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CARMEL BY THE SEA, California — This was not a typical girls' trip.

By: Ann Tatko-Peterson

My sister-in-law Lisa and I were going on vacation, not with our daughters but with Daisy and Misty — our dogs. Daisy is Lisa's 10-year-old miniature poodle; Misty is my 5-year-old Lhaso Apso-poodle mix. Both have gone on long car rides, camping trips and visits to Lisa's vacation home in Angel's Camp. But this was to be the first trip designed specifically with them in mind. Lisa and I picked Carmel-by-the-Sea, a charming artists' enclave that embraces its eccentricity. This is, after all, the town that doesn't have street addresses, once tried to ban ice cream cones to keep the sidewalks clean and requires a permit for residents and visitors who want to wear high heels. But it's also the town that loves its dogs — even those visiting with tourists — which prompted DogFriendly.com to select it as America's most dog-friendly resort region. Accommodating pets is big business in the tourism industry these days. A 2008 TripAdvisor survey found that 61 percent of 1,600 pet-owning travelers polled have brought their pets on at least one trip. About 29.1 million Americans regularly take their pets on trips of 50 miles or more, says the Travel Industry Association of America.

Carmel doesn't just pay lip service to its claim of being dog friendly. It has 25 hotels, inns and bed-and-breakfasts that welcome pets of all sizes, and 44 restaurants, bars and coffee houses that offer seating where dogs are permitted. Carmel has one of the few remaining leash-free beaches in California. Shops and galleries welcome canine customers with water dishes and biscuits. (On our visit, we saw only three shops or galleries with signs banning dogs — and one of those because, as the sign read, "My dog barks louder.") Even City Hall opens its doors to dogs; Carmel Mayor Sue McCloud often brings her Dandie Dinmont terrier, Robbie, to work. And a painting of Pal, the "town dog" until his death in 1943, hangs in the entryway of the City Council chamber. Michael Merritt, owner of the floral design gallery Twigery, said it best: "When I die, I want to come back as a Carmel dog." Yes, Carmel seemed the ideal spot for a rookie pooch-vacation experience. Our trip didn't exactly have an auspicious start. We had

placed both dogs in the back seat, nestled into their respective beds, but within two minutes, Daisy attempted to climb into Misty's bed, tipping it over and sending both dogs sprawling. It didn't help that our trip coincided with one of the relentless January storms that pounded through California.

Yet, as we pulled into Carmel, the dark clouds suddenly shifted. With a welcome respite from the rain, we drove straight to Carmel Beach. Who knew if we'd have another opportunity to let the dogs wander on the sands during our three-day visit. High tides had brought out a "beach closed" sign, so we stuck to higher ground. Daisy remained on her leash—her old-dog hearing and love of water were a risky mix. I unhooked Misty, and she bounded across the sand like a puppy to greet a handful of other visiting dogs and their owners. As we would learn later, the beach is usually crowded with dogs of all sizes and breeds — "It's like walking at the Westminster Dog Show," explained local Gale Wrausmann. It's also a popular site for dog parties, even an annual corgi convention.

Size and breed are not issues at Cypress Inn, either. The hotel began opening its doors to pets when actress Doris Day came on board as a co-owner in 1986. Today, general manager Nancy Slade estimates that one-third of the hotel's guests bring their pets — not that you can tell by the rooms. The 44 well-appointed rooms and spacious suites look practically brand new and bear not a single hair from or scent of the previous canine guests. The trick: dry cleaning, one staffer confided. Plus, each pet gets its own blanket. We arrived during the hotel's signature afternoon tea (1–4 p.m. daily), where, a sign boasted, "Husbands and pets welcome." Much to our chagrin, Daisy and Misty barked to make their presence known to the five dogs in attendance. Two regular guests — Mollie, a West Highland white terrier from Carmel, and Tasha, a Pomeranian from Seaside — gave our pooches no more than a passing glance. They were too busy helping their owners nibble on tea sandwiches and homemade scones. On the hotel's front desk, a giant glass jar of dog biscuits dwarfed a smaller bowl of candy. For our first night, we opted to dine at Terry's Lounge, the hotel's restaurant, where a special indoor seating area off the lobby allowed us to keep the dogs with us while we ate. Lisa and I enjoyed a meal of scampi with large prawns in a white wine sauce over angel hair pasta (\$22 US) and a pan-roasted Alaskan halibut (\$26 US) that, more than once, had Daisy standing on her back legs for a peek. Such curiosity marked most of the trip for Misty and Daisy. They especially enjoyed sniffing the low tins of biscuits and rawhides at Diggidy Dog, a dog-and-cat boutique designed especially for spoiled pets, with everything from homemade treats and toys to pet strollers, shades and backpacks. Misty even dipped her head into the Fountain of Woof, a three-tier fountain for dogs at Carmel Plaza, a shopping and dining establishment. Lisa and I had our curiosity filled, too, thanks to the Carmel Walks tour provided by Gale Wrausmann. For 15 years, Wrausmann has taken visitors into some of Carmel's 60 hidden courtyards and secret passageways, detailing the history and little-known facts about the town on her two-hour walking tours.

Along the way, we saw some of Carmel's fairy-tale cottages, the window of artist Salvador Torres' studio, the courtyard through which Clint Eastwood (former Carmel mayor) ran while starring in "Play Misty for Me" and the old theater-turned-bank where a mock movie theater, complete with popcorn, sits

in the lobby. She also brought us inside the dog-friendly Church of the Wayfarer to see the stained glass windows. "You can sit the dogs in a pew and take their picture," she told us.

