered all four items on the pet menu: Lick Your Chops dry dog food, \$5; Rin Tin Tin chopped sirloin cheeseburger (hold the bun), \$6; Tall Wagger grilled boneless chicken breast, \$7; and Mighty Mutt filet mignon, served rare, \$10.

The food was chopped into bite-sized pieces. Nothing fancy, but it was hearty. Darby didn't waste time: He ignored the dry dog food, devoured the Mighty Mutt filet mignon, then bolted for the cheeseburger to see how much he could gulp down before I grabbed the bowl.

Clearly, the Biltmore's menu was a hit. But not nearly as big a hit as another amenity the resort offers visiting pets: in-room massages (\$120 for 30 minutes). The lights were lowered, candles were lit and a massage technician focused on letting Darby experience "complete renewal from head to paw," according to the hotel brochure.

When he tried to get up after she'd finished, he could hardly stand. He was so relaxed that his legs wobbled. Color me green with envy. Based on a five-paw scale:

**Hotel:** 5 paws  
**Dog fare:** 4 paws  
**Massage:** 5+

## Peninsula Beverly Hills

Lucky dogs stay here. This palace-like hotel, at Wilshire and Santa Monica boulevards, knows how to roll out the grass carpet for four-legged guests, perhaps from dealing with battalions of celebrity pups.

The Peninsula is part of a celebrated brand that has equally luxurious hotels in Hong Kong, Tokyo, Shanghai, New York and a handful of other places. Condé Nast Traveler calls the Beverly Hills version the "No. 1 hotel in Southern California."

The Hollywood set loves it. Celebs can drive to the back and stay in one of the hotel's 16 private villas without being seen by other guests or paparazzi. (It's rumored to be popular with people who have



**A KNOCKOUT VIEW** from his Hyatt Regency Huntington Beach balcony didn't distract Darby from his Buddy Burger (\$5).



**DARBY** eyes a bacon dog biscuit at Carmel Valley Ranch.

had a little work done.) Small gardens surround the villas and main building; European-style guest rooms are large and ultra-comfortable with antiques, art-work and high-tech room amenities. Guests have round-the-clock valets and access to the courtesy Town Car or Rolls-Royce Phantom. Uber-wonderful pet amenities await too. Darby brought along a friend, Lillie, a West Highland terrier, to share his visit. Both received personally monogrammed bath towels, velvety dog beds, bowls with Fiji water and doggie bags. A thoughtful gift—a lint roller—rounded out the doggie loot. (Per-night fee, \$35.)

On the minus side, the Peninsula's location wasn't great for walking my pal and his friend. We had to go several blocks to find a tuft of grass for them to sniff. But the hotel offers complimentary dog walking, so I guess most guests leave that problem to the hotel's affable pages. And our room had a spacious outdoor patio, which allowed the dogs space to stretch their legs.

What about the food? A top-dog success. Only a temple of chicness such

as the Peninsula would offer a Tall Shakin' not Stirred Martini for dogs. No alcohol; just low-sodium beef bouillon. In addition, the pet menu lists six other items, the most we found anywhere. Prices range from \$4 to \$19.

Darby dug right into Spot's New York Strip, an 8-ounce portion served sliced and garnished with baby carrots (\$19). Meanwhile, Lillie focused on Lorenzo's Turkey Burger, a ground patty mixed with aromatic vegetables (\$16). "The ideal choice for the figure-conscious doggie," advised the menu.

Darby tried to sneak over to Lillie's dish after finishing his own, but she grumbled at him and he backed off. She polished off her food, then laid down for a nap.

**Hotel:** 5 paws  
**Dog fare:** 5 paws

## Carmel Valley Ranch

This special place in the foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains cries out for dogs and people to romp and play. With 500 acres to explore, Carmel Valley Ranch is a vacation waiting to happen.

Besides lots of play space, the ranch offers plenty of excitement for dogs, with wild turkeys and deer roaming the hillsides. At the front desk, Roxie the bulldog greets visiting pups, offering a canine-style welcome. (Per-visit fee, \$100.)

All of the rooms are large suites (ours measured 800 square feet), with hillside and valley views. An expansive elevated deck gave Darby the opportunity to hang out in the fresh air and bark like a demented junkyard dog whenever he spotted birds or deer. He was in canine heaven.

Hotel scion John Pritzker bought the resort in 2009, spending more than \$30 million to upgrade it. Furnishings are contemporary, plush and comfortable. Lots of activities are scheduled, many of which (such as hiking) can include dogs.

Inside the room, we found pet

## Where to stay

Peninsula Beverly Hills, 9882 S. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills; (800) 462-7899, [www.peninsula.com/Beverly\\_Hills](http://www.peninsula.com/Beverly_Hills). Doubles from \$550 a night. Pet fee \$35 a night (per dog).

Four Seasons Resort the Biltmore Santa Barbara, 1260 Channel Drive, Santa Barbara; (800) 332-3442, [www.fourseasons.com/santabarbara](http://www.fourseasons.com/santabarbara). Rooms for two from \$444 a night. No pet fee (but 50-pound weight limit).

