The Fine Print: An Anatomy of the Hotel Pet Policy

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Document Reference: RDWP-HPP-01
Version: 1.4
Date: 1st October 2026
Publisher: Roch Dog Inc

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Executive Summary

Nothing tells a dog owner they are not really welcome quite like a list of rules, and every hotel that accepts dogs publishes one. The pet policy is the first thing a dog owner reads about your hotel and the document that decides whether they book, yet in most properties it was written once by whoever handles the insurance and has never been looked at since. This paper is the first study of that document: we read 236 published hotel pet policies from 29 countries, set them against Roch Dog's assessments of more than 3,000 hotels, and had the law behind them reviewed in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.

The first finding is that the pet policy has stopped being a welcome and become a liability document. Nine in ten policies contain more prohibitions than courtesies; the typical one forbids six things and offers fewer than two, and only one in five mentions something as basic as a water bowl. Many of them also contain a trap nobody intended: they close the restaurant and bar to dogs and then forbid leaving the dog alone in the room, which means a guest travelling alone with a dog cannot eat dinner in the hotel.

The second finding is that this is largely an American habit that the rest of the world is copying. Nine in ten American policies are signed contracts full of waivers and indemnities, drafted for the hotel's insurer rather than its guest. British policies are house rules, warmer and better provisioned, with the legal content reduced to a sentence about damage. Canada and Australia sit between the two.

The third finding, and the one that matters most to anyone who signs off a policy, is that the legal drafting does not do what hotels think it does. The waivers, indemnities and fines that make these documents so unwelcoming turn out, in all four countries, to be somewhere between weak and worthless, while the few things the law will reliably back are short, reasonable and exactly what a good host would say anyway: a fee the guest saw before booking, damage charged at cost, and a handful of conduct rules that staff actually enforce.

So the pet policy is risk theatre. It performs a protection the hotel largely does not get, at the price of the welcome the guest came for, and it costs bookings from guests who would gladly have paid for a real welcome. The paper closes with the alternative, which we call the Friendly Dog Policy: a one page policy, backed by Roch Dog and free for any hotel to use, that leads with what the dog gets and where it can go, states the costs in one glance, keeps the law to two sentences, and replaces breed lists and weight limits with one fair test of how the dog behaves.

SECTION 1

What Your Pet Policy Tells a Dog Owner

Before a dog owner has seen your lobby, tasted your breakfast or met a single member of your staff, they have read your pet policy, and they have read it more carefully than any other page on your website, because it is the only page that tells them whether the trip is going to work at all. Most hotels do not think of the document that way. They think of it as a form, drafted once, usually by whoever handles the insurance, and then left alone for years. Everything here comes from reading 236 published policies closely; how we gathered and read them, and the full figures, are in Appendix B. One caution: we read policies published as PDF documents, the pet policy at its most formal, so a hotel whose rules live on a web page may read warmer than these figures suggest.

1.1 Your first sentence decides who the document is for

Read the first sentence of your own pet policy. It will do one of four things: welcome the guest, state a rule, make a legal declaration or name the price, and whichever it does tells the reader at once who the document was written for. A guest who is greeted reads on as a guest. A guest who is told in the first line that they "assume full responsibility" reads everything after it as a defendant.

Just over half of the policies we read begin with a welcome of some kind, which sounds respectable until you remember that every one of these hotels has chosen to accept dogs and presumably wants the business. Nearly a third begin with a rule, about one in nine with legal language, and a handful with the fee. The split follows national habit closely. Four British policies in five open with a welcome, while only half of American policies do, and one American policy in five opens with a statement of the guest's liabilities.

What makes this worth a general manager's attention is that it costs nothing to fix. Changing a fee needs a revenue conversation and opening the bar to dogs needs an operational one, but the opening line can be rewritten this afternoon by anyone with access to the website.

The first sentence costs nothing to change, and it is the one a dog owner carries with them through every rule, every fee and every condition that follows it on the page.

1.2 The word you use for the dog gives you away

We did not expect the noun to matter, and it turned out to be the most reliable signal of a hotel's attitude in the whole study. We rated every policy for tone on a five point scale, from one for hostile or purely legal to five for warm hospitality, and then looked at what each policy called the animal. Policies that call the dog a guest average 4.3 and those that call it a companion 3.9. "Your dog" scores 3.3, "pet", which is the word in just over half of them, 2.7, and "animal" 2.1, the coldest documents we read.

The word also predicts what the hotel does. Four in ten of the policies that say guest or companion provide bowls and more than half let the dog into a shared indoor space, against one in six and two in five of those that say pet. The dog friendliest hotels in the study talk about a dog and a guest, and the least friendly manage an animal. Nobody chooses the word in a meeting. It falls out of how the hotel already thinks, and a hotel that thinks of the dog as a guest has settled most of the other questions in its favour before it starts writing. We showed in Nobody Trusts Pet Friendly that travellers no longer believe the phrase "pet friendly", and the pet policy is where that distrust is earned.

Hotels that call the dog a guest tend to treat it like one. Check which word your own policy uses for the dog, because every dog owner who reads it has already noticed.

1.3 Your policy is less welcoming than your hotel

For each policy we counted two things: how many separate things it forbids the guest, and how many things it says the hotel provides. The typical policy forbids six and offers fewer than two, and nine in ten forbid more than they offer. American policies are the most lopsided, at nearly seven rules for every thing offered, British policies the least at roughly two, and Canada and Australia run at about six to one.

A document like that reads as a warning, and the striking thing is that it usually misrepresents the hotel. When we assess hotels we regularly find bowls, beds and treats that the policy never mentions. The hotel has carefully written down everything the guest must not do and left out everything it does for them, so a property that is in fact quite welcoming presents itself to dog owners as one that would rather they stayed away. Nobody is asking hotels to drop their rules, because a hotel that admits dogs owes its other guests a few of them. The fix is to write down the hospitality first, so that the rules read as the conditions of a welcome and not as the whole of it.

Most hotels are kinder to dogs than their own policy admits. Write down everything you provide for the dog before you list a single thing that you forbid its owner to do.

1.4 The five star lie

This is the finding that should worry a general manager most, and it only appears when the rules are read together. Start with where the dog may go. Two thirds of the policies we read close the restaurant to dogs, and where the bar, the lounge, the pool, the spa and the gym are mentioned they are usually closed as well. Then look at the room. More than two policies in five say the dog may never be left alone in it, a further one in five permit it only in a crate, and another one in five only if the guest leaves a contact number.

Each rule is reasonable on its own, and each was probably written by a different person. Put them together and the guest cannot take the dog to dinner and cannot leave the dog behind in order to go to dinner. The couple who wanted a drink in the bar, the family who booked for

the pool and the traveller on their own who simply needs to eat are all in the same position: wherever the dog cannot go, they cannot go either.