When I gave her a skeptical look, she just laughed and explained that pets often sit in the pews at Christmas Eve Mass. "Everyone loves dogs in Carmel," she added later. "Dogs feel loved and accepted here." Everywhere we went, that became abundantly clear.

At Galante Vineyards, Misty and Daisy were free to explore the tasting room. That gave me time to work my way through a tasting menu of eight wines -- including the first-rate Blackjack Pasture cabernet sauvignon-- and learn more about the family-owned winery and working cattle ranch.

At Cima Collina, the lineup of rich pinot noirs also left room for Howlin' Good Red, a blend whose sales benefit the SPCA. The winery's rat terrier, Sweetie, inspired the wine's label. A number of shops and galleries have their own dogs on-site. At Wellington's gallery, a special cutout in the door allows Lord Wellington, an English bulldog, to stick his head out and greet visitors. At Chapman Gallery, several pieces of art bear the image of Marisa, a rescued Borzoi, who strolls from room to room. Nowhere was the hospitality more abundant than at the Carmel restaurants. We arrived for lunch at Bistro Beaujolais as the rain was falling. Usually, customers with dogs are confined to the partially covered patio area, but the manager took pity and sneaked us into a back corner of the restaurant. There, as we were enjoying our club sandwich and chicken panini, another couple was secreted in with their dog, setting Misty and Daisy into noisy, naughty dog mode. The server shrugged off our apology a few minutes later. "Everyone heard them, but no one complained, so no big deal," she said. Later that night, we dined at Porta Bella restaurant. A peek inside the door revealed an elegant and intimate Mediterranean restaurant. No way were they letting our damp dogs in here, I thought. Wrong. General manager Luiz Ferreira ushered us through the restaurant to the Garden Room, an enclosed and heated patio where two other dogs were waiting as their owners dined. The service was exceptional and the food divine. The grilled pork tenderloin with a grain mustard demi sauce (\$23.95 US) was melt-in-your-mouth tender; the roasted corn and crab bisque (\$7.50 US) was brimming with real crab meat; and the freshly baked warm apple tart (\$7.75 US) was a perfect blend of sweet apples in a flaky pastry. Meanwhile, the dogs had their own bowl of water, served on a plate draped in white linen. But it was Ferreira who blew us away as he crouched down to pet each of his canine guests, heedless of the eager paws brushing against his nice suit. Later that night, back at the Cypress Inn, Lisa and I sank onto the comfortable sofa in our sitting room. The dogs fell asleep instantly. We wouldn't be far behind them.

IF YOU GO: WHERE TO STAY:

Cypress Inn -- 7th Avenue and Lincoln Street, 800-443-7443, www.cypress-inn.com. Rates start at \$165 US per night and include breakfast. Pet fee is \$30 US per night for one pet and \$40 US for two. On-site restaurant is available with special seating area where pets are permitted. Yappy hour with discounted drinks runs 5-6 p.m. daily. Note: Pets may not be left alone in the hotel rooms, but pet sitters are available.

Lamplighter Inn -- Ocean Avenue and Camino Real, 831-624-7372, www.carmellamplighter.com. Rates at this bed-and-breakfast start at \$185 US a night and include a light breakfast. Pet fee is \$30 US a night for one and \$45 US for two. Facilities include an outdoor pet shower.

For a complete list of pet-friendly hotels in Carmel, visit www.seemonterey.com/pet-friendly-monterey-county.

WHERE TO EAT:

Porta Bella Restaurant -- Ocean between Lincoln and Monte Verde, 831-624-4395, www.carmelsbest.com/portabella. Serving Mediterranean cuisine for lunch and dinner. Heated enclosed patio seating available for guests with dogs.

Bistro Beaujolais -- Carmel Plaza, 831-624-5600, www.dagiovannis.com. Serving a bistro-style blend of Italian, Mediterranean and French cuisines for lunch and dinner. Patio seating available for customers with dogs.

Casanova Restaurant -- 5th Avenue between Mission and San Carlos, 831-625-0501, www.casanovarestaurant.com. Serving rustic French and Italian cuisine. Covered patio seating available for guests with dogs.

Forge in the Forest -- 5th Avenue and Junipero, 831-624-2233, www.forgeintheforest.com. A casual restaurant serving American cuisine and featuring a low-carb menu. It also has heated outdoor seating for guests with dogs and a special "Dog Pound" menu featuring everything from kibble (\$2.50) to the Good Dog New York steak (\$12.95) for dogs. Pick up a list of other pet-friendly eating and drinking establishments from pet-friendly hotels and Diggidy Dog (info below).

WHAT TO DO:

Carmel Walks with Gale Wrausmann -- 831-642-2700, www.carmelwalks.com. Two-hour walking tours are available 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Saturdays and 10 a.m. Tuesdays-Fridays. \$25 US per person. Private group tours available by request. Dogs welcome.

Galante Vineyards -- Dolores between Ocean Avenue and 7th Street, 831-624-3800, www.galantevineyards. Wine tasting 1-6 p.m. Sundays-Fridays and noon-6 p.m. Saturdays. Eight tastings \$10 US per person, refunded with purchase of \$50 US or more.

Cima Collina -- San Carlos between Ocean Avenue and 7th Street, 831-620-0645, www.cimacollina.com. Wine tasting 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Thursdays-Mondays. Seven tastings (includes a dessert wine) for \$5 US per person, refunded with purchase of \$40US or more.

Diggidy Dog -- Ocean Avenue and Mission Street, 831-625-1585, www.diggidydogcarmel.com. A dog and cat boutique open daily from 10 a.m.

Carmel Beach -- Leash-free beach located at the end of Ocean Avenue. Free parking available.
More info: Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau at 877-666-8373; www.seemonterey.com.
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