

Luxury Tourism: Perception of Pet-Friendliness in European Hospitality

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Abstract: Pet ownership is expanding across Europe, yet destination-level conditions that enable dog-inclusive luxury tourism remain uneven and weakly coordinated across mobility, public-space access, and hospitality services. This study examines how European dog travellers evaluate destination infrastructures and regulatory conditions alongside five-star hotel practices, and identifies factors associated with satisfaction and loyalty intentions. An online questionnaire (seven-point Likert-type measures) was administered to European dog travellers via Google Forms and 457 valid responses (from 841 initial) met eligibility criteria, including recent overnight travel with a dog and a five-star hotel stay in Europe within the last five years. Analyses were descriptive and exploratory, using descriptive statistics and Spearman correlations. Results indicate strong perceived availability of dog-accepting accommodation (M = 5.32) and emergency veterinary services (M = 5.22), but greater heterogeneity where access rules are contested, such as attraction entry restrictions (e.g., monuments; M = 4.10) and everyday commercial settings (e.g., supermarket waiting areas; M = 4.11). Mobility remains only partially enabling: public transport for dogs is rated slightly above the midpoint (M = 4.63) and is positively associated with perceived accommodation acceptance ($p = 0.107$, $p = 0.023$); beach access is frequently reported as limited and locally variable. Within luxury hotels, general professionalism is rated highly, yet pet-specific service depth is weaker, particularly regarding clarity of circulation policies in common areas (M = 4.75). A substantial share of respondents report foregoing activities due to dog-care constraints (M = 4.12; 43.33% agreement). The study proposes a destination framework with four interdependent pillars, health and well-being, economy and tourism, environment and education, implemented through strategic coordinated regulation, clear mobility information, designated spaces, partnerships, signage and public-space planning to strengthen satisfaction, loyalty and competitive differentiation.

Keywords: Luxury Tourism; Pet-friendly Hospitality; Dog-travellers; European Destinations; Service Quality and Loyalty.

1. Introduction and Conceptual Background

The presence of companion animals in urban environments has been steadily increasing, yet scholarly and societal responses remain episodic and fragmented, often producing sector-specific and short-term interventions rather than integrated approaches across policy domains and service systems (Buhalis and Chan, 2023; Granai et al., 2024; Mars PetCare, 2019). While early work identified travel with dogs as an emerging tourism segment and linked pet attachment to leisure-related behaviour (Dotson et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2011), more recent research indicates that pet-inclusive travel remains unevenly supported across destination systems and service contexts, with satisfaction and revisit intentions shaped by the consistency of enabling conditions beyond accommodation alone (Ying et al., 2021; Buhalis and Chan, 2023). In European contexts, the operational depth of pet-friendly provision, particularly in luxury hospitality, continues to vary across properties and destinations, reinforcing the need to move from isolated acceptance policies to coherent, destination-level coordination across mobility, access rules, and public-space use (Buhalis and Chan, 2023; Ramos Ruiz et al., 2024; Granai et al., 2024).

Accommodation is frequently positioned as a pivotal component of destination competitiveness in attracting pet travellers, as travellers who journey with their dogs seek emotionally meaningful experiences that are genuinely inclusive rather than merely permissive (Huang et al., 2021). This logic aligns closely with luxury hospitality, a segment characterised by high expectations of personalisation and consistently high service quality and one that has expanded markedly in recent decades, particularly in major European destinations (Kotur and Dixit, 2022; Yang and Mattila, 2016). Although pet-friendly accommodation is increasingly discussed as an emerging hospitality trend, including within luxury contexts, practices and service depth remain inconsistent across properties and destinations (Buhalis and Chan, 2023; Ramos Ruiz et al., 2024). Given the established relationship between perceived service quality and loyalty intentions, pet inclusivity in luxury hospitality should therefore be understood as a coherent service proposition rather than a simple acceptance policy (Alves et al., 2022).

Accordingly, this study investigates how European dog travellers perceive destination infrastructures, public policies and luxury hotel practices, and which factors are most influential for satisfaction and loyalty. It further advances an integrative destination development framework organised around four interrelated pillars (health and well-being, economy and tourism, environment, and education), emphasising coordinated action among public and private stakeholders to support consistent policies, accessible infrastructure and high-quality service provision for dog travellers (Granai et al., 2024; Mars PetCare, 2019).

2. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative design based on an online questionnaire administered to European dog travellers, through the non-probabilistic convenience sampling method. Data collection was outsourced to a market research firm during April and May 2024 via Google Forms and disseminated through social media, tourism agencies, tour operators, and related businesses. A pre-test in early April 2024 informed minor refinements prior to full deployment. Of 841 initial responses, 384 were excluded due to eligibility criteria, yielding a final analytical sample of 457 valid questionnaires. Eligibility required respondents to be at least 18 years old, to have lived with a dog for a minimum period, to have completed at least one overnight trip with their dog, and to have stayed in a five-star hotel in Europe within the previous five years, ensuring informed assessment of both destination-level pet-friendliness and luxury hospitality contexts.

The questionnaire captured perceptions of pet-friendliness at destination and hotel levels, focusing on infrastructures and regulatory conditions shaping travel feasibility (e.g., accommodation acceptance, emergency veterinary services, access rules for public spaces and attractions, beach policies, and transport-related constraints). It also assessed luxury hospitality practices and experience evaluations aligned with the service quality–satisfaction–loyalty nexus, alongside information-search behaviours using digital platforms and specialised planning tools for dog-inclusive travel. Analyses were descriptive and exploratory, using descriptive statistics and Spearman correlations, appropriate for ordinal, seven-point Likert-type measures, to examine associations between perceived destination conditions and enabling factors for dog travel in Europe.

3. Findings and Data Analysis

Pet-friendliness emerges as a sequence of enabling and constraining conditions that jointly shape travel feasibility, satisfaction and the likelihood of repeat choice. Across the survey, respondents distinguish between what is available and visible at destination level, what becomes restrictive through mobility and access rules, and what luxury hotels deliver in practice once the stay begins. Respondents revealed that the last European destination visited with their pet was predominantly France, United Kingdom and Italy. Hence, these countries represented the realities studied.

3.1 Perceptions of Destination Infrastructure and Services

At destination level, enabling conditions are generally evaluated positively, particularly regarding core support services. Respondents reported high agreement that dog-accepting accommodation is available across European destinations ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.535$) and that emergency veterinary services exist ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.570$), indicating that accommodation acceptance and critical animal health coverage are perceived as comparatively well established. Supporting infrastructures are also rated above the midpoint of the scale, including pet grooming services ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.512$) and parks or public spaces that accept dogs across the city ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.666$), suggesting that everyday destination usability is present, albeit not uniformly strong.

By contrast, perceptions become markedly more heterogeneous where access rules are socially and institutionally contested. Agreement that monuments are normally restricted to dogs is moderate ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.857$), but dispersion is the highest among destination items ($Var = 3.448$), signalling substantial variation in lived experience across places. A similar pattern is observed for supermarkets offering designated waiting areas for dogs ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.803$, $Var = 3.251$), reinforcing that pet-friendliness is not perceived as a single destination attribute but as a configuration of rules that varies across jurisdictions and commercial contexts.

3.2 Mobility and Access Restrictions, Including Transport and Beaches

Mobility is perceived as feasible yet only partially enabling. On average, respondents rated the statement that public transport systems allow dogs slightly above the midpoint ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.592$), corresponding to a neutral to mildly positive overall assessment. Importantly, this perception is statistically associated with the

perceived availability of dog-accepting accommodation. A positive Spearman correlation was found between accommodation acceptance and public transport allowing dogs ($\rho = 0.107$, $p = 0.023$), indicating that destinations perceived as more accommodating in lodging also tend to be seen as more accessible in terms of mobility. This linkage matters because pet-friendliness gains coherence when accommodation and transport conditions improve simultaneously.

Airport-related support follows a similar pattern. The perceived availability of designated airport areas or dedicated amenities for dogs is slightly above the midpoint ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.658$), suggesting that mobility-enabling features exist but remain uneven. Alongside these quantitative patterns, respondents also report that beach access is often limited and locally heterogeneous, particularly during peak periods, creating an external constraint for coastal luxury hotels whose ability to influence shoreline rules is structurally restricted.

