

## THE DOG ISSUE

## Canine companions taste the good life, too, in Asheville

Hotels and shops invite pups to stay and play

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

As travelers go, Hammy's not particularly fussy. He'll eat anywhere (and anything), doesn't care what I play on the car radio and tends to fit in with the locals. He delights in exploring new places, packs light and doesn't carry a selfie stick. He's a sport about long drives and short pit stops.

So I always thought Hammy was one of those "It's about the journey, not the destination" travelers. Then we went to Asheville, a city with a new tour designed specifically for visitors like him. The tour started with snacks, continued with beer-tasting and ended with cannabidiol (CBD) treats. In just two hours, this mountain town in Western North Carolina blew his little beagle mind.

When I first heard that Asheville had coined itself "Dog City, USA" and launched a welcome center designed for travelers who don't consider it rude to sniff strangers, I wasn't surprised. Nestled in the Appalachian Mountains, near the southern end of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Asheville is nirvana for dogs and humans who love the outdoors. On past trips, we'd enjoyed the hiking trails and scenic overlooks, and we knew that business owners went out of their way to invite pups into shops and onto restaurant patios. But when I visited in the fall, I learned that this progressive city is canine-friendly in ways that go far beyond biscuits.

"What makes a town a dog city?" said Kim Brophey, a dog behavior expert, author and owner of Asheville's Dog Door Behavior Center and Outfitters, which houses what she said is the country's first welcome center for dogs. "We want to be the city that has done better."

Asheville has become a national leader for the humane treatment of dogs by banning unattended tethering, considering outlawing shock collars, raising the standard of care in shelters and providing door-to-door outreach for pet households in underserved areas. There's even a downtown hotel, Aloft, that fosters dogs until they're adopted by guests; since the program began in 2014, 113 dogs have found homes, and the model has been replicated in other cities.

Next year, Brophey will join Trillium Properties in launching an innovative dog park just outside Asheville. Designed for one dog at a time, the three-acre park (with woods, creek and barn) will invite dogs to express the behaviors they were bred for — such as chasing, hunting, herding, tracking and digging — freedoms that urban dogs seldom enjoy. Users will be able to reserve the area by the hour, and Brophey plans to build similar parks across the country. She said being a model dog city involves retraining people to understand the science behind dogs' needs — and the behavioral problems that can result when those needs go unmet. "We've been having these conversations in the community for



years," she said. "Then we started talking about how we could extend that for tourism."

One Friday in October, Hammy and I arrived at the Dog Door for our noon tour. I'd called ahead to reserve our spots and answer a few questions about Hammy: "Is he neutered? Any behavioral issues?" The welcome center is more or less a pet store with a couch, bathroom, WiFi and water. We picked up a visitor's pack that contained dog treats, a map and a long list of Asheville's dog-friendly restaurants, breweries and shops.

Other tour participants: a six-pound longhair Chihuahua named Jasper and 94-pound golden retriever named Rambo, who arrived with a couple from Bethesda; and another Chihuahua, also named Rambo, who came with our guide, Emily Carr. "It's a beautiful day out, so we got hella lucky," Carr said as we all walked out into a crisp, sunny fall day.

Our first stop was Three Dog Bakery, a national chain with treats such as beef beer and "pupcakes." Hammy, a sensitive and obedient dog until food enters the picture, stood on his hind legs and sniffed the barrels of bulk treats. Carr bought each dog a squirrel-shaped cookie with carob frosting.

We continued south, stopping at a patch of grass off the sidewalk. Carr, a laid-back guide with a nose ring and moose tattoo, mentioned that most of the studios in the hip River Arts District are dog-friendly, as is the district's trolley and New Belgium Brewery, which has an outdoor patio and fire pit. The grounds of Biltmore Estate and the North Carolina Arboretum are dog-friendly, and many bars and breweries allow dogs inside, including South Slope's Urban Orchard Cider Co., Burial Beer Co. and Green Man Brewery; Hill-



PHOTOS BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**The author's beagle, Hammy, sits obediently at SunFroot, a shop with CBD dog treats, on a tour of Asheville, N.C., which has declared itself "Dog City, USA." Many breweries, restaurants and stores, such as the Dog Door, top, happily accommodate dogs. Many offer specialized items.**

man Beer and French Broad River Brewery, south of downtown; and West Asheville's UpCountry Brewing Co. and Fleetwood's, a funky bar and vintage shop with a wedding chapel.

We passed ZaPow, a dog-friendly gallery that serves local beer and tea, and strolled next door to Tasty Beverage Co., a beer store with communal tables and more than a dozen taps. I sampled a sour beer made with apricots before deciding on a perfectly spicy locally brewed ginger beer. At the table, Carr distributed freeze-dried liver treats. A man wearing flannel walked in with a young basset hound, ears sashaying along the floor. "He's the official mascot of Hi-Wire Brewing," the man told us, as his dog pestered Hammy. "Murphy, no," the man said, rolling his eyes. "Don't even start."

Our next stop was Catawba, a brewery and tasting room in South Slope. Here, you can order Buxton Hall Barbecue from next door, so it's fair to say that canine noses were in overdrive. A four-some next to us ordered beer flights, and Hammy stared longingly at the 16 little glasses. The two Chihuahuas sat on laps, and the humans, predictably, talked

about dogs.

