

## ARK & TENT

Uniting people & animals...through travel

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### PET TRAVELS

*Hound Dog Hotels Take the "Guilt" out of Your "Trip"*

By Katey Pfeil

When you and the family go out of town for the weekend, you don't have to feel too guilty about leaving Rex and Fluffy behind because run-of-the-mill pet boarding as we once knew it is no more. Of course, cramped crates and the aesthetically sobering décor of traditional boarding centers are still an option; but with more and more pet boarding facilities marketing themselves as "pet hotels" (at surprisingly affordable prices) why not treat your pooch to a little pampering while you're on vacation?



The Wag Hotel is one such boarding center. Offering locations on the west coast in San Francisco and Sacramento (with plans to expand in the future), Wag caters specifically to dogs and cats, and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Wag first opened its doors in 2005 at their 34,000 sq. ft. Sacramento location, and has been pushing the boundaries in pet boarding ever since. The hotels are mainly built from the ground up (as opposed to renovating existing buildings), which allows builders to create a truly unique structure. Both hotels are modern and colorful, full of art and extra features. The lobby boasts an espresso machine as well as wi-fi while the whole space has a clean and relaxed vibe, which human customers appreciate.

"A lot of people look at what we're doing and say, 'Gosh, I really don't think you had to spend that extra money. I don't think you have to offer that,'" relates co-owner/business entrepreneur Joel Leineke in *Pet Services Journal*. "Our answer to those people is, 'You know what? Five years from now we would have to, because more and more people are going to be getting into this business.'"

Leineke's predictions are already coming true. Although at one time it may have seemed silly to offer posh amenities for pets such as massages and "paw-dicures," a growing number of people regularly purchase such services for their pets. Even in today's uncertain market, the pet industry is one market that hasn't suffered too badly, which may have to do with our "pets-as-children" outlook. (Americans spend approximately \$40 billion on their pets every year.)

So just how “posh” are these Wag Hotels?

“We’re not the Ritz-Carlton, but more of a Hilton or Marriott. We’re nice but affordable,” states Leineke.

Wag Hotels offer plenty of activities for your pet to participate in, including Swim Time in the doggie pool (15 mins. for \$15), Buddy Time (where pups get to socialize for 15-20mins. for \$15) and even “Paw-dicures” which include nail trim, polish and paint for a reasonable \$15. (Note: rates may vary by location.)

Several deluxe rooms feature flat panel televisions (with appropriate shows) as well as a “wag-cam” which allows owners to see their furry friend while they’re away. The hotel is staffed 24/7, 365 days a year, which makes delivery and pick-up very convenient, especially for business people who travel frequently and don’t want to wait until the next day to pick up their pets.

Another option on the market is The Barkley Hotel, with locations in Cleveland, Ohio and Westlake Village, California. They welcome dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, snakes and other exotic animals to their state-of-the-art facilities.

The 15,000 sq. ft. Cleveland location opened in 2007 and has basically been “recession proof” according to owner Howard Perlmutter. In a 2009 interview with *About* magazine, Perlmutter discusses the amenities offered at his hotels, including



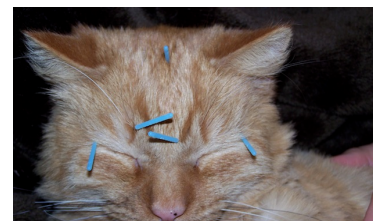
Day Group Play, Personal Play/Cuddle Time and Bedtime Story/Tuck-in Tummy Rub. The Barkley even features a pretty unique “trans-paw-tation” option. Pets may be picked up, taken home, or driven around town in a flashy limousine for a price determined by distance. The limo will even do drive-through outings for pets whose owners treat them to McDonald’s.

The Barkley is equipped with some serious features owners will appreciate, such as climate controlled air systems, 8 ft. buried fencing, and video surveillance cameras. The Westlake Village location has an on-site veterinary hospital while the Cleveland location is located just across the street from a 24-hr. veterinary clinic.

According to the company website, the main goal of The Barkley is to “maximize the comfort and safety of guest pets” and smart features such as skylights and noise reducing material lessen stress, helping to create a healthy environment for pets. “The Barkley is a lifestyle, not just a facility. We have flea funerals daily in our grooming department, “muttrimonies” for dogs looking to get married, bar(k) mitzvahs for kosher dogs, and we even cater to metrosexual dogs in our salon,” says Perlmutter in an *Animal Faire* interview.

Spa services range from “paw-dicures” to de-skunking and are quite affordable (\$10 for teeth brushing; 30-minute massages for \$40.) Acupuncture is even available for pets who experience occasional pain, stiffness or stress.

With stay-over options like these, who says ‘It’s a dog’s life’ is such a bad thing?



**FAST FACTS**

***THE BARKLEY HOTELS***

*27349 Miles Road*

*Orange Village, Ohio 44022*

*(440) 248-BARK (2275)*

*31166 Via Colinas*

*Westlake Village, CA 91362*

*(818) 889-2275 (BARK)*

*www.thebarkleypethotel.com*

***WAG HOTELS***

*25 14th Street*

*San Francisco, CA 94103*

*(415) 876-0700*

*1759 Enterprise Blvd.*

*West Sacramento, CA 95691*

*(916) 373-0300*

*www.waghotels.com*

Photos courtesy of The Barkley Hotels and Wag Hotels

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