More second-home communities welcome pets

Posted 16h 50m ago

By Larry Olmsted, Special for USA TODAY



The Cliffs Communities

A treat for pet owners: In addition to dog parks, trails and other amenities, many pet-friendly communities and private clubs allow man's best friend to join in on all sorts of activities, such as water sports.

Pets, especially dogs, have never been as big a part of the family as they are today.

From sitters to spas, massages and antidepressants, people spare no expense when it comes to their pets — even during tough economic times. Americans will spend $47.7 billion on their pets this year, up from $45.5 billion last year, the American Pet Product Association estimates. Almost two-thirds of U.S. households, 62%, have a pet, according to the most recent National Pet Owners Survey. That's some 71.4 million homes — and about 45% of the pets are dogs, the survey finds.

Any wonder that the search for second homes includes pet accommodations? Developers of second homes and real estate agents are taking that into consideration. Realty firms that specialize in pet-friendly sales can now be found in most major cities.

ARCHIVE: Find more second-home destinations

"Many of our clients refuse to even travel to look at potential properties without bringing their four-legged friends," says Marian Schaffer, owner of Southeast Discovery, a realty and consultancy firm that specializes in retirement and second homes — and spots pet-friendly ones.

"Developers are starting to recognize dog parks as an important amenity," Schaffer says. "We visit over 100 communities annually, and we're seeing more and more parks. At Rarity Bay in (Vonore) Tennessee, the dog park has its own website. I've never seen a community with a dog park website before, and that shows the current level of interest."

People take their pets, especially dogs, with them when they travel. Hotels have become more pet friendly. Cars, like the Honda Element SUV, are advertised as dog-friendly. Second-home communities are embracing pet owners, too, and making pet amenities selling points.

Schaffer describes two main types of second-home amenities: "natural" ones and "purposeful" ones.

The "natural" amenities include lakes and trail networks, which are exploding in popularity. "While golf is still the premier amenity, the No. 1 facility being requested now is hiking and walking trails," she says. "Walking is the most popular form of exercise, and a dog goes hand-in-hand with that."

The Club at Spanish Peaks, a luxury community in Big Sky, Mont., offer six miles of trails, encourages pet use, and in winter grooms a 2.6-mile "canine



Print Powered By Dynamics

cross country" ski trail.

The most common of the "purposeful" dog-friendly amenities is a dog park, a fenced area where dogs can run, play and sometimes swim. But some communities offer more. Palmetto Bluff, a community near Hilton Head, S.C., has a dog weekend with games and "American Fido," its version of Fox's *American Idol*. The Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Fla., has a veterinary center. Dogs aren't the only animals catered to. Hidden Meadow Ranch in Greer, Ariz., has a BYOH — Bring Your Own Horse — program that includes stalls, feed and pasture time for $30 a night.

A look at three pet-friendly second-home options

• The Southeast. Facilities especially designed for pets in planned communities are most common in the Southeast. Rarity Bay in Vonore, Tenn., has a l arge dog park, a 960-acre pet-friendly lake, and planned events and activities for pets and owners. South Carolina's Reserve at Lake Keowee has a large dog park, plus 5 miles of pet-friendly trails, 1,400 acres of open space and an extensive shoreline. Hampton Lake in Bluffton, S.C., has a waterfront "Dogpaddle Park" with picnic tables. It recently hosted a pet-party fundraiser to buy a new patrol dog for the local police K-9 team. There are eight Cliffs Communities developments in the Carolinas, and all have extensive trails open to pets. The Cliffs and many other private communities also allow dogs to partake in club activities such as boating.

• The West. Many ranch and ski-resort communities are dog-friendly. Although dedicated facilities haven't caught on as quickly as in the Southeast, the West offers plenty of natural amenities for pets, especially trails like the extensive ones at The Club at Spanish Peaks in Montana. Calistoga Ranch in California's Napa Valley is one of the most friendly second-home communities that offers fractional ownership. It won the 2008 Top Dog award from PAW (Pet-friendly Accommodations Worldwide, a hotel booking site). It stocks units with pet beds and accessories, offers a chef-cooked canine menu and provides owners with a list of dog-friendly wineries they can visit with their best friends. When Men's Health magazine recently rated the top 10 best cities for dogs, it found nine in the West.

• Cities. Public dog parks are increasingly common in cities, and new condos are often built with pet patios. The Plaza Lofts at Kierland Commons in Phoenix has a private pet park and access to a community trail system. Some cities consistently receive high marks for dog friendliness, including Provincetown, Mass., Carmel, Calif., and Colorado Springs. San Diego was the top-ranked large city by both Forbes.com and DogFriendly.com, largely for its beautiful, dog-friendly beaches. Dogs can even take surfing lessons there. Other cities known for being pet-friendly: Portland, Ore., has more than 30 public dog parks. Austin has an abundance of large dog parks that often include lakes — 122 acres per 1,000 dogs, according to Forbes.com. Austin's new Austonian, the tallest residential building in Texas, has a private dog park on a 10th-floor terrace. The residences at the Four Seasons Seattle, in another highly rated dog-friendly city, are another high-rise with a private pet terrace.



Print Powered By FormatDynamics™