3.3 Luxury Hospitality Practices and Service Gaps

Within luxury hospitality, perceptions of service quality are generally positive in interpersonal and managerial domains, but weaker where pet-specific tangibility and circulation clarity become operationally decisive. The highest-rated items include professional management ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.475$) and courteous and equal treatment of guests with and without dogs ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.484$). These items also show strong concentration of agreement, with 75.27% of respondents endorsing professional management and 72.21% agreeing that service is courteous and equal, while neutrality remains non-negligible (12.69% and 16.19%, respectively).

At the same time, several indicators point to limitations in service depth that are critical for pet-inclusive luxury. The lowest mean among the twenty service items concerns the clarity of circulation policies for animals in common areas ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.774$, $Var = 3.147$), indicating that the rules governing everyday movement within hotels remain ambiguous. Similarly, the perceived existence of innovative infrastructures for companion animals ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.582$) and of a specific marketing plan targeting dog travellers ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.672$) remains below the highest-rated service domains. Together, these results suggest that luxury hotels may perform well in general service professionalism while still exhibiting gaps in the specific systems, infrastructures and operational clarity required to sustain a consistently pet-inclusive luxury proposition.

3.4 Impact on the Experience, Foregone Activities, and Demand for Inclusion

The clearest evidence of unmet experiential inclusion emerges from the structural constraint that dog care competes directly with tourism participation. Respondents reported moderate agreement with the statement “I cannot participate in activities because I have to care for my dog at the same time” ($M = 4.12$). The distribution is revealing: 43.33% agree, 36.76% disagree and 19.91% are neutral. This pattern indicates that, for a substantial share of luxury dog travellers, pet-friendliness is not exhausted by access permission. It is realised only when the destination and hotel ecosystem enables shared participation, reduces trade-offs and supports activity engagement without forcing travellers to choose between their holiday experience and dog care.

These findings inform Figure 1, which synthesises four interdependent pillars and the operational levers required to strengthen satisfaction and loyalty in luxury pet-friendly tourism.

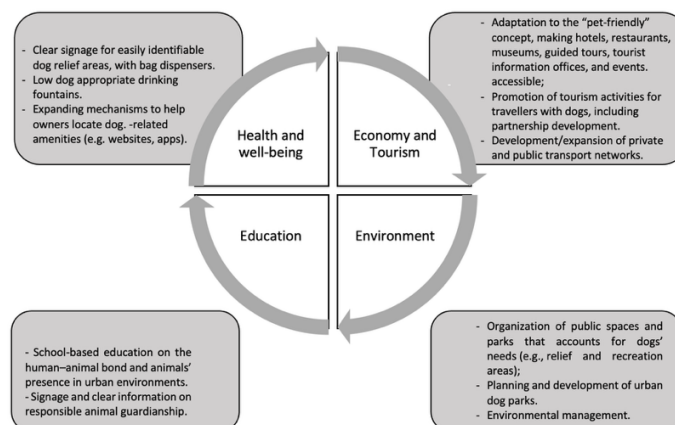


Figure 1: Destination-level framework for luxury pet-friendly tourism organised around four interdependent pillars.

4. Conclusion

This study examined luxury tourism through the lens of pet-friendliness in European hospitality. Dog travellers report strong enabling conditions in accommodation acceptance and emergency veterinary services, but inconsistent inclusion where access rules vary across attractions and everyday commercial settings. Mobility and coastal access remain key constraints, and luxury hotels, while rated positively for overall professionalism, show weaker provision in pet-specific infrastructures, policy clarity, and inclusive programming. As a result, travellers often forgo activities due to dog-care responsibilities.

A methodological caveat should be noted: questionnaire reliability fell below commonly accepted thresholds, and response variability may reflect cross-cultural differences inherent to the phenomenon.

Overall, the results support the proposed framework, structured around health and well-being, economy and tourism, environment, and education, and suggest that competitive differentiation depends on coordinated governance, clear mobility guidance, and integrated pet-support measures that convert pet acceptance into satisfaction and loyalty.

Ethics Declaration

Ethical clearance was not required under the authors' institutional guidelines, as the study used an anonymous questionnaire with adult participants and collected no special category data. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and applicable data protection requirements were observed.

AI Declaration

Generative AI tools were used solely for language editing (improving clarity, grammar, and concision) and did not generate original research data, analyses, or results. All AI-assisted edits were reviewed and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content.

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