

The Hidden Cost of Travelling With Your Dog

A data-driven investigation into hotel pet fees across 2,000+ hotels in 50+ countries.

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Executive Summary

Hotels charge dog owners fees with no definition, no standard, and no consistent link to what is delivered. In practice, the guest who pays the most often gets the least.

This report draws on 2,000 hotels across 56 countries assessed under the Roch Dog Friendly Standard. The finding is clear: most pet fees are not service charges. They are revenue tools presented as cleaning fees. Lower-quality dog friendly experiences are more likely to carry higher fees, with little or nothing provided in return.

Roch Dog supports pet fees when they are justified. A clear, reasonable fee tied to genuine amenities and access is fair. What the data shows, however, is that this is not how the industry operates today.

Dog owners are high-value guests. The rise of double-income, no-kids households with dogs has created a segment willing to pay for quality. What they reject is paying without receiving. They expect basic provisions—proper bowls, a bed, access to shared spaces, and a welcome that reflects hospitality, not restriction.

"Pet friendly" has no agreed meaning. It signals permission, not experience.

This report quantifies what guests actually receive, how fees are applied, and where the disconnect lies. It sets the case for a standard that aligns price with delivery.

SECTION 1

The Dog Owner Market

Sixty five million American households own at least one dog. Seventy eight percent of dog owners travel with their dogs. These numbers have grown every year for a decade, accelerating sharply after 2020, when dog ownership and domestic travel both surged simultaneously.

Dog ownership spans every age group. Among adults aged 18 to 34, ownership rates are highest, driven by the DINK demographic. Adults aged 35 to 54 represent the largest absolute number of dog owning households. Among adults over 55, fifty four percent own a pet, the majority a dog. For every segment, the pattern is the same: dog owners do not leave their dogs behind when they travel. They either bring them or they do not go. A dog friendly hotel is not a preference. It is a precondition.

1.1 The Financial Stakes

The pet fees documented in this report represent a meaningful and unpredictable additional cost for any dog owning traveller. A hotel charging \$150 per stay plus a \$250 damage deposit is requiring a guest to commit \$400 before a single night is slept. If the stay is five nights and the fee is charged per night at \$50, the total pet surcharge is \$250 on top of the room rate. None of this information is typically displayed at the point of search, and the formats used by hotels are so varied that comparison is functionally impossible.

A lack of transparency around pet fees is not an inconvenience. It is an unpredictable financial trap. The question is not whether hotels should charge a fee. It is whether that fee corresponds to anything real.

"Pet friendly" is not a standard. It is a label without definition.

SECTION 2

What the Data Shows

The Roch Dog dataset covers 2,000 hotels across 56 countries. Every hotel has been assessed under the same 31 question evaluation framework, producing a ranked score from A+ through F. The pet fee data in this report is drawn directly from self declared hotel policy, cross referenced against quality scores.

2.1 The Headline Numbers

Of 2,000 hotels assessed, 1,738 charge a pet fee. That is 87% of the market. Only 257 hotels, 13% of those assessed, allow dogs to stay at no additional charge. A further 315 hotels require a damage deposit on top of their room rate. One hundred and eighty four hotels charge both a fee and a deposit, meaning the dog owner must pay twice before the stay begins.

The fee amounts themselves tell a story of extraordinary variation. The lowest fees are zero. The highest documented in this dataset reaches \$600 for a single stay, at a property in California that charges \$300 per dog with a two dog maximum. Between these extremes, the market shows almost no consistency. There is no industry norm, no standard format, and no reliable relationship between what a hotel charges and what it actually delivers.

2.2 How Fees Are Structured

Three structural models dominate the market. Thirty four percent of hotels charge per night. Thirty two percent charge a flat fee for the stay. Twenty three percent charge per pet, which can stack on top of either of the above models. The remaining eleven percent use formats that do not fit cleanly into any category, including variable fees by room type, fees that cap after a certain number of nights, and combinations of the above.

The per night model carries significant hidden cost for longer stays. A hotel charging \$25 per night appears modest for a weekend but costs \$175 for a week. The flat fee model creates a different kind of inequity: a guest paying \$150 for a one night stay is subsidising guests who stay seven nights at the same charge. Neither model is transparent. Both obscure the true cost at the point of booking.

2.3 The American Market

The United States accounts for 743 of the 2,000 hotels in this dataset, and the American pet fee market has the most pronounced clustering of any country examined. The \$150 per stay fee appears more than twice as often as any other single amount, cited by 52 properties. This is not coincidence. It is price anchoring. Hotels are not calculating the cost of hosting a dog and charging accordingly. They are selecting a number that feels defensible within the category. The \$100, \$125, and \$200 per stay fees follow the same logic. They are conventions, not calculations.

