

The Dog Days Rock - For Dogs

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Michael Heaton, The Plain Dealer



It's a dog's life. And it's not so bad.

Even with these 90 degree temperatures, it's never been so good to be a dog during the dog days of summer.

Judging from the myriad ways one can pamper one's pooch, man's best friend is no longer merely a pet. Today's American dog is nothing less than a star in many households.

In fact, the dog days of summer takes its name from a group of stars, the constellation Canis Major, which roughly translated from Latin means "big dog." The weather designation stems from the ancient belief that the heat during July and August was somehow the fault of the brightest star in the big dog constellation, Sirius. As in "you can't be Sirius about all this hot weather."

Paws by the Lake in Avon Lake offers dog amenities that rival some finer human roadside vacation attractions. There are daily exercise sessions, nature walks and televisions in dogs' rooms that play "Lady and the Tramp" all day.

There are comfy couches to make Spot feel at home, swimming pools of different depths to accommodate small and large dogs, a lazy river feature for lazy dogs, and an aquatic therapy underwater treadmill for dogs rehabbing after surgery.

And if you're boarding your dog while the family takes vacation, there's a video camera in each room so you can check on Rover from your iPhone while you are in Rio de Janeiro or Kelleys Island. Not to mention the shampoo, fur trim, nail clipping and other beautifying bow-wow treatments. It's all there for the asking and the paying. The canine room with the lake view is \$64 a day. The place also caters to cats and birds.

On the east side of Cleveland, the Hotel Barkley: Pet Hotel and Day Spa, in Orange, offers equally elegant options.

Owner Howard Perlmutter was in California opening another Barkley Hotel, but he e-mailed information about some of the Barkley's more fabulous services.

"There are Pawdicure nail painting with PAWlish, limousine transpawtation, massage, spa baths, tummy rubs and bedtime stories. We offer a daily house cuisine as well as room service from Hyde Park Steakhouse. We take them on trail hikes to Cleveland Metroparks and drive-through McDonald's. We offer 24-hour camera viewing for owners while they are away. They can Skype with their pet as well. We play continuous television entertainment -- from the Animal Planet network to Cavs games."

But there are more modest ways to give your dog a momentary reprieve from the unrelenting summer sun.

There's a Dairy Queen on Detroit Road in Lakewood that offers a 99-cent doggie bowl, which is a squirt of ice cream topped off with a little doggie treat cracker. DQ manager Stasia Williams says it's been a long-standing practice there. And if your dog is lactose intolerant, they give Bowser the doggie snack without the dairy for free.

The Chick-fil-A at Westgate shopping center in Fairview Park offers a small bag of Scooby Snacks, which are mini-chicken nuggets for your dog. Manager Chris Baillairgeon says it keeps people coming back. "We're all about customer service," he said. "People with dogs love it."

K-9 Kingdom in Richmond Heights on Highland Road has Kelli's K-9 Kafe, which features a gourmet dog and cat bakery. No, they don't bake dogs and cats. They make snacks for dogs and cats. They also serve koffee for humans.

For canine couture, there are few better places than Pet-Tique, a one-stop "boutique for your pet" on Clifton Boulevard in Cleveland. For the alpha dog in your household, there are faux leather bomber jackets and Polo shirts; for the pampered bitch, faux fur leopard coats and "Manolo Barknik" chew toys shaped like shoes. More sporty pups can find Cleveland Browns and Indians jerseys as well as Buckeye gear.

The most obvious form of relief and relaxation for a real hot dog would be a long dip in a cool pool. Many area cities end their summer season with a doggie pool day. On Monday, Aug. 30, the Rocky River Family Aquatic Center allows members to bring their dogs for a dousing. Last year, the event drew 175 dogs whose owners paid \$2 per pup to get wet. The money goes to the Rocky River Police K-9 unit.

"There's a little barking that goes on," said pool supervisor Amy Klima. "But it's all good fun. Owners keep dogs on leashes. And we have dog trainers and groomers on hand to do some spa work and promote their businesses."

Over on the east side in Shaker Heights, Thornton Park offers a similar event. "It's called Doggie Dip," said Pam Quinn, director of the Shaker Heights Community Life Dept.

This year, Doggie Dip is 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, Sept. 11. Pool privileges are \$3 a dog for Shaker residents and \$5 for nonresidents. Residents can swim with dogs. Lifeguards are on duty. No leashes required in the pool.

"The last time we did this, we had 300 dogs," said Quinn. Money goes to the Recreation for Youth Scholarship Fund.

"We have a blast," said Quinn. "We have dogs of all sizes."

If you're not sure about your dog's swimming ability, you might want to get a swim vest for Lassie. Marine Equipment and Supplies downtown on St. Clair Avenue offers nylon and neoprene dog vests for your favorite aqua dog. Prices range from \$30 to \$40.

If you are up for the Bonnaroo of pet celebrations, you won't want to miss the second annual Animal Attraction 2010 in Lorain at Black River Landing, Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 21-22. The festival will have a "Pet Fest, Dog Dock and Car Show." Pets and their families are welcome to enjoy cooling stations, pet/owner look-alike contests, animal groomers and pet education services. It's \$2 per person, and pets are free.

Food vendors will be on hand for both four- and two-legged visitors. This year, a beer truck will join the festivities. All pets must be 21 to drink. Gates open at 11 a.m. Remember, friends don't let man's best friend drive drunk. Get a designated dog to drive.

Is your dog having an identity crisis? Lift his self-esteem with a "DNA Breed Identification" from BioPet. For \$60, you swab Fido's gums and mail in the goo. Results are promised in two weeks. You will be the proud owner of an Ancestry Analysis Certificate for the mantel. Won't he be happy to find out he is part Great Dane and part collie? He'll never be called a mutt again.

But you don't have to get complicated or expensive to offer some pleasures to your dog. Do you have a tile floor covered with throw rugs? Remove the rugs and let your pet cool off on the cold flooring. That will give him or her something not to bark about.

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