



APRIL, 2020

IT'S A DOG'S WORLD

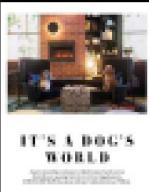
Australian Gourmet Traveller, National

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As pet ownership continues to climb, luxury hotels across Australia are opening their doors to four-legged guests.
JOANNA HUNKIN checks in with her Golden Retriever Wilbur.



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As the sun begins to break through the early-morning cloud over Port Stephens, an energetic game of tag is taking place on Bannisters' back lawn. It's been less than 24 hours since Wilbur first met Winston and Clementine, but they've already become firm friends, chasing after one another gleefully as fellow guests watch on, smiling.

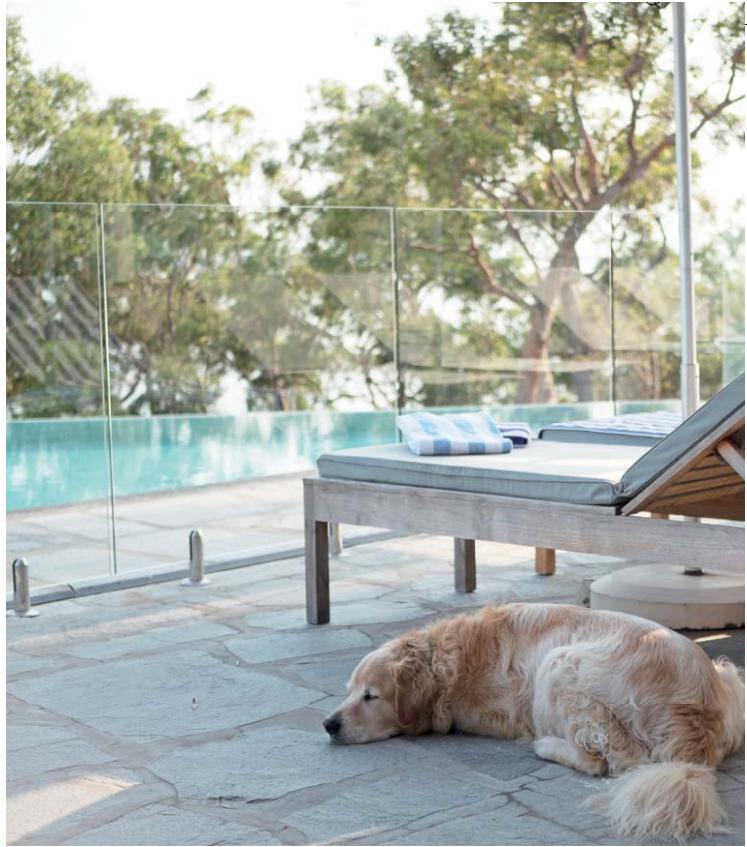
It would be a fairly typical scene at most family resorts, but for one small detail: Wilbur and his new pals are dogs, each staying in one of the resort's three dog-friendly rooms.

Located on the ground floor, the rooms open up directly onto a grassy knoll that separates the resort from Soldiers Point beach, where dogs can be walked on leash at any time. Just 10 minutes' drive to the east, Bagnalls Beach is a designated off-leash area, where dogs can swim and play to their heart's content.

For dog-lovers looking to enjoy a weekend escape with their four-legged friends, it's the perfect location. And, while Bannisters was one of Australia's first luxury properties to welcome dogs, it's part of a growing movement, as more and more premium hoteliers see the benefit in offering pet-friendly accommodation.

The RSPCA reports 70 per cent of Generation Z (those aged 18 to 24) own a pet, while more than half of all cat and dog owners consider their pets to be a member of the family. With more than 4.2 million pet dogs in Australia, it's little wonder hotels have realised the growing demand for quality, pet-friendly accommodation. The real surprise is how long it's taken for the industry to respond.

Since opening in November 2018, Bannisters has seen a steady stream of canine visitors, with their pet-friendly rooms consistently booked out. General manager Pete Bacon says they've had no issues with



any of their four-legged guests, claiming they're easier to look after than their human companions.