On our way out, we passed a group walking into the brewery. "Oh, a dog brigade!" an elderly woman exclaimed. "Did they go eat barbecue?" The sun had warmed the air, and we walked, two by two, leaves crunching under our feet and paws. One of the many joys of waking with a dog — especially a scent-driven hound — is the slower pace. Naturally, we could have done that with our own six legs, but I enjoyed the tour for the same reasons that foodies and drinkers enjoy food and beer tours: expertise, insider tips and camaraderie.

Of course, dogs experience cities differently — namely through their noses. On the tour, they explored things we didn't, like the base of a light post, and were downright spellbound by the smells of the stylish stencil-letter trash and recycling cans. All four snouts went skyward as we passed Vortex Doughnuts, and each dog stopped to greet a white Labradoodle named Pumpkin as we cut through an alley. Meanwhile, they had zero interest in the buskers we humans appreciated at every corner, even the man who was playing spoons.

In Pack Square Park, our pack

walked by turkey and pig statues that mark the path once taken by farmers driving their livestock to market. Some dogs posed with the statues, but it was all too much for Hammy, who vigorously pulled away from a bronze piglet roughly his size.

Adjacent to the park, we settled down on comfy patio chairs under large umbrellas at Twisted Laurel. The manager served each dog a gorgeous meal of diced carrots, sweet potato, zucchini and salmon. To drink: herbal iced tea flavored with bacon, salmon and apple.

"It's the coolest thing when they realize they get to eat, too," Carr said as Hammy inhaled his entree and pulled toward Rambo's bowl.

We sampled an Oktoberfest beer and a small plate of wilted radicchio, sunchoke, fennel and carrot. (All the food and drinks were covered in the cost of the tour: \$45 per person and dog, plus \$15 for each additional person.) The umbrellas swayed in the breeze, causing Hammy to tremble.

After lunch, we stopped at SunFroot, a solar gear and CBD shop. The saleswoman told us that the CBD dog treats help with anxiety, inflammation and achy joints. "Does he have any of these conditions?" she asked, looking at Hammy. "Occasional anxiety," I said. She handed him a Best Buds cheese cookie, and he sat sweetly until he got a second one.

Back at the Dog Door, Carr handed out parting gifts: small bags of carob-dipped peanut butter and banana cookies. Hammy trotted out of the store, tail high, as though he were ready to tour the city again. But minutes later, he was asleep in the back seat of my car. The creepy piglet and alarming umbrellas long forgotten, he twitched and snorted, and Dog City faded away in the rearview mirror.

[travel@washpost.com](mailto:travel@washpost.com)

Kaplan is a freelance writer based in the District. Her website is [melaniedgkaplan.com](http://melaniedgkaplan.com). Find her on Twitter: @melaniedgkaplan.



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If you go

**WHERE TO STAY****Aloft Asheville Downtown**

51 Biltmore Ave.

828-232-2838

[marriott.com/hotels/travel/avlal-aloft-asheville-downtown](http://marriott.com/hotels/travel/avlal-aloft-asheville-downtown)

In the heart of downtown, with a rooftop pool (opens April 1) and resident foster dogs who are up for adoption. No pet fee for guest dogs; amenities include a dog bed and access to a rooftop dog run. Rooms from \$169.

**WHERE TO EAT****The Twisted Laurel**

130 College St., Asheville

828-552-3240

[twistedlaurel.com](http://twistedlaurel.com)

Downtown eatery on Pack Park Square. Dog menu includes \$10 build-your-own bowl with options including salmon, orzo, scrambled eggs and broccoli; snacks include celery sticks with peanut butter, \$4. Lunch for humans: burgers, sandwiches, pizzas, \$11 to \$17.

**WHAT TO DO****Dog Door Behavior Center and Outfitters**

1 Battle Sq., Asheville

828-656-8305

[dogdoorcanineservices.com](http://dogdoorcanineservices.com)

Dog Door Behavior Center and Outfitters serves as the city's dog welcome center. Weekly tours for four-legged visitors start March 15 and include stops (and samples) at dog-friendly breweries and shops. The tour ends at a restaurant with a dog menu, where both humans and dogs sit and stay for snacks. Fridays at noon, \$45 for one dog and one human, \$15 for each additional human.

**North Carolina Arboretum**

100 Frederick Law Olmsted Way

[ncarboretum.org](http://ncarboretum.org)

Dogs are welcome on the property (except in the Bonsai Exhibition Garden and during special events) but must be kept on a leash at all times. Free admission, but parking is \$14 per vehicle (\$7 the first Tuesday of every month).

**Biltmore Estate**

1 Lodge St.

[biltmore.com](http://biltmore.com)

Leashed pets are allowed on the grounds and the outdoor patios of Bistro and Cedric's Tavern. Entry fees range from \$55 to \$85, depending on the day, and include a self-guided tour of the house and wine-tasting.

**INFORMATION**[exploreasheville.com](http://exploreasheville.com)

For the author's full list of Asheville recommendations, visit [washingtonpost.com/travel](http://washingtonpost.com/travel)

M.K.

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