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Ricardo Thomas / The Detroit News

"A lot of people are worried about boarding their pets. Owners want to make sure they are taken care of the way they would take care of them, and that's what we try to do here," says Paw Print Inn co-owner Laurel Nicola, who is tending to Toby.

## Luxury goes to the dogs: Owners indulge pets at posh animal resorts

Delores Flynn / The Detroit News

NOVI -- When Trisha Hodge walked into the lobby of Paw Print Inn, she knew she had finally found what she was searching for.

"Everything from the granite countertops and mural behind the check-in desk to the

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stylish boutique is just beautiful," said the Commerce Township resident. "You can tell a lot of care went into every detail. The facility is just opulent. I knew I had found a second home for Jibb."

Hodge's 7-year-old tan cocker spaniel stayed at the pet resort and spa for a weekend this summer, when Hodge and her husband took a trip to Mackinac Island. Jibb's private signature suite featured sliding glass doors, a raised luxury day bed and TV for \$65 a night.

The Paw Print Inn is the latest luxury pet resort to open in Metro Detroit amid a growing trend of posh animal retreats and day care facilities that indulge pets and their owners with such amenities as luxury furnishings, gourmet meals, bedtime stories and tuck-ins, Web cameras, soothing background music and climate-controlled surroundings. The goal of pet owners is to make sure their pets are treated like -- or better than -- family when they are left behind on family vacations and business trips.

"Whether it's good or bad, people have started to humanize their pets, especially dogs, and then (they're) acting on it," said Joseph Lyman, CEO of the American Boarding Kennel Association. "Many develop an emotional tie and begin treating their pets as their children. And when owners go away they want their pets to have the best, creating a demand for suite facilities and spa services that the owners themselves may have an affinity for."

Animals at the Paw Print Inn receive five-star gourmet treats and meals like a roasted chicken dinner, braised beef chunks with gravy or chicken thighs. They can also experience such indulgences as blueberry facial scrubs, aromatherapy sessions, massages and other treatments that range from \$5 to \$70. The 14,000-square-foot facility, which has day care rooms and outdoor heated play areas, can house 98 dogs and 16 cats in a separate area with four-level "condos."

While the pet industry has yet to track the number of pet resorts across the country, the trend became noticeable about five years ago and breaks across socioeconomic classes, according to the boarding kennel association.



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**Callie Bradley plays with the dogs**  
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Americans are expected to spend an estimated \$2.9 billion on pet grooming and boarding services this year, compared to the \$1.2 billion in 2001, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

Overall pet spending has increased from \$17 billion in 1994 for food, veterinary care and toys to \$38.5 billion in 2006, with an estimated \$40.8 billion to be spent by the end of 2007. That's more than the \$33 billion the country spends on entertainment such as movies, video games and music, according to industry data.

Hodge and her husband spend about \$5,000 annually for Jibb's grooming, boarding and other care.

"Now that the kids are gone, we're older and have more disposable income and like to spoil her within reason," said Hodge, who has shied away from larger boarding facilities that perhaps smelled badly or didn't allow pet owners to tour the facility.

Tony Caruso, owner of Camp Bow Wow in St. Clair Shores, has found that people also want proper stimulation for their pets.

"Most kennels have dogs confined for most of the day, with an hour or less of playtime. But owners know the value of socialization for their dog's quality of life, so some seek a more premier place for their pets," said Caruso, who provides six to eight hours of playtime and a dog lounge area for older canines.

At Paw Print Inn, pets can also get private play sessions and extra cuddles and pats from staff if owners desire. Owners Kirk and Laurel Nicola started research for the facility two years ago, after they became disenchanted with the boarding services at a local facility. Loud barking in an open area was stressful for the dogs, and when their 8-year-old bichon frise Scooter came home with a puncture wound on his neck and they hadn't been notified, the couple opted for something better.

"A lot of people are worried about boarding their pets. Owners want to make sure they are taken care of the way they would take care of them, and that's what we try to do here," Laurel Nicola said.



Ricardo Thomas / The Detr

Shiloh, a lab-sharpei, and Scooter, a bichon frise, get some quality playtime when Scooter, the dog of Paw Print owners Laurel and Kirk Nicola, came with a puncture wound on his neck and was staying at a local facility, the Nicolas inspired to open the luxury pet resort. [See full image](#)

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KrisFisher appreciates such efforts after having to board her dog for the first time. "I was nervous about leaving him. He's like our baby," said Fisher of Joey, a 1-year-old yorkie-poodle that her two teenage daughters begged their parents to get.

Joey has stayed at total of seven nights at the Paw Print Inn on two occasions. The owner opted for the private signature suite and treated the pooch to a \$10 "sparkle and shine" treatment. The combination of yogurt and honey is supposed to condition the skin and repel dirt and dust.

The Northville resident doesn't believe such boarding care is excessive.

"Pets give people a lot of joy," Fisher said. "Joey is a member of the family. I need to know he's in good hands."

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