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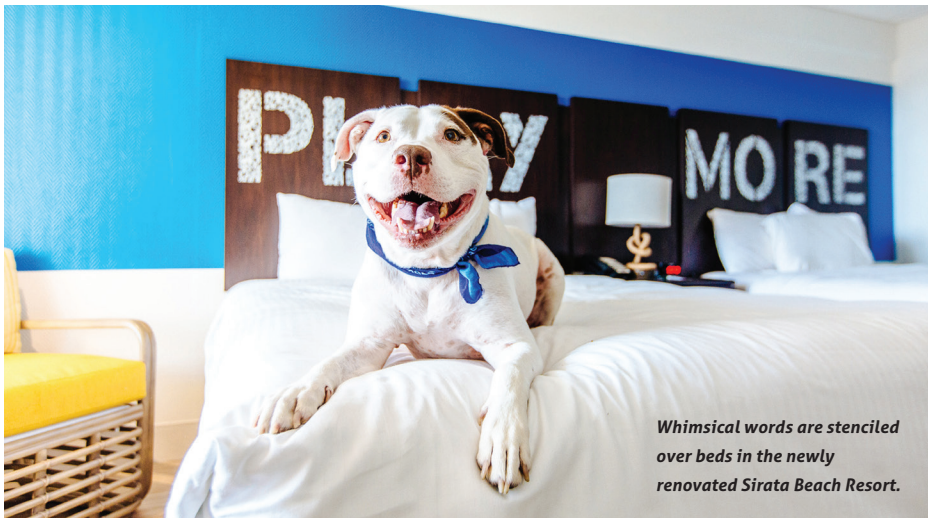
Beaches, Boats & Lake K9 Safety



St. Pete Beach Rolls out the Red Carpet for Fido

Furry Friends Find Warm Welcome on Florida's Gulf Coast.

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER



Whimsical words are stenciled over beds in the newly renovated Sirata Beach Resort.

TOOTSIE DIDN'T LOOK IMPRESSED, BUT HER OWNERS WERE DELIGHTED. At the resort's check-in desk her name appeared in big letters on a chalkboard under the greeting "Welcome Furry Friends."

Every dog gets this star treatment at Sirata Beach Resort, a Fido-friendly property in St. Pete Beach, Florida, one in a string of beach communities strung along the Pinellas Peninsula on Florida's west coast. St. Pete Beach remains comfortably old school with lodgings lining Gulf Boulevard that remind visitors of days past but offering up-to-date features today's vacationers demand, including amenities for pets.

"Dogs are part of the family and travelers choose their destination based on their pets' needs as much as their own," said Cricket Wagner, director of sales and marketing at Sirata Beach Resort. "We love being able to create the perfect beachside getaway where both guests and their pets can feel welcomed."

Sirata Beach Resort introduced a new set of pet amenities as part of its \$15 million transformation completed last fall. That goodie bag presented at check-in contains a dog mat, food

and water bowl, pet waste bag holder with a flashlight and a guide to nearby Fido-friendly restaurants and beaches. While dogs are not allowed on any beaches in St. Pete Beach, Sirata guests can stroll with Fido on the resort's dedicated outdoor walking areas and have a seat in designated dining areas of two outdoor beachfront restaurants and bars. An occasional Yappy Hour brings Fido-loving guests together.

Just down the beach, TradeWinds Island Resorts has two properties welcoming Fido. TradeWinds Island Grand has a leash-free Pet Play Zone with doggy drinking fountain, fire hydrants, photo-op display, grass and shade. A rinse and drying station is good for quick washes and an accessory center has bowls, leashes, toys and towels. Both TradeWinds Island Grand and sister property RumFish Beach Resort have designated dog-walking zones and offer Paw Court Bistro room service. Would Fido like some Mutt Meat Loaf or a Doggie Pu Pu Pork Platter?

Visitors to St. Pete Beach cannot miss the massive Moorish-style "pink palace" that rests regally on the south end of the beach. Dating from 1928, The Don CeSar has functioned as



A chalkboard welcomes Fido by name at Sirata Beach Resort.

a high-society playground for guests both famous and infamous including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Clarence Darrow and Al Capone. Today it welcomes furry guests with custom water bowls, treats and pet placemats and offers accessories such as bedding, waste bags, leashes and collars. A room service menu has delicacies for Fido. Canine massages, dog-sitting and dog-walking services can be arranged.

Vacationers who wish to take Fido off properly to a beach where pets are permitted will find a stretch of sand at Fort De Soto County Park that has received high marks from Trip Advisor and Dr. Beach, a professor of coastal science who annually ranks America's best beaches. The park sprawls across 1,136 acres on a chain of five keys on the south end of the Pinellas Peninsula. Its 1898 fort built for the Spanish-American War never saw action and can be seen on a self-guided walking tour. Fido can run and swim off leash on a dog beach and playground. Dog showers and water fountains are available.

Honeymoon Island, on the north end of the peninsula, takes its name from a *Life* magazine contest in the 1940s that awarded newlyweds with a two-week stay in the island's thatched bungalows. Now a state park, overnight lodging has been replaced by modern pavilions with concession stands and bathhouses. Four miles of beach include a dog beach where Fido and family can walk, swim and chase the surf. 🐾

KATHERINE RODEGHIER, a travel journalist, photographer and editor from suburban Chicago, has covered nearly every U.S. state and about 100 countries and has cruised across the globe. An animal lover, she has experienced close encounters with penguins and leopard seals in Antarctica, lions in Tanzania and tortoises in the Galapagos Islands.



Fido can relax with guests on hammocks at the TradeWinds Island Grand.

COURTESY OF TRADEWINDS RESORTS



VISITOR INFORMATION

Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater, (877) 352-3224, visitstpeteclearwater.com; Fido-friendly information at visitstpeteclearwater.com/things-to-do/pet-friendly

SIRATA BEACH RESORT

Recently renovated 382-room resort; from \$136 in June, \$40 resort fee, \$50 pet fee plus \$100 deposit with a percentage donated to an animal shelter; 5300 Gulf Boulevard, St. Pete Beach, FL 33706; (855) 344-5999; sirata.com

TRADEWINDS ISLAND RESORTS

A pair of beachfront resorts; (800) 360-4016; tradewindsresort.com. TradeWinds Island Grand, 48 Fido-friendly rooms of 585 rooms, from \$239 in June; 5500 Gulf Boulevard, St. Pete Beach, FL 33706; (727) 367-6461. RumFish Beach Resort 10 Fido-friendly rooms of 211 rooms, from \$188



The Don Cesar is a St. Pete Beach landmark nicknamed "The Pink Palace."

PHOTO CREDIT: KATHERINE RODEGHIER

in June; 6000 Gulf Boulevard, St. Pete Beach, FL 33706; (727) 360-5551. Each charges a \$45 resort fee, \$30 pet fee plus \$100 deposit. tradewindsresort.com/our-resorts/tradewinds-island-grand

THE DON CESAR

Landmark 227-room resort on National Register of Historic Places; from \$299 in June, \$36 resort fee, \$75 pet fee; 3400 Gulf Boulevard, St. Pete Beach, FL 33706; (727) 360-1881; doncesar.com

FORT DE SOTO COUNTY PARK

\$5 per vehicle; 3500 Pinellas Bayway South, Tierra Verde, FL 33715; (727) 582-2100; pinellascounty.org/park/05_ft_desoto.htm.

HONEYMOON ISLAND STATE PARK

\$8 per vehicle; 1 Causeway Boulevard, Dunedin FL 34698; (727) 241-6106; floridastateparks.org/honeymoonisland