American hotels are also the most likely to add the double charge structure. Of the 284 hotels in the global dataset that charge both a fee and a damage deposit, a disproportionate share are located in the United States. The deposit amounts range from \$50 to \$500 per night, with the higher figures applied at properties that already charge the highest fees. The dog owner paying \$150 per stay at a property requiring a \$300 refundable deposit is committing \$450 to a transaction that will not return the deposit portion for days or weeks after checkout.

2.4 The United Kingdom and Europe

The United Kingdom operates on a fundamentally different model. Rather than charging a flat fee for the stay, British hotels charge per night, and the amounts are considerably lower. The most common UK pet fee is fifteen pounds per night. Ten pounds and twenty pounds per night are the next most common amounts. For a three night stay that is forty five pounds, and the logic is consistent with the nightly model: the hotel is charging for the incremental service cost per night rather than applying a blanket cleaning surcharge.

Continental Europe is even more generous. Italy allows dogs to stay free at 19% of assessed hotels. France reaches 39%, making it the most dog financially inclusive market in the dataset. Germany, by contrast, charges fees at every hotel in the dataset with no exceptions. The European pattern reflects cultural differences in how dogs are perceived as guests. In France and Italy, the dog is an accepted companion whose presence carries no implicit stigma requiring a financial buffer. In Germany, the market is sophisticated and dog specific, but the fee structure is consistent and expected.

SECTION 3

The Cleaning Fee Myth

The most common justification hotels give for pet fees is cleaning. The room requires extra attention after a dog has stayed. The fee covers that cost. This is the industry's default explanation, and the data does not support it.

3.1 What Housekeepers Actually Say

As part of this research, Roch Dog surveyed 120 housekeepers across hotels of varying quality and star rating. The question was simple: does a dog staying in the room create significantly more cleaning work?

The consensus was clear. It was not the dogs who made the mess. It was the humans. Housekeepers at five star properties were particularly direct. Several told us that their standards were so high they cleaned every room to the same specification regardless of who or what had stayed in it. A dog in the room did not change the protocol.

The most commonly repeated observation was that humans make considerably more mess than dogs, and that children were a far greater source of cleaning work than any canine guest. There were exceptions. Young dogs and dogs that were not fully house trained occasionally caused issues, primarily urination on carpets. But housekeepers described these as infrequent and manageable. Most hotels have carpet cleaning equipment on site and staff reported that such incidents could be resolved quickly.

Of the 120 housekeepers surveyed, fewer than 5% described dog stays as a routine source of significant additional cleaning work.

3.2 What the Damage Research Shows

Independent research supports what the housekeepers told us. The U.S. Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative's 2021 report, surveying large rental portfolios, found that fewer than 10% of all pets cause any damage at all. Where damage does occur, the average repair cost is approximately \$210.

A separate academic study published in *Anthrozoös* found no statistically significant difference in overall damage between units with and without pets. In a worst case interpretation, pets caused only 10 to 15 percent more damage, roughly \$40 extra per tenancy.

The comparison with human guests is instructive. A UK survey by Propertymark of 673 property managers found that 85.3% had incurred damage from pets, but 84.7% had incurred damage from adult human guests and 54.9% from children. The damage risk from dogs is statistically indistinguishable from the damage risk of hosting any guest at all.

The cost comparison is even more revealing. The average pet damage repair across affected units is approximately \$567. By contrast, unauthorised smoking in a hotel room, a purely human violation, costs an average of \$1,100 per incident and requires two to four days of ozone treatment and remediation. A dog stay that goes wrong costs less and is resolved faster than a guest who lights a cigarette.

For hotels specifically, baseline room cleaning costs approximately \$10 to \$16 per clean, including labour, laundry, and supplies. Enhanced cleaning protocols add approximately \$0.70 per room. If a housekeeper's fully burdened wage is \$25 per hour, a pet checkout adds \$6 to \$25 in direct labour cost. Against this, hotels routinely charge pet fees of \$75 to \$150 per stay, and some charge \$75 to \$100 per night. The gap between the actual incremental cost and the amount charged is not a rounding error. It is a margin.

3.3 Fees Are Not Cost Recovery

The arithmetic is straightforward. Fewer than 10% of dog stays produce any chargeable damage. The average damage cost when it does occur is \$210. The incremental cleaning cost per stay is tens of dollars, not hundreds. A \$150 flat fee charged to every dog owning guest is not a cleaning fee. It is not cost recovery. It is revenue, collected under the pretence of operational necessity.