We call this the Five Star Lie. Many of the things that make a hotel five star, the restaurant, the bar, the spa, the terrace, the lounge, sit on the far side of a rule, and what the dog owner is actually sold is a bed at a five star price. The hotel believes it is dog friendly because the dog gets through the door. The guest, reading the rules side by side before booking, sees what the stay will really be. The way out does not require opening the dining room. It requires a few honest exits: a table on the terrace, a corner of the bar, or permission to leave a settled dog in the room with a mobile number at reception.

Koufodontis and Melissourgou of the University of the Aegean saw the same thing in 2024, in the pet related reviews of 115 top ranked TripAdvisor hotels: a policy that keeps the dog in the room and forbids leaving it there keeps the guest in the room too, and the guests said so. Owners did not ask for the dining room, only somewhere to eat.

If the dog is barred from the restaurant and the bar and cannot be left in the room, its owner is paying five star prices for a bed. Give them somewhere to eat and drink.

1.5 The bowl you forgot to mention

The last thing we looked for was what the hotel says it will do for the dog, and the answer is not much, or at least not much that it troubles to mention. One policy in five says the hotel provides a food and water bowl. Fewer than one in five mentions a bed, and fewer still treats or a welcome kit.

In Britain more than one policy in three mentions bowls, and one in four a bed or treats. In the United States it is one in thirty for bowls and the same for beds, and not one American policy in our collection mentions a treat. Many American hotels do put a bowl in the room. They simply do not think the fact belongs in the document, which tells you what they think the document is for.

The first lesson is that a bowl is the cheapest signal of welcome in hospitality, and a hotel that provides one without saying so is throwing the signal away. In the 2024 Aegean study, owners named a bowl, a bed and a small treat among the things that made a stay, and staff who made a fuss of the dog mattered even more.

The second lesson is that the kit is the floor, not the offer. A choice experiment with 491 dog owners at Kyung Hee University, explained in What Dog Owners Will Pay For in a Hotel, found that owners would pay far more for space outside the room and staff to mind the dog, and less for extras inside it.

Mention the bowl, because guests notice it and it costs you nothing. Then remember that what they will happily pay more for is somewhere they can go with their dog.

SECTION 2

The Money

Ask a hotelier which part of the pet policy puts guests off and most will say the fee. It is the wrong answer. Dog owners expect to pay for bringing the dog, and the great majority of hotels charge them. What costs the booking is not the price but the fog around it: the fee with no explanation, the deposit nobody mentions and the fine waiting in the small print. Money is where a pet policy most easily turns a willing customer into a suspicious one, and it is also where the fix is simplest, because all three problems are solved by saying plainly what you charge and why.

2.1 The fee is rarely the problem

More than four policies in five charge for the dog, nearly one in five say nothing about money at all, and exactly one policy in 236 says plainly that dogs stay free. Where a fee is charged the typical figure is USD 50 in the United States, GBP 22 in Britain, EUR 30 in continental Europe, CAD 25 in Canada and AUD 30 in Australia. American fees look the highest, running up to USD 250 in our collection, but Americans usually charge once per stay while the British charge per dog per night, so over a typical two night stay the guest pays something similar in both countries.

What separates a good policy from a bad one is whether the reader can work out what they will pay and why. One policy in five does not describe the charge at all, and one in four never says whether it is per night, per stay or per dog. A guest who reads "GBP 25 per stay, which covers the deep clean after you leave" understands the charge and usually thinks it fair. A guest who reads "a pet fee applies" has learned only that the hotel intends to charge them and would rather not say how much. Silence is no kinder, because a policy that says nothing about money is not read as free; it is read as a surprise waiting at the desk.

The research explains why the explanation matters more than the amount. In The Hotel Pet Fee we put the real cost of hosting a dog at USD 6 to 25 a stay, against a typical American fee of USD 100, and found the same median fee at our A grade hotels as at our F grade ones. A fee with no explanation looks like a surcharge, because it usually is one.

Dog owners do not object to paying. In the 2024 Aegean study nearly two owners in three said they would accept a pet fee if the dog actually got something for it, and the reviews told the same story: guests complained about fees that were high, unexplained or a surprise, not about paying one. The Kyung Hee experiment shows what they would pay for, which is space outside the room and someone to help with the dog. The fee is seldom what loses the booking. What loses it is a fee that buys the dog nothing and gets it in nowhere.

Guests will pay a fee that buys their dog something and resent one that buys it nothing. State the amount, the basis and exactly what the dog gets for it, before they book.

2.2 The deposit nobody explains

The deposit is handled worse than the fee. Only one policy in nine mentions a refundable deposit and one in five mentions a hold on the card, which leaves nearly three in five saying nothing either way about the one question a guest with a card on file most wants answered: will money be taken, and will I get it back?

The odd thing is that most of the hotels that say nothing about a deposit probably do not take one. They are keeping quiet about good news. A guest cannot tell the difference between a hotel that takes no deposit and a hotel that would rather not mention it, so they assume the worse of the two, when a single sentence saying that no deposit is taken would settle the matter. Where a deposit or a card hold is taken, the guest needs to know how much it is and when it comes back, and very few policies give both.

If you take no deposit, say so, and if you take one, say how much and when it comes back. Most policies leave the guest to guess, and guests always guess the worst.

2.3 Damage, and the temptation to fine

Damage is the one subject on which the whole genre agrees. More than nine policies in ten make the guest responsible for whatever the dog breaks or soils, and as section 3 explains, that sentence mostly restates what the law already says. The interesting question is how the hotel proposes to collect. The better documents say damage will be charged at cost with an itemised account. A minority name a flat sum regardless of what happened. And about one policy in sixteen goes further and imposes an explicit fine: GBP 50 for fouling not cleared up, in several British country hotels; USD 100 for an undeclared dog, in an American resort chain; PLN 1,000 for an undeclared pet, in Warsaw; and, in one Canadian chain, CAD 200 for leaving the dog in the room, a case we return to in section 5.

The appeal of a fine is obvious. It is simple to administer and it feels like a deterrent. But it is addressed to the wrong reader. The careless owner it is aimed at seldom reads the policy, while the careful owner, who reads every word, learns that the hotel expects trouble and has priced it in advance. As section 3 shows, the fine is also the clause a court is least likely to uphold, so the hotel pays the full cost in goodwill for a protection it largely does not get. Charging the real cost of real damage, with photographs and a receipt, deters just as well, offends nobody and is enforceable everywhere.

