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K9s & COCKTAILS***Hotel Indigo's Canine Cocktails Have Guests Celebrating "Yappy Hour" with Man's Best Friend*****By Erin Caslavka**

Against a backdrop of bowser-related tunes like "Who Let the Dogs Out?," guests at Atlanta's Hotel Indigo chat, mix and mingle. But it isn't just Elvis who's crooning, "You ain't nothin' but a hound dog..." As a dozen or so four-legged buddies lap up water from doggie bowls scattered around the patio, their two-legged owners are sipping cocktails and comparing stats:

"Is yours a pound puppy, too?"

"She's beautiful! What breed is she?"

"We got him from a rescue group just last week, and he's already putting on weight!"

"We're very dog-friendly," says Gabriele Webster, General Manager of the Hotel Indigo Atlanta

Midtown. "And we overlook Peachtree Street - a busy avenue here in Atlanta. We had lots of people from the neighborhood walking by with their dogs who wanted to come in and check out the hotel, but they weren't sure they could. So we decided to host our first 'Canine Cocktails' Happy Hour to invite the local community into the hotel for a social function - along with their dogs."

That was back in 2004, and the concept that Webster created has been going strong ever since. "Our guests really liked the idea from the beginning," she continues. "So we bought colorful dog bowls for water, and hot dog carts to serve treats to the dogs. It created a lot of energy at the hotel. Some of our guests now actually plan to be here during the time of year (Memorial Day through Labor Day) when we'll be hosting our Canine Cocktails functions; whether they have a dog or not!"

The Piedmont Dog Park, also located in Atlanta, is the lucky recipient of part of the profits from these events. They also bring adoptable dogs to the hotel during Canine Cocktails, so if anyone is looking to adopt, they've got the chance to interact with



some local pooches in need of a good home.

Still, it wasn't until one particular guest of the hotel showed up with his dog that things really began to change at the midtown hotel. As Webster explains, "We had a guest who brought his dog with him. He was here from New York on business, and needed someone to watch his dog while he was working, so we volunteered. The other guests staying at the hotel thought it was our dog. We were heartbroken when he left; as were the guests. So we thought it would be a great idea to adopt a dog. That's how we ended up with Indie' which is, of course, short for 'Indigo'."



Indie, a Jack Russell terrier adopted from the Atlanta Humane Society, is now the official mascot of the Hotel Indigo Atlanta Midtown property. He lives at the hotel fulltime, goes to staff meetings, and at Christmas receives cards mailed to him from previous hotel guests.

But as Webster points out, dogs aren't just welcome during their special Happy Hours. "A lot of our clients bring their dogs with them when they stay here," says Webster. "So we've got special packages that are specifically geared towards dogs and their owners. You get a doggie bag at check in; you get the use one of our dog beds; we have treats and lint brushes in the room; and, we keep them all on one floor so they can interact with other dogs." (And, no doubt, to spare the non-dog totting travelers from some possible midnight howling...)

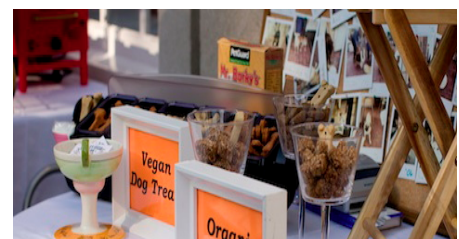
And even though some hotel guests might not have a four-footed companion of their own, that doesn't necessarily mean they show up without one. "Our Halloween costume contest is very popular," Webster says. "And the cash prizes we award are actually handed over to the charity of the winner's choice. So as you might imagine," she adds with a soft chuckle, "some of our attendees have been known to borrow a dog to attend."

Lest you think otherwise, Atlanta isn't the only Hotel Indigo property where you and your dog can enjoy a social hour that involves both of you. At the company's Jacksonville location, they too host a Canine Cocktails event.

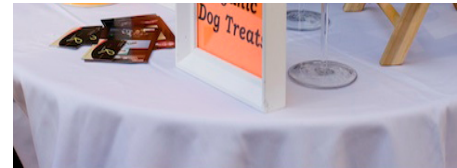
"We opened in January 2009," General Manager Beth Long tells me, "and we hosted our first Canine Cocktails in April. Basically, we copycatted the Atlanta property on this because Jacksonville is a very dog-friendly city and we knew it would fit in perfectly. We're located inside of Tapestry Park, a planned community with brick-lined streets. We are unique in that we're tucked away, and we're on a lake. We also have a patio that lends itself beautifully to this kind of an event."

"So, we always have a fantastic turnout," she continues, "and we'll get about 50 people and their dogs in attendance. It's pretty funny because we usually know the dogs' names before we know the owners'!"

Like the Atlanta Midtown, the Hotel Indigo Jacksonville also donates a portion of their revenue to a local charitable organization: First Coast No More Homeless Pets. The hotel provides a table at their Canine



Cocktails event that's manned by volunteers from the organization so guests can learn more about the group and its mission.



Because Jacksonville enjoys such mild weather, the property lends itself to hosting these kinds of events year-round. "As of now, we're tying it to the weather," explains Long. "But if it gets too chilly or if it's raining, we'll reschedule."

Making everyone feel welcome is a goal of these events - regardless of whether they're a hotel guest or someone from the local neighborhood who's just stopped by for a drink. And that's certainly the goal of the Hotel Indigo San Diego, a property that just initiated its Canine Cocktails in September 2009. The night I attended with my dog Etta, I counted no less than 45 dogs and about twice as many people. But like me, not everyone was actually staying at the hotel - and that's what's so nice about it.

"Most of us don't have kids," explains hotel General Manager Chris Jones. "But we live downtown. So this is a great way for us here at the hotel to get to know the locals who also live and work downtown and have dogs, instead of kids."

Appropriately enough, the outdoor space at the Hotel Indigo San Diego overlooks Petco Park. The 1,500 square-foot space of the outdoor patio is more than big enough to accommodate both pets and their owners during the Tuesday night Canine Cocktails held there. The schedule for this property is dependent on the Padres' - when baseball season isn't on, the events are held.

"The Hotel Indigo is about community," Jones tells me, "and they reflect the neighborhood in which they're built. So for us, hosting a Canine Cocktails makes absolute sense."

The San Diego hotel is another property that's adopted a resident dog - in this case, an adorable Lab-mix named Sandie. (Her name is a derivative of San Diego; without the "go" at the end.) They also have hotel rooms geared for dogs, especially as many of their clientele arrive via car and have brought their pets with them.



"The dogs are all well-mannered," says Jones. "Plus, it's nice for our out-of-town guests to meet some local residents in a relaxed, friendly environment."

So the next time you find yourself in Atlanta, Jacksonville or San Diego, you might consider dropping by a Hotel Indigo for a Canine Cocktails Happy Hour. And if you do, don't forget to try the signature Indigo Blue Martini (made with acai/blueberry vodka) - trust me, you'll be "yappy" you did.