Hotels that charge no fee and still deliver a premium dog friendly experience demonstrate that absorbing the cost of hosting dogs is commercially viable. The fee is a choice, not a requirement. And when a hotel chooses to charge it, the guest has every right to ask what they are getting in return.

SECTION 4

The Quality Paradox

The most counterintuitive finding in this dataset is the relationship between hotel quality and pet fees.

4.1 Higher Quality Hotels Charge Less

Among hotels rated A and A+ under the Roch Dog Friendly Standard, 27% allow dogs to stay free. Among F rated hotels, which scored the lowest on our evaluation criteria, only 1.5% charge nothing. The pattern is consistent across every grade between them: as quality increases, the likelihood of charging a fee decreases. A hotel rated D charges a fee 93% of the time. A hotel rated A does so 72% of the time.

The assumption most dog owning travellers make is that a higher fee signals a more considered, better resourced, more genuinely dog friendly experience. The data does not support this. The hotels most invested in dog friendly hospitality, those that provide dedicated amenities, trained staff, appropriate spaces, and genuine welcome, are more likely to absorb the cost of dog hosting into their overall offer rather than layering it onto the guest as a surcharge.

4.2 Five Star Properties Are More Generous

Among five star hotels in the dataset, 16.3% allow dogs to stay free. Among four star hotels, the figure drops to 9.4%. Five star hotels also require fewer damage deposits in absolute terms, despite having more properties in the dataset. Premium properties treat dog hosting as a service to be delivered rather than a risk to be priced.

The four star segment shows the reverse. Mid tier hotels charge fees more consistently, require deposits more frequently, and impose weight restrictions at a higher rate. This is the risk averse posture of a business that views dogs as a liability rather than a revenue opportunity, and it is exactly the posture that produces the worst outcomes for guests.

4.3 The Commercial Case Hotels Are Missing

The irony is that dog owning guests are among the most commercially valuable segments in hospitality. Pet friendly properties achieve 15 to 20 percent higher occupancy rates in pet travelling markets. Guests with dogs stay an average of 2.56 nights compared to 2.1 nights for those without, a 22 percent increase in length of stay that reduces turnover costs and increases on property spending. Seventy six percent of pet owners become repeat guests after a successful stay. Comprehensive dog friendly programming can generate between \$750,000 and \$4 million in incremental annual revenue per property.

The DINK demographic, double income no kids with dogs, spends approximately 30 percent more on amenities than the average guest. These are travellers who actively seek out hotels that treat their dog well and are willing to pay for it. Hotels that charge a fee and deliver a genuine experience are building a loyal, high spending customer base. Hotels that charge a fee and deliver nothing are driving that customer base to competitors.

SECTION 5

What Good Looks Like

The data makes clear that the fee itself is not the problem. The problem is what is, or is not, delivered in return. The contrast between the best and worst hotels in this dataset is stark.

5.1 Hotels That Charge and Deliver Nothing

The Sheraton Dallas Hotel charges \$150 per stay. It is rated F under the Roch Dog Friendly Standard. It provides no dog bed, no food or water bowls, no treats, no bar access, no restaurant access, no lounge access, and no support for pet charities. The fee buys nothing.

The Berkman in Texas charges \$150 per stay. Also rated F. Zero amenities across the board. The Peninsula Chicago charges \$250 for dogs under 30 pounds and \$400 for dogs over 30 pounds. Rated F. The Kempinski Hotel San Lawrenz in Malta charges EUR 75 plus a EUR 100 damage deposit. Rated F. Cavalry Court charges \$75 plus a \$300 damage deposit. Rated F.

These are not edge cases. Among the 435 hotels rated D or F in our dataset, the pattern is consistent: fees are high, amenities are absent, and the guest is paying for the privilege of being tolerated rather than welcomed.

5.2 Hotels That Charge and Deliver Value

The Limelight Hotel Aspen charges \$50 per stay. It is rated A. It provides real food and water bowls, a dog bed, free treats, and allows dogs in the bar, the restaurant, and the lounge. The fee is modest and the experience is genuine.

The Four Seasons Chicago charges \$100 per stay. Rated A. Full amenities: bowls, treats, bed, and access to every public space in the hotel. The Rosewood Vienna charges EUR 50 per night. Rated A+. Everything provided, plus support for pet charities. No38 The Park in Cheltenham charges just fifteen pounds per night. Rated A. Full amenities across the board.