Carmel Valley Ranch, 1 Old Ranch Road, Carmel; (866) 405-5037, [www.carmelvalleyranch.com/index.aspx](http://www.carmelvalleyranch.com/index.aspx). Doubles from \$510 a night. Pet fee \$100 per stay per pet.

Hyatt Regency Huntington Beach Resort & Spa, 21500 Pacific Coast Highway, Huntington Beach; (800) 233-1234, [www.huntingtonbeach.hyatt.com](http://www.huntingtonbeach.hyatt.com). Doubles from \$350 a night. Pet fee \$50 a night; 50-pound weight limit.

Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel, 1700 Ocean Ave., Santa Monica; (888) 332-0160, [www.loewshotels.com/Santa-Monica-Beach-Hotel](http://www.loewshotels.com/Santa-Monica-Beach-Hotel). Doubles from \$438. Pet fee \$100 per stay.

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Go online for more photos of Darby and Lillie.

mats, a giant dog bed, bowls, treats, bottled water and a check-in snack, a hand-sized bacon-doggie biscuit (\$5).

As usual, the snack just whetted Darby's appetite, and I turned to the pet menu. It featured two entrees, chicken and rice (organic brown rice, of course) and a pooch patty, beef with whipped potatoes and garden vegetables. Both were \$12.

The dishes were beautifully presented and looked as though they should have been served to me instead of my dog. The exception: a giant beef marrow bone (\$6) so large that it barely fit in the pet dish. I stashed the bone for later, and Darby attacked the beef and potatoes, a happy boy.

**Hotel:** 5 paws  
**Dog fare:** 5 paws

## Hyatt Regency Huntington Beach Resort & Spa

Surf City loves dogs. It has a great dog beach (100 Goldenwest St.) and a bevy of dog-friendly hotels, including the sprawling Hyatt Regency.

The 517-room hotel, set on the inland side of Pacific Coast Highway, has Spanish-inspired architecture, overlooks the beach and offers downtown action and the pier. It has courtyards, fountains and fire pits, with nice green areas and rooms with small private balconies or patios. Furnishings are contemporary and comfortable.

I loved the view, the surf view and the room here, but the property wasn't great for Darby and Lillie. High-rises present problems for dog owners, because it usually takes an elevator ride and a long walk to get to places where dogs are permitted.

The standard amenities—dog bed, bowls, bags—were in the room, along with the best freebie we encountered: a cute and practical canvas doggie bag dispenser. (Pet fee, \$50 per night.)

And we couldn't complain about the food or prices on the doggie room-service menu. Everything was \$5, including wonderful treats with cutesy names: Barking Biscotti, Snicker-Poodles and Cold Nose Bark Bar. Entrees included a Buddy Burger, Bowers Bacon Pancakes and, for vegetarian pups, K-9 Green Bean Casserole.

As usual, Darby loved everything he ate, but Lillie wasn't sure about the green bean casserole. I think she's a carnivore. Perhaps there could have been a bit more variety, with another meat, poultry or fish dish on the menu.

**Hotel:** 3.5 paws  
**Food:** 4.5 paws

## Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel

Loews loves pets. In fact, that's one of the mottos of the Loews Hotels chain, which launched a pet-friendly program in 2000, long before most of its competitors.

But the Santa Monica hotel, a sea-view high-rise, has some of the same problems we encountered in Huntington Beach. It takes an elevator ride and a walk across the street to get to a patch of grass. On the other hand, the hotel is great for its human guests, with beautiful ocean views and access to the Santa Monica Pier and beach.

From our sixth-floor room, which featured a contemporary beach-casual look, we could see the pier and the hotel pool, far below. Darby and Lillie had grown accustomed to the routine by now and waited expectantly as we got settled. They knew food would soon be served. But first we checked out the doggie amenities: nice place mats, which we could keep, stainless steel bowls, dog treats, a special Do Not Disturb sign for the room and a pooper-scooper canister and bags to attach to the leash. (Pet fee, \$100 per stay.)

The room-service menu included a nice variety of dishes: Bow Wow Tenderloin of Beef (\$20), which included eggs and brown rice; Chow Hound Chicken (\$19) with carrots and green beans; GRRreat Vegetable Feast for dogs or cats (\$18), mixed vegetables with eggs and brown rice; Whisker Licking Liver (\$17) with eggs and brown rice and Salmon Supreme (\$18), a fresh salmon filet. The downside: All the food was chopped and looked the same. It was also pricey, considering the size of the portions.

Of course, my ever-hungry whetted charged the food and would have devoured it all, if I hadn't intervened. Lillie, ever the dainty guest, was more demure. But she didn't seem to mind the visual sameness, either. And I had to grab the dishes away from her too.

**Hotel:** 3.5 paws  
**Food:** 4 paws

We'd been to five hotels, and Darby had been eager to act as a dog critic at each.

Granted; at times it seemed like he was inhaling the food instead of savoring it, but that's because it tasted so doggone good.

Unfortunately, now he wants only strip steak, filet mignon or grilled chicken breast. I've created a monster.

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