A fine insults the careful guest who reads the policy and rarely binds the careless one who does not. Charge what the damage actually cost you, and show them the receipt.

SECTION 3

The Illusion of Protection

Almost everything that makes a pet policy unwelcoming is there because somebody believed it protected the hotel. We wanted to know whether it does, so we had the law reviewed in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, from the statutes and the decided cases themselves. Roch Dog is a standards body, not a law firm, and none of this is legal advice, but the answer was the same in all four countries: most of the defensive drafting does little or nothing, and the part that works is the part no guest would object to.

Three terms come up throughout. A waiver, or release, is the guest giving up their own right to sue the hotel. An indemnity is the guest promising to pay the hotel back for any loss or claim the dog causes. A "hold harmless" clause is the strongest form of that promise, in which the guest agrees to cover any claim anyone brings against the hotel because of the dog, sometimes even one caused by the hotel's own carelessness.

3.1 The guest was liable before you wrote a word

Hotels write "guests are responsible for all damage and injury caused by their pet" as though the sentence created the responsibility. It does not. In every country we studied the law decided who pays for a dog's behaviour long before any hotel wrote a policy, and it decided that the person who brings the dog does. About thirty American states impose strict liability for dog bites by statute, and the rest reach the owner through negligence. England's Animals Act makes the keeper liable, Scotland goes further, Ontario's Dog Owners' Liability Act requires no proof of fault, Quebec's Civil Code presumes it and New South Wales imposes it by statute for any attack.

So the most common clause in the genre, found in more than nine policies in ten, gives the hotel nothing against the dog's owner that it did not already have. It is still worth one sentence, because it puts the guest on notice and gives the hotel a contractual footing to bill for damage to its own property. What it does not justify is the page of supporting clauses that usually follows.

The sentence making the guest responsible for their dog is worth keeping, once. Repeating it across six clauses adds nothing the law has not already given you.

3.2 A waiver binds only the person who signs it

The release of liability appears in more than two policies in five, and in two American policies in three, and it rests on a misunderstanding of what a hotel has to fear. The claim that matters is rarely the dog owner suing the hotel. It is somebody else: the guest bitten in the corridor, the housekeeper bitten in the room, the child on the terrace. None of them signed anything, a contract binds only the people who made it, and the owner's signature does nothing whatever to their claim against you.

Even against the guest who did sign, the release is weaker than it looks. Louisiana and Virginia void such releases outright. California and Montana void them wherever a public service is involved, in a line of cases that names innkeepers specifically, and almost no American state will enforce one against gross negligence.

Outside America the release fares worse. In England the Consumer Rights Act says a business cannot exclude liability for death or personal injury caused by its negligence, and Quebec's Civil Code says the same. Australia's consumer guarantees cannot be excluded either, and since late 2023 an unfair term in a standard consumer contract there attracts a penalty merely for having been proposed.

For a general manager the point is practical. The signature at check in feels like insurance, but it does not cover the incident you are actually worried about. If your insurer makes a signed waiver a condition of cover, keep it on the registration card and off the page a guest reads before booking.

Nine in ten American pet policies require a signature at the desk, and not one of those signatures stops another guest suing the hotel if the dog happens to bite them.

3.3 Fine print the guest never saw does not bind them

Many American documents declare the guest bound by the policy "regardless of whether they actually read or reviewed any part of it". No legal system we studied accepts that. American courts want reasonable notice of the terms and some act of agreement to them. English law has held since a hotel case in 1949 that a notice first seen in the bedroom comes too late to form part of the contract, and it demands special prominence for anything onerous. Canadian courts require reasonable steps to bring harsh terms to a consumer's attention, Quebec nullifies outside clauses that were not expressly pointed out, and Australia treats transparency as a test of whether a term is fair at all.

This is good news for anyone who wants a shorter document, because the rule that falls out of all four countries is the same. Whatever you actually intend to rely on, a fee, a charge, the right to remove a dog, a conduct rule, has to be put in front of the guest before they book. Five lines in the booking path will do more for the hotel than five pages signed at the desk.

What the guest was shown before booking is what binds them, so put the few terms you really care about in the booking path and keep them short enough that they are read.

3.4 The fine is the weakest clause of all

Section 2 argued that a fine offends the wrong guest. The law adds that it seldom holds. In Quebec, section 13 of the Consumer Protection Act prohibits any term requiring a consumer to pay a penalty fixed in advance for failing to perform an obligation, and a fixed sum for leaving a dog in a room falls squarely within that wording. No court has yet ruled on a hotel pet fine, so this is a strong inference from an unambiguous statute, not settled law. In the rest of Canada the common law rule applies: a sum set in advance is enforceable only as a genuine estimate of the loss, and a single sum payable for any breach is presumed to be a penalty, recoverable only as far as the hotel can prove what it actually lost.

England and Australia are more forgiving. In 2015 the Supreme Court upheld a GBP 85 parking charge because it protected a legitimate interest and was not out of all proportion, and Australia's High Court applies the same test. By that reasoning a GBP 50 fouling charge that is shown at booking, applied only when a mess is actually left and roughly equal to the cost of cleaning it up is probably enforceable. A flat charge for a dog found alone in a room, payable whether or not anything happened, is a good deal weaker. The distinction is between a charge that reflects a cost and a punishment for breaking a rule.

That points to the alternative most of these policies already contain in another sentence: charge the actual, documented cost of damage or cleaning to the card on file, with photographs and an invoice. That is enforceable everywhere, and it is exactly what the card networks ask for before they will let a hotel defend a disputed charge.

The fine is the clause a court is most likely to strike down and a guest is most likely to resent. Charge what the damage really cost, and keep the photographs and the receipt.

3.5 A hotel that bans the family dog is not dog friendly

The most common restriction in the whole study has nothing to do with the law. More than two policies in five set a weight limit, and where a figure is given the typical limit is 40 pounds. One policy in six restricts named breeds. The weight limit is above all an American habit, found in more than half of American policies against roughly one in four in Britain, Canada and Australia, while breed lists are commonest in Australia, where more than one policy in four carries one.

Roch Dog's view of this is simple. Our standard defines the family dog as an ordinary household companion, benchmarked at a Labrador sized dog of up to around 35 kilograms, or 77 pounds, because Labradors and Golden Retrievers are the most popular family dogs in the world. A 40 pound limit is barely half that benchmark, which means the typical weight limit in our study shuts out the most popular dogs there are. A hotel that will not take a Labrador is not dog friendly in any sense a dog owner would recognise.

Hotels usually defend these limits as a matter of law, insurance or safety, and the evidence supports none of them. The law allows a private hotel to refuse dogs by weight or breed, with

the one exception that an assistance or service dog may never be refused, surcharged or made subject to such conditions, but nothing requires it to. The only breed restrictions with legal force are the statutory ones: the banned types under Britain's Dangerous Dogs Act, Ontario's pit bull provisions and the restricted breed regimes in the Australian states.

Insurance explains breed lists, not weight limits. The exclusion endorsements attached to commercial liability policies name breeds, and a hotel bound by one has a real reason for its list, which an honest policy says out loud. But our companion paper, Weighed and Found Wanting, found no commercial policy, endorsement or underwriting guide that sets a weight limit for a hotel.

Nor does safety. The research gathered in that paper runs the other way: smaller dogs are, by their owners' account, more fearful, more excitable and quicker to snap than large ones, and no study has ever tied hotel damage, complaints or allergy to a dog's size. What a weight limit does reliably is turn dogs away. Of the 27,541 American dogs in the Dog Aging Project, 57 per cent weigh 20 kilograms or more, so a 40 pound limit refuses more than half of them before anyone has seen one behave.

There is one honest reason for a size limit, and it is space. A small city room may simply not hold a large dog, its bed and two guests in any comfort, and a limit tied to a room category, with the reason given, is a fact about the building that our standard has no quarrel with. A blanket cap across the whole hotel with no reason stated is a different thing, and weight is in any case a poor stand in for what the hotel really cares about, which is how the dog behaves.

A weight limit that keeps out a Labrador keeps out the most popular family dog in the world. If that is your policy you are not dog friendly, whatever the website says.

3.6 The law's own test for a dog is behaviour

There is a precedent hiding in plain sight. The most protected dogs in the law of all four countries are assistance and service dogs, and the law manages them without a fee, a breed list, a weight limit or a waiver. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act a hotel may ask a service dog to leave on exactly two grounds: it is out of control and its handler does nothing about it, or it is not housebroken. Britain's equality guidance, Alberta's Service Dogs Act and Australia's Disability Discrimination Act all draw the line in the same place. Size does not come into it. In American housing the government puts it plainly: "Breed, size, and weight limitations may not be applied to an assistance animal."

That matters to a hotelier for a reason that goes beyond service dogs. Every hotel already admits these dogs on a test of conduct alone, so the method is neither new nor untested, and if it is good enough for the dogs the law protects most it is a defensible test for every dog. It is the foundation of the Friendly Dog Policy in section 7.

The law judges its most protected dogs purely by how they behave, with no fee, breed list or waiver, and a hotel is free to judge every other dog in exactly the same way.

3.7 What actually protects the hotel

Strip away everything that does not work and four things are left, and all of them are plain.

The first is telling the guest before they book. A fee, a charge or a rule that the guest was shown before booking binds them. One they first met at the desk, or in a document they were never shown, may not.

The second is charging what damage actually cost. A hotel that bills the real cost of cleaning or repair to the card on file, with photographs and an invoice, is on firm ground in every country we studied.

The third is the right to ask a dog to leave. Ending a stay because a dog is aggressive or disruptive is lawful everywhere, and it works best when the guest was told in advance what behaviour would trigger it and what happens to their money.

The fourth is the least appreciated: a few rules about behaviour that staff actually enforce. The one American appeal court decision to hold a hotel potentially negligent for a guest's dog, Maher v Best Western in Florida in 1998, turned on the motel having taken "no action whatever" to lessen the risk: no lead rule, no control rule, no notices. A hotel is exposed by having no rules, or by ignoring the ones it has, and not by having too few waivers.

That is the whole list. A long document, a signature and a waiver are not on it.

Tell the guest before they book, charge what damage really cost, enforce a few rules on behaviour and keep the right to send a dog home. Nothing else protects the hotel.

What the policy assumes	What the law actually does	What to do instead
A signed waiver protects the hotel if the dog hurts someone	A waiver binds only the guest who signed it; other guests and staff can still sue, and in the UK and Quebec injury liability cannot be excluded at all	Keep one plain sentence making the guest responsible for their dog, and enforce conduct rules
A broad indemnity shifts all risk to the guest	A narrow indemnity for loss the dog causes is enforceable; a sweeping one is read down or struck	Say the guest pays for damage their dog causes, at cost, and stop there
The guest is bound whether or not they read the policy	Terms not shown before booking do not bind the guest anywhere	Put fees, charges and rules in the booking flow, not in a PDF
A flat fine deters bad behaviour	Prohibited in Quebec, unenforceable beyond proven loss in most places, weak everywhere	Charge documented actual cost to the card on file, with a receipt
Breed and weight limits reduce risk	Lawful but required by no law; insurers name breeds, not weights; the law's own test for the most protected dogs is behaviour	Judge every dog by conduct under the Friendly Dog Policy
More clauses mean more protection	The one hotel found potentially negligent had no rules at all; enforced conduct rules are the defence	Fewer rules, applied

SECTION 4

Two Traditions

Whether a pet policy reads as a welcome or a warning depends less on the hotel than on the country it was written in. The four English speaking markets we focused on fall into two traditions, one American and one British, with Canada and Australia borrowing from each, and knowing which one your own document belongs to explains most of what is in it.

Measure	United States	United Kingdom	Canada	Australia
Policies studied	61	56	12	15
Signature required	92%	32%	58%	27%
Indemnity or release of liability	77%	38%	75%	27%
"Hold harmless" in the text	44%	11%	17%	7%
Opens with a welcome	51%	80%	33%	40%
Written mainly in legal language	44%	12%	42%	27%
Weight limit	54%	23%	25%	20%
Bowls mentioned	3%	38%	17%	20%
Dog never to be left alone	33%	45%	67%	87%
Restaurant closed to dogs	69%	71%	67%	47%
Any shared indoor area open	25%	68%	8%	13%
Tone, 1 hostile to 5 warm	2.7	3.5	2.2	2.5

The American document is a contract. Nine in ten require a signature, three in four carry an indemnity or a release, and more than four in ten contain a "hold harmless" clause, which is four times the British rate.

Because it manages risk on paper, the American hotel is, oddly, a little more relaxed than the British one about where the dog may go and whether it may be left alone. What it does not do is offer anything. Only one American policy in thirty mentions a bowl or a bed. It is a document drafted to survive a deposition, and it reads like it.

The British document is a set of house rules. Only one in three asks for a signature, only one in eight is written mainly in legal language, and four in five open with a welcome. It is better provisioned than any other market's and far more generous with the building: two British policies in three let the dog into at least one shared indoor space, against one American policy in four. Where it is strict is the furniture, and its legal content is usually a single sentence about damage.

Canada and Australia show what happens when the two are mixed, though our samples there are small, at 12 and 15 policies, so their figures show a direction more than a measurement. Canada takes the American paperwork, with a signature in more than half its policies and an indemnity or release in three out of four, and adds the coldest tone of the four: only one policy in three opens with a welcome, two in three forbid leaving the dog at all, and a third reserve "the right to sue" the guest.

Australia has the lightest legal content, with a waiver or indemnity in only a quarter of policies, but the tightest control of the dog itself: designated rooms in three policies out of five, the dog never left alone in nearly nine out of ten, and breed restrictions in more than one in four.

The American document did not get this way by accident, and four forces explain most of it. The first is insurance. As we showed in The Coverage Gap in Dog Friendly Hospitality, the standard hospitality liability policy in the United States commonly excludes injury caused by animals, and American lawyers reach for a waiver to fill the hole the insurer left. The second is litigation culture: contingency fees, jury awards and the absence of a loser pays rule make a dog bite in a lobby a serious financial threat in a way it is not in Britain.

The third is the template. Franchise brands and hospitality law firms distribute the same form to thousands of properties, which is why our collection contains the identical clause, "indemnify, defend and hold harmless the Hotel, Hotel Owner, [brand operating company] and their respective officers, employees and agents", at unrelated hotels. The fourth is the Americans with Disabilities Act, which obliges every American hotel to admit service dogs free and without conditions, so the pet policy becomes the place where lawyers draw the line between a service dog and everything else, and the tone of the whole document follows the lawyers.

The other three countries write shorter documents because their laws already make the owner liable and limit what a business can make a consumer sign away. But as section 3 showed, the American paper does not deliver the protection it promises either, so the choice is open to everyone. A hotel anywhere can write house rules in the British manner, keep one sentence on damage and lose nothing in law. If its insurer or its brand insists on the American wording, that wording can sit on the registration card and stay out of the document meant to welcome the guest.

You do not need a contract to protect the hotel. A page of house rules with one sentence on damage does the same job in law, and it does not frighten the guest away.

SECTION 5

A Case Study in Canine Hostility

Germain Hôtels is a respected Canadian group, based in Quebec City and operating the Le Germain and Alt brands across the country. Its December 2023 pet policy is the clearest example we found of a policy that is hostile to dog owners.

The policy is not without hospitality. It provides a bed, food and water bowls, treats and a lead on request, charges a modest CAD 45 per stay and exempts guide dogs from its restrictions. Then it says this: "Pets must not be left unattended, under a penalty risk of $200" ("sous peine d'une amende de 200 $"). And on the same page: "Pets are not allowed in any food and beverage outlets, fitness center and pool areas of the hotel."

This is the Five Star Lie with a price attached. The guest may not bring the dog to the restaurant or the bar, and may not leave the dog in the room to go there without risking a CAD 200 fine, so a guest with a dog cannot eat or drink anywhere in the hotel. The policy's only answer is a pet sitter "in certain establishments", arranged in advance and at the guest's cost, which is another way of saying that the group has no dependable service in place for the situation its own rules create. It also reserves "the right to sue the pet's owner".

The fine also runs against the law. Section 13 of Quebec's Consumer Protection Act prohibits any term that makes a consumer pay a penalty fixed in advance, and the French text of the policy calls the charge an "amende", so on a plain reading of the statute the fine is unlawful in the province where the group is based, although no court has yet been asked to rule on it. In Ontario, British Columbia and the other common law provinces it is very probably a penalty, which a hotel can recover only as far as it can prove a real loss. It is also unnecessary, because the same policy already gives the hotel the right to charge the guest's account "commensurate to the cost of such damages", and that is the enforceable way to deal with a dog that damages a room.

We can see what the fine is for. A dog left alone in a strange room may bark for hours, and a hotel is entitled to protect its other guests. But a hotel that wanted to solve that problem would give the owner somewhere to take the dog. This policy closes every door and then fines the guest for the consequence, and we do not think it can be read as anything but hostile.

Roch Dog has assessed three Germain properties independently, two in Toronto and one in Quebec City, and graded them C, D and D, where C means an acceptable stay for a dog and D a disappointing one. A dog shut out of every shared space, whose owner is fined for leaving it in the room, does not have a good stay, and neither does its owner.

Close every restaurant and bar to the dog and fine the owner for leaving it in the room, and you have written a hostile policy, however good the bed and the bowls may be.

SECTION 6

What the Standard Asks of a Pet Policy

The Roch Dog Friendly Standard sets six minimum requirements for a dog friendly hotel, and every one of them is something a pet policy can state in a sentence. A policy that meets the standard tells the guest the six things below. We checked all 236 policies in the study to see how many do.

Requirement	What the policy must tell the guest	Policies that do
R1. Policy before booking	The hotel's dog policy, in writing, before the guest books	All, by definition
R2. Bowls	That a food and water bowl is provided for the dog	1 in 5
R3. Shared indoor access	That the dog may enter at least one shared indoor area	2 in 5
R4. Fee	The fee and how it is charged, or that there is none	3 in 4
R5. Deposit	Whether a deposit applies and, if so, how much	1 in 10
R6. Number of dogs	How many dogs are allowed in a room	2 in 3

Every policy in the study meets the first requirement simply by being published. Of the other five, only two policies in 236 tell the guest all of them, sixteen tell the guest none, and the typical policy manages two. Which two is the revealing part. Hotels state the fee and the number of dogs, because those facts protect the hotel. They leave out the bowl, the places the dog may go and the deposit, because those facts serve the guest.

These figures describe what the policy says, not what the hotel does. Many hotels provide bowls without mentioning them, and we see it often in our assessments. But that is the point. The gap between a typical policy and one that meets the standard is seldom a gap in what the hotel provides. It is three or four sentences that nobody thought to write.

Those sentences are also what dog owners say they want someone to vouch for. In the Aegean survey of 343 owners, 83 per cent said certification was important to them and ranked it second among their reasons for choosing a hotel, yet 68 per cent did not know such a thing existed. The authors argue that certification can do two jobs: set the core rules, and tell guests what they are. That is what the six requirements are for.

The same author returned to the question in October 2026 with a global survey, Koufodontis (2026) in the International Journal of Hospitality Management, and it reads like a brief for this paper. Asked what makes a place genuinely pet friendly, 1,041 travellers in 66 countries put clear and transparent rules second only to the right facilities, at 76 per cent, ahead of

amenities, and nine in ten accepted a hotel that admits the dog, publishes its rules and provides the basics. The study draws a line that every hotel writing a policy should borrow. Rules, it says, structure how a dog and its owner behave inside a welcome; restrictions decide who gets the welcome at all. Travellers accepted the first readily and the second hardly at all: only 12 per cent would call a hotel pet friendly if it accepts some kinds of pet and turns others away, and only 11.7 per cent if it charges a high fee. A policy of six sentences that states the rules and the cost passes that test. A policy of six prohibitions that hides the cost does not. The split by region matters to a hotel writing for international guests: Europeans and Asians accepted a restricted arrangement about a fifth of the time and Americans more than half, so a policy drafted to American tolerances reads as hostile to most of the world.