The Alchymist Grand Hotel and Spa in Prague charges EUR 40 per night. Rated A. Bowls, treats, bed, full venue access, and charity support. The Devonshire Arms Hotel in Yorkshire charges twenty pounds per night. Rated A. Everything a dog owner could reasonably expect.

These hotels prove that a fee and genuine hospitality are not mutually exclusive. The fee funds the experience. The guest feels respected. The dog is welcome. That is the model.

5.3 Hotels That Donate

A small but meaningful number of hotels in the dataset donate a portion of their pet fee to animal charities. Among A and A+ rated hotels, approximately 20% support pet charities in some form. Among D and F rated hotels, the figure drops to 6%. This is another indicator of intent. Hotels that care enough to share a portion of the fee with causes that benefit animals are signalling a fundamentally different relationship with their canine guests than hotels that treat the fee as pure margin.

5.4 A Model Worth Following

During our research we encountered one hotel in California that operates a pet fee model we believe the industry should study. The hotel charges a one time pet fee, approximately \$150 to \$200, on a guest's first stay. Every subsequent visit, the dog stays free. The fee is paid once and the guest earns free dog stays for life.

This is a loyalty tool disguised as a pet fee. It rewards repeat visitors. It removes the sting of a per stay charge for regular guests. And it reframes the fee as an investment in an ongoing relationship rather than a one off extraction. We recommend this model to any hotel serious about building long term loyalty with dog owning travellers.

SECTION 6

What the Industry Needs to Fix

The pet fee market has three structural problems which the industry has not resolved.

6.1 Transparency at the Point of Search

No major online travel platform displays pet fees consistently at the point of hotel selection. Fees are buried in policies, noted in footnotes, or absent entirely until the guest contacts the hotel directly. The formats in which fees are expressed, per night, per stay, per pet, capped, uncapped, refundable deposit, non refundable deposit, are sufficiently varied that side by side comparison is functionally impossible. A traveller searching for a hotel for themselves and their dog cannot make an informed financial decision at the point of booking. This is a transparency failure that affects no other category of hotel service charge.

6.2 The Double Charge Structure

Charging both a pet fee and a damage deposit for the same stay is logically incoherent. A cleaning fee is intended to cover the incremental cost of preparing the room after a dog stay. A damage deposit is intended to provide recourse if the dog causes damage beyond normal wear. These are not the same cost. But 14% of the hotels in this dataset charge both, which means the guest is pre paying for cleaning and pre funding damage insurance simultaneously. In most consumer contexts this would prompt regulatory scrutiny. In hotel pet policies it has become normalised.

6.3 The Absence of a Standard

There is no industry standard for what a dog friendly hotel must provide in exchange for a pet fee. A hotel charging \$150 per stay is not required to provide a dog bed, a water bowl, or a designated outdoor area. It is not required to allow dogs in any public area. It is not required to have trained its staff in canine guest management. The fee exists in a void: it is charged for a category of service that has no minimum definition. Until hotels are held to a defined standard, the dog owning traveller has no basis for evaluating whether the fee they are paying corresponds to a genuine service commitment.

What Dog Owners Should Do

The practical implications for dog owners are clear.

The majority of American hotels charge a pet fee. The modal fee in the United States is \$150 per stay. One in seven hotels charges both a fee and a damage deposit. The highest ranked, most genuinely dog friendly hotels in the dataset are more likely to waive the fee entirely or deliver real value in return. Price is not a reliable indicator of quality in this category.

The most important thing a dog owning traveller can do before booking is ask three questions before confirming a reservation: what is the pet fee, is there a separate damage deposit, and what specific dog friendly amenities does the fee cover. The answers will often reveal either genuine commitment or the absence of it. Hotels that cannot answer the third question clearly are almost always charging for tolerance, not hospitality.

The implication for the travel industry is clear. Dog owning travellers are among the most loyal, highest spending, and most underserved segments in hospitality. DINKs with dogs represent one of the fastest growing demographics in the market. Both groups are happy to pay for genuine hospitality. Neither will tolerate being price gouged. Serving them well requires transparent fees, no double charge structures, a minimum defined standard of what dog friendly actually means, and something real in return for every dollar charged.

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Roch Dog is the dog friendly standards and certification body. We define what dog friendly means, then assess, certify and rank hotels, workplaces, and residences against the Roch Dog Friendly Standard.

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Roch Dog is an independent certification body. We assess, certify, and verify hotels against the Roch Dog Friendly Standard (RDFS-02). The standard, framework, and supporting reference documents are published at rochstandard.com.

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