

A dog's life

Dog-friendly hotels are all the rage, but what's it like to take a break with man's best friend?

Eleanor Kirk investigates

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we are a nation of dog lovers. From pugs to poodles, dachshunds to dalmatians, we just can't do without our four-legged friends. But what happens when it's time to take a well-earned holiday?

Kennels can be expensive, and it's not always possible to leave pets with friends or family. So why not take your beloved dog on holiday with you?

A growing number of UK hotels are tapping into this trend, offering bespoke doggy packages for pooches that want to be pampered just as much as their owners. With no need to worry about quarantines, pet passports or dragging your pup around the airport, it's no wonder pet-friendly staycations are on the up, so we headed to Cotswolds country house Tewkesbury Park to test out its new Canine Retreat.

GETTING THERE

As my mum and I tried to herd springer spaniel Bertie into the back seat of her convertible, I started to

wonder whether this was a good idea, as the three-hour journey to Gloucestershire would be the longest our over-excitable dog had ever spent in a car.

Luckily (read: with thanks to a rather large bone) Bertie was well behaved, and we were soon trundling up the driveway of the hotel, past the grounds of an exquisitely manicured, 18-hole golf course.

As we got out of the car, the view was breathtaking. The golf course gives way to rolling farmers' fields and wild meadows dotted with pretty Cotswold villages, all visible from the hotel's hilltop vantage point.

OUT AND ABOUT

Most of the hotel's 67 hectares of grounds are taken up by the golf course, which means that dogs have to be kept on their leads at all times. This isn't ideal for more energetic breeds, such as Bertie, which need to run around off-lead to burn off their abundant energy.

However, there are plenty of nearby options for dogs that need a bit more exercise. The closest ➤

DESTINATIONS

HOTELS, RESORTS & SPAS | DOG-FRIENDLY BREAKS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Tewkesbury Park; exploring the hotel's grounds; the Lord Hastings Suite; Bertie in the Piano Lounge

PICTURES: Mark Bolton Photography

is Bloody Meadow, a beautiful stretch of wild grass at the bottom of the hotel's driveway. With Bertie leading the way, distracted only slightly by the odd wild rabbit, it took no time at all to walk the length of the grounds and reach the rolling meadow.

We found out the hard way that there is an expanse of water in the meadow, when Bertie came galloping through the grass toward us, dripping wet, tail wagging and with a tennis ball firmly clamped between his teeth, looking very pleased with himself.

After a quick bath back in our room, he was raring to go again, pawing at the patio doors and watching with interest as a group of golfers teed off on the course below.

For those wanting to go farther afield, there are plenty of dog-friendly places in Tewkesbury town. Cafe au Chocolat provides doggy treats free of charge for four-legged friends to savour while their owners enjoy indulgent hot chocolates or gooey slabs of chocolate cake.

THE HOTEL

The facilities at Tewkesbury Park include a swimming pool, sauna, steam room, gym, squash courts and

tennis courts. The hotel completed an extensive refurbishment in 2018, adding an orangery and outdoor events area with wood-fired pizza oven, perfectly positioned for guests to enjoy the scenery on a summer's evening, sundowner in hand.

Dog-friendly rooms feature patio doors leading directly to the grounds, which gave Bertie much-needed 24/7 access to the outdoors. Aside from being perfect for late-night toilet trips, Bertie loved being able to sit and watch what was going on outside, allowing him to adjust to his new surroundings.

Bertie was also treated to a dog bed in our room and luxury food and drink bowls, with dry food provided daily. Despite these luxuries, he still preferred to jump into bed with me during the night, stretching out to take up more room than I thought possible – it's a good job he's so cute.

Elsewhere in the hotel, dogs are welcome throughout the day in the Piano Lounge. The staff are bona fide dog-lovers, so clients need not worry if their canine companion can be a bit naughty from time to time. When Bertie was a little restless on our first night, a waitress came over with a jar of doggy treats and

a generous helping of tummy rubs to put him back in a good mood – crisis averted!

DINING OUT

Dogs needn't miss out on the exceptional food at Tewkesbury Park. While we enjoyed a hearty breakfast buffet, Bertie was served his very own bowl of scrambled eggs and sausages.

At least, that's what I've been told. By the time I returned from getting my own breakfast, Bertie was sitting next to an empty bowl looking very content indeed – he'd gobbled down the lot and was on his best behaviour, all puppy-dog eyes, hoping to be slipped an extra sausage or a sliver of bacon.

In the evenings, we dined with Bertie in the Piano Lounge, which serves the same menu as main

restaurant Mint, so you won't be missing out. Food is seasonal and fresh, with delights such as macadamia-crusted cod, lamb shoulder confit and our favourite, crispy pork-cheek balls with a pineapple glaze. Desserts are as beautiful as they are indulgent; a buttermilk and mint panna cotta scored especially highly, along with a decadently rich chocolate mousse.

Bertie couldn't believe his luck when he was presented with his very own chicken dinner to enjoy alongside us, complete with mashed potatoes, gravy and broccoli. Despite his usual penchant for jumping up at the kitchen table to steal morsels from our plates, he looked at us with his head cocked, as if to check this feast really was for him, then devoured it in a flash. Another satisfied customer. **TW**

BOOK IT

The **Canine Retreat** starts at £230 per room per night, and pays 10% commission to agents. This includes a welcome pack, breakfast for humans and dogs, afternoon tea, three-course dinner (plus a hot doggy meal) and a £25 spa voucher. Tewkesbury Park is hosting a fam trip in September to experience the dog-friendly package. Contact sales manager Amanda Baker on sales@tewkesburypark.co.uk for details. tewkesburypark.co.uk