Six sentences are all the standard asks of a pet policy, and only two of the 236 policies we read contain them all. Most hotels could write the missing ones this afternoon.

SECTION 7

The Friendly Dog Policy

The Friendly Dog Policy is Roch Dog's answer to everything in this paper: a one page pet policy, set out in full in Appendix A, that any hotel may adopt as its own. It rests on a simple exchange. A dog friendly hotel is defined by what it provides, and a friendly dog is defined by how it behaves.

We define a friendly dog as a dog which does not worry, intimidate or bother other guests or members of staff, and which does not cause property damage or noise complaints. In practice that means no lunging, no growling at people, no jumping up, no persistent barking, no roaming off the lead and no damage to the room.

That definition does the work that breed lists, weight limits, waivers and fines try and fail to do. The hardest question a hotelier faces about dogs is not what to provide but what to do when a dog is a problem, and most policies answer it in advance, by guessing from size or breed which dogs will be trouble and making every owner sign for the risk. The Friendly Dog Policy answers it when it arises, by looking at the dog. It is the same test the law already applies to assistance and service dogs in all four countries, and if it is good enough for them it is good enough for a Labrador.

The definition also looks after the guest who has no dog, and a hotel is right to think about them. In the Aegean survey a third of guests without pets would choose another hotel to avoid animals, and what they complained about in reviews was barking at night, hygiene and pets near their rooms. None of it is about size. A dog that barks for hours or bothers other guests fails the Friendly Dog Policy whatever it weighs, and a clear policy on rooms, areas and charges, experiments published this year found, is what reassures the guest without a dog.

A hotel that adopts the policy commits to three things. It judges dogs by their behaviour and not by breed, size or weight, unless a law names a breed, in which case it says which law. It applies the test in the same way to every dog, because a behaviour rule applied selectively is only a breed ban with better manners. And it follows a fair process: a clear warning, help where help is possible, and if the behaviour continues, the end of the stay under the hotel's normal cancellation terms.

In return the hotel gets what the waiver never delivered: a clear, defensible right to send a badly behaved dog home. The guest gets a hotel that welcomes their dog whatever it weighs. We developed it from our assessments of more than 3,000 hotels, this study of published policies and the legal review behind it. We publish it under a Creative Commons Attribution licence (CC BY 4.0), so any hotel is free to use and adapt it with credit to Roch Dog.

Judge the dog in front of you and not the breed on a list, and tell every guest in advance, in plain words, exactly what kind of behaviour will get their dog sent home.

SECTION 8

How to Write One

A good pet policy contains the same facts as a bad one. What changes is the order and the voice: hospitality first, rules second, law last, and all of it written as a host would say it. The Friendly Dog Policy in Appendix A follows the seven steps below, and a hotel can either adopt it as it stands or use the steps to rewrite its own. The words in italics there are examples, to be replaced with the hotel's own.

1. Welcome the dog. Open with two sentences that call the dog a guest and tell the reader what the page covers.

2. Say what the dog gets. Bowls, a bed, a towel, treats, a map of walks, the nearest vet, where the dog can relieve itself. List everything you provide before you mention a single rule.

3. Say where the dog can go. Go through the hotel, the lobby, bar, lounge, terrace, restaurant and grounds, with a plain yes or no for each and a reason for every no. Make sure the list leaves the guest somewhere to eat and drink with the dog. If a floor or two is kept dog free for guests with allergies, say so.

4. State the costs together. The fee, what it covers and whether it is per stay or per night. Whether there is a deposit and when it is returned. How many dogs may share a room. If a room is genuinely too small for a big dog, tie the limit to that room and give the reason.

5. Ask for a few things in return. Four or five house rules are enough: a lead in shared spaces, clearing up outside, what to do when the guest goes out. Write each one as a request, with its reason.

6. Define a friendly dog. Use the definition in section 7, and say that behaviour is the only ground on which a dog will be asked to leave, that it applies to every dog alike, and that there will be a warning first.

7. Keep the law to two sentences. The guest is responsible for their dog and for any damage or injury it causes, and damage will be charged to the card on file at cost, with a receipt. If your insurer or lawyer insists on more, put it on the registration card.

Then put the policy where a guest will see it before they book, and make sure the people who work with it know it. Marketing should own the page, because it is the first thing a dog owner reads about the hotel. The front desk and housekeeping should be able to repeat its rules from memory, because a rule the staff apply protects the hotel and a rule they have never read does not.

SECTION 9

Conclusion

The pet policy is the first thing a dog owner reads about a hotel and, more often than hoteliers realise, the reason they book somewhere else. We read 236 of them, and what we found is a document that has drifted a long way from hospitality. The typical policy forbids six things and offers fewer than two. It charges a fee without explaining it, says nothing about a deposit, closes the restaurant and the bar, and often forbids leaving the dog in the room as well, so that a guest paying five star prices is left with little more than a bed. Hardly any of this was decided by anyone. It built up over the years, one reasonable rule at a time, in a document that nobody at the hotel reads from the guest's side.

The reason usually given for all of it is protection, and the law does not bear that out. In each of the four countries we studied the owner is already responsible for their dog, whatever they sign. A waiver does nothing to stop another guest or a member of staff bringing a claim, terms the guest never saw do not bind them, and a fixed fine is the clause a court is least likely to uphold. What the law does support is short. Tell the guest the fee and the rules before they book, charge the real cost of any damage with the evidence to show for it, set a few rules about behaviour that your staff actually enforce, and keep the right to ask a badly behaved dog to leave. A hotel that does those four things is better protected than one with five pages of waivers, and nothing on the list would trouble a guest.

So the welcoming policy and the safe policy turn out to be the same policy, and that is the most useful thing this research has to say. A hotel does not have to choose between looking after itself and looking after its guest. It can lead with what it provides, say plainly where the dog can go and what the stay will cost, and replace breed lists and weight limits with a single test of how the dog behaves. That is the Friendly Dog Policy, and it fits on a page.

The simplest thing a general manager can do after reading this paper is to open the hotel's own pet policy and read it as a guest would, with a dog at their feet and a booking to make. If it reads as a welcome, very little needs to change. If it reads as a warning, the Friendly Dog Policy in Appendix A is free to use, and the rewrite is an afternoon's work.