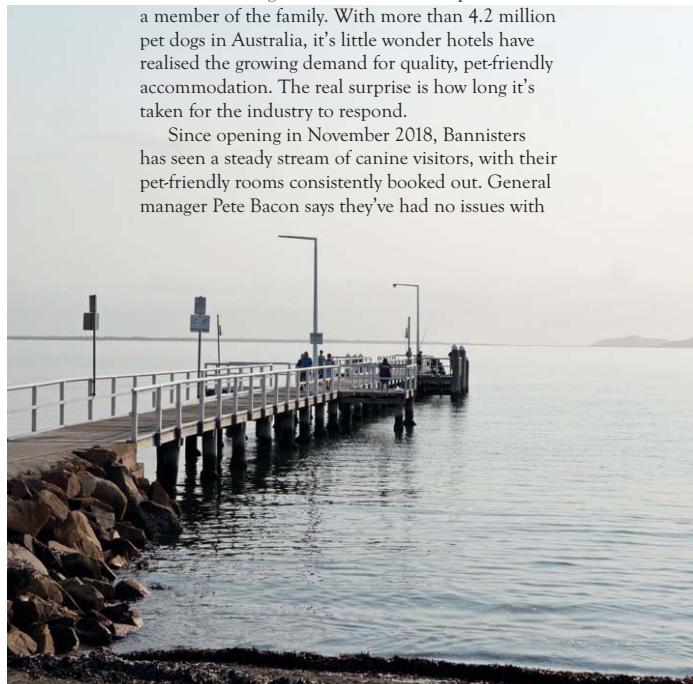
"Dogs don't complain," jokes the Irishman, who says he found it confronting when he first moved to Australia to discover dogs were not welcome in many pubs, cafés and hotels.

"Anyone who's taking their dog to a hotel generally has a good dog, so there haven't been any dramas. In 18 months, we've had one person who's said 'I don't like having dogs around.' But you can't please 100 per cent of people, 100 per cent of the time."

When Wilbur arrives at the Port Stephens resort, the seven-year-old Golden Retriever is given a rock star's welcome and finds himself continuously stopped for cuddles from both staff and guests. At one point, a toddler curls up next to him for an afternoon nap by the pool. And when it comes to dinnertime, Wilbur is welcomed onto the terrace outside Rick Stein's restaurant, where he happily dozes while his humans enjoy a feast of fresh seafood.

Bannisters keeps it simple when it comes to its pet offering, providing a pet-friendly room with easy access to grassed areas. Owners are responsible for bringing their own food, bowls and bedding for their canine companions.

Other hotels offer more elaborate services, including in-room dining for dogs, as well as pet-sitting services and even, in the case of Zagame's House in Melbourne, pet-friendly wine tours to the Yarra Valley. The Carlton boutique hotel introduced its fur-friendly



PHOTOGRAPHY KONRAD KASISKE (BANNISTERS & SOLDIERS POINT JETTY).



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Clockwise from far left: Soldiers Point Jetty, Port Stephens; Wilbur relaxes poolside at Bannisters; service at The Langham, Sydney. PREVIOUS PAGES Dogs at Zagame's House, Melbourne.

policy last September, driven by general manager Adam Taloni, whose dog Hugo the Groodle can regularly be found greeting guests in the hotel lobby.

"Travelling throughout America and Europe, and seeing dogs not just in hotels, but in cafés and shops, made me realise we're so backward here when it comes to dogs," he says. "If they're good enough to be in our homes and be our best friends, why don't we allow them in hotels? For me, it's nothing groundbreaking or genius, I think we're catching up with the rest of the world." •



BANNISTERS

Where: Soldiers Point, Port Stephens, NSW

Rate: An additional \$60 cleaning fee applies.

Services: Dogs are welcome throughout the resort.

Plus: Several off-leash zones in the surrounding area including Bagnalls Beach.

Restrictions: Dogs only. Maximum two dogs per room.

bannisters.com.au/port-stephens

Services: Pet room-service menu offering freshly prepared meals including an Angus-beef tartare dish.

Plus: A full range of pink, Langham-branded pet merchandise including collars, leads, pet beds, bowls and tennis balls. Pet-sitting available.

Restrictions: All pets welcome. Dogs must be under 20kg.
langhamhotels.com

THE OLD CLARE HOTEL