Appendix A: The Friendly Dog Policy

Your hotel name, town. Version 1.0, *date.*

Welcome

Your dog is as welcome here as you are, and we mean it. We have bowls and a bed waiting in your room, plenty of places the two of you can go together, and only a few things we ask in return. Everything you need to know before you book is set out below on this one page.

What your dog gets

Food and water bowls are in your room when you arrive, along with a proper dog bed and a towel for wet days. You will also find *a bag of treats from our kitchen, and a dog menu on room service*. Reception has a map of our favourite local walks and the details of the nearest vet, and can arrange *dog sitting or walking with a day's notice*. There is a grassy spot for your dog *by the garden gate*, with bags and a bin.

Where your dog can go

Every type of room takes dogs, *with the fourth floor kept dog free for guests with allergies*. Your dog is welcome in your room, in the lobby and the lounge, in the bar, on the terrace and in the garden, on a lead in the shared spaces. *The restaurant is the one room we cannot offer, because of food hygiene rules, so we will gladly serve you the full menu in the bar or on the terrace.* The pool, spa and gym are closed to dogs by health regulation.

What it costs

We charge 25 pounds per stay for your dog, which covers the deep clean of your room after you leave. We do not take a deposit. You can bring up to two dogs per room. We have no size or weight limit and no breed restrictions.

Living together

If you go out without your dog, let reception know and we will hold housekeeping until you are back; a settled dog with the "dog inside" sign on the door is fine with us. Please keep your dog on a lead in shared spaces and clear up after it in the grounds, and ask at reception if you need bags. We would rather dogs stayed off the furniture, so there is a bed and a throw in your room for exactly that. And please do not bath your dog in the room; ask us and we will show you *the dog wash by the boot room*.

Friendly dogs

We do not judge dogs by breed, size or weight. We judge them by how they behave, and we judge every dog the same way. We define a friendly dog as a dog which does not worry, intimidate or bother other guests or our staff, and which does not cause property damage or noise complaints. In practice that means no lunging, growling at people, jumping up, persistent barking, roaming off the lead or damage to the room. If your dog is having a bad day we will tell you, clearly and once, and help if we can. If it carries on we will ask you to end your stay, and our normal cancellation terms will apply. This is the only reason we would ever ask a dog to leave, and it applies equally to every dog that stays with us.

Your responsibilities

You are responsible for your dog and for any damage or injury it causes. Any damage will be charged to the card on file at cost, with an itemised receipt.

This policy follows the Friendly Dog Policy published by Roch Dog and meets the six minimum requirements of the Roch Dog Friendly Standard at rochstandard.com. The Friendly Dog Policy was developed from Roch Dog's assessment of more than 3,000 hotels and its study of 236 published hotel pet policies. It is published under a Creative Commons Attribution licence (CC BY 4.0), so any hotel may use and adapt it freely with credit to Roch Dog.

Appendix B: The Study in Detail

Where the policies came from

We collected pet policies published as PDF files by hotels, resorts, inns and lodges on their own websites, or on their brand's own content network, over two days in September 2026. We chose PDFs deliberately. A web page can be an afterthought, but a PDF is a document a hotel has decided to write, format and publish as a thing in itself; it is the pet policy at its most considered. We found them through search engine queries in eleven languages, starting from the hotels in Roch Dog's own database and then widening market by market. We did not take policies from booking platforms, third party listings, blogs or review sites, and we removed anything that turned out on reading not to be a hotel's rules for overnight guests with dogs: residential leases, housing association rules, campsite agreements, kennel terms, vendor templates and the like.

That left 262 documents. Eleven were scanned images whose text could not be read by machine and 15 more were excluded on reading, so 236 policies were analysed: 61 from the United States, 56 from the United Kingdom and Ireland, 15 from Australia and New Zealand, 12 from Canada, and 92 from 25 other countries, chiefly Spain, Italy, Japan, Germany and Poland. The four English speaking markets were the focus of the collection and of the comparison in section 4; the rest are used for whole study figures and as a check on what is universal and what is local.

Two things should be said about what this collection is and is not. Hotels that publish a formal PDF are more likely to take the document seriously, in either direction, so the study probably over represents both the carefully welcoming and the carefully legal. Hotels that keep their rules on a web page were not sampled, and may well read warmer. And the American share reflects both the size of the US market and the American habit of publishing the policy as a form to be signed. Neither changes the direction of the findings, but the figures describe published policies, not every hotel.

How we read them

Every policy was read in full and the same 72 questions were asked of each one, so that the answers could be compared. The questions are the ones a dog owner would ask, made systematic: what kind of document is this, and must it be signed; what does it charge, on what basis, and is there a deposit; which dogs does it admit, by number, weight, breed and vaccination; what does the hotel provide; where may the dog go, room by room; what are the rules on leaving the dog, housekeeping, leads, furniture and noise; what legal clauses does it carry; how does it open, what does it call the dog, how warm is its tone on a five point scale, and how many things does it forbid against how many it offers. Finally each policy was scored against the five requirements of the Roch Dog Friendly Standard that can be judged from the text.

The readers were instructed to record only what the document said, to mark anything the document did not address as unstated rather than guess, and to quote the hotel's own words. Policies in other languages were read in the original. The reading was structured and machine assisted, and every figure quoted in this paper was checked back against the source document; where a check found an error it was corrected before the analysis was run.

The figures

The whole study figures behind the paper, across all 236 policies, are as follows.

The document itself. Just over half of the policies (53 per cent) are a plain policy or set of house rules, 36 per cent are an agreement, waiver or registration form to be signed, and the remaining 11 per cent are guides, welcome letters, FAQs or a clause in the hotel's general terms. A signature is required by 53 per cent. Fifty six per cent open with a welcome, 31 per cent with a rule, 11 per cent with a legal statement and 2 per cent with the fee. A quarter are written mainly in legal language. On tone, 34 per cent were rated welcoming, 30 per cent neutral, 22 per cent legalistic and 13 per cent restrictive, for an average of 3.1 on a five point scale. The dog is called a pet in 52 per cent of policies, a companion in 12 per cent, an animal in 5 per cent, a dog in 5 per cent and a guest in 4 per cent, with the rest mixing terms. The average policy carries 6.0 prohibitions and 1.8 welcome features, and 89 per cent carry more of the former than the latter.

Money and admission. Eighty two per cent charge a fee, 18 per cent are silent, and one policy says dogs stay free. Where a fee is charged, 69 per cent state its basis: per dog per night in 62 policies, per stay in 43, per night in 33, per dog per stay in 16, and a mixture in 23. Eleven per cent mention a refundable deposit and 20 per cent a hold on the card. Ninety three per cent make the guest liable for damage and 6 per cent impose a flat fine or penalty. Fifty four per cent admit dogs only, 21 per cent dogs and cats, and 22 per cent "pets" without definition. Sixty three per cent state a maximum number of dogs, almost always one or two. Forty two per cent impose a weight limit, with a median of 40 pounds where stated; 17 per cent restrict named breeds; 38 per cent require proof of vaccination and 9 per cent a licence or tag.

Access, rules and provision. Restaurants are closed to dogs in 66 per cent of policies, open in 8 per cent and open on the terrace only in 4 per cent. Where the bar or lounge is mentioned it is closed in 57 per cent of cases; where the pool, spa or gym is mentioned it is closed in 96 per cent. Thirty six per cent confine dogs to designated rooms. Forty three per cent say the dog may never be left alone in the room, 21 per cent allow it in a crate, 20 per cent allow it with a contact number and 7 per cent allow it without condition. Sixteen per cent require the guest to be present for housekeeping, 19 per cent will not service a room with a dog in it, 20 per cent require the dog to be removed and 45 per cent say nothing. Ninety three per cent require a lead, 78 per cent a clean up rule, 78 per cent a noise clause; 67 per cent reserve the right to remove the dog, 43 per cent contain a release of liability, 32 per cent an indemnity and 46 per cent a service animal carve out. Bowls are mentioned in 21 per cent, a bed in 18 per

cent, treats in 8 per cent, a welcome kit in 10 per cent and a relief area in 22 per cent.

Against the standard, as documented	Pass	Fail	Not stated
Real food and water bowl provided	20%	17%	62%
Access to at least one shared indoor guest area	42%	42%	16%
Fee amount and structure stated, or explicitly none	73%	19%	8%
States whether a deposit applies, and if so the amount	10%	58%	32%
Maximum number of dogs stated	63%	16%	21%

Two policies document all five requirements. Sixteen document none. The median policy documents two.

The legal review

Section 3 rests on a review of the law in four countries: the United States, covering federal law and the main states; England and Wales, with the Scottish differences noted; Canada, covering Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec; and Australia, covering New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. We put the same ten questions to each, among them who is liable for a guest's dog, whether a waiver or an indemnity is enforceable, whether terms the guest never saw are binding, whether a fixed fine can be collected, and whether breed and weight rules are lawful or required.

The answers were taken from the law itself: the statutes as they stand today, the court decisions in full and the published guidance of regulators. Commentary and textbooks were used only to find those sources. Where we could not confirm a point from the law itself we have left it out of this paper, and the main authorities are listed in the sources. None of this is legal advice. It is a description of the published law, offered so that hotels can ask their own advisers better questions.

What the academic literature says

Academic hospitality research has taken an interest in dog owning travellers for about a decade, and it is worth setting out what it has found, because it supports this paper from the guest's side while leaving the document itself untouched.

The earliest substantial study is Kirillova, Lee and Lehto's 2015 survey of American consumers, published in the Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism, which examined willingness to travel with pets and the constraints that hold owners back. Its contribution was to establish that the decision to bring the dog is shaped as much by what

owners expect to encounter at the destination as by their attachment to the animal, which is precisely the expectation a pet policy sets.

Joo and colleagues at Kyung Hee University, in Current Issues in Tourism in 2023, ran a choice experiment with 491 pet owners to find out which hotel attributes they would actually pay for. The answer was services and shared spaces, specifically dedicated staff and pet lounges, while extra amenities in the room were not valued. The basic bowl came with every package in that experiment, so it was assumed rather than tested, and the Aegean authors note that their own data do not show owners preferring services to amenities. That is the study cited in sections 1.5 and 2.1, explained for hoteliers in What Dog Owners Will Pay For in a Hotel, and it matters because it shows that the things most policies restrict, access and service, are the things guests value.

Koufodontis and Melissourgou of the University of the Aegean, in the International Journal of Hospitality Management in 2024, came closest to the policy itself. They surveyed 343 pet owners and 144 people without pets, recruited through the authors' own contacts, and read the 419 pet related reviews among more than half a million at 115 top ranked hotels. They describe a three way balance between the hotel and guests with and without pets, and recommend clear charges, simple amenities, staff who welcome pets and enforce the rules, a place to dine with the dog, separate floors or lifts, and certification. Koufodontis returned to the subject alone in 2026 with a systematic review and a survey of 1,041 travellers in 66 countries, which found that no scholar had ever defined pet friendly from evidence and proposed one: the conditional inclusion of companion animals through clear rules, the right facilities and trained staff, made legitimate by welfare, hygiene, safety and fairness to guests without pets. It is the closest thing the literature has to a definition of the document this paper studies, and it was published after our fieldwork closed. Its scenario results bear directly on sections 2 and 6: of 1,041 travellers in 66 countries, nine in ten accepted a hotel that admits the dog with clear rules and basic provision, while only 12 per cent accepted a hotel that restricts which pets it takes and 11.7 per cent one that charges a high fee, and Europeans were the least tolerant of either. Lee, Fan, Park and Mattila, in the International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration this year, tested in two experiments how the detail of a hotel's pet policy changes booking intentions, and found that detail helps, most of all with guests who do not own pets.

Hoy, Stangl and Morgan, also in 2023 and in the same journal as Kirillova, surveyed 697 people who had travelled with their dogs and modelled why they use specialist dog friendly booking channels. Institutional trust and attitude to risk drove the decision. Dog owners, in other words, are risk managers who seek out sources they can trust, which is a reasonable description of someone reading a pet policy at midnight before pressing book. Tomassini's 2022 research note in Research in Hospitality Management surveyed the field and concluded that the sociological and physical space for companion animals in hospitality "seems overlooked and under researched", and called for more work.

Older marketing theory is relevant too. Oliver's expectation confirmation model, from 1980, holds that satisfaction is the gap between what a customer was led to expect and what they got; Bitner's servicescape work, from 1992, shows how the physical and symbolic environment of a service, including its signage and rules, shapes how welcome a customer feels. A pet policy is both: it sets the expectation and it is the first piece of the servicescape a dog owner encounters. When it promises "pet friendly" and delivers six prohibitions, the theory predicts exactly the trust collapse we documented in Nobody Trusts Pet Friendly.

What none of this literature has done is read the policies hotels actually publish. The studies mostly examine the guest, and the one study of policy wording used experiments rather than real documents. None has read the pages guests are really reacting to, and none has asked what the law lets those documents do. This paper is, to our knowledge, the first to do either.

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Published by Roch Dog

Roch Dog is the dog friendly standards and certification body. We define what dog friendly means, then assess, certify and rank hotels, workplaces, and residences against the Roch Dog Friendly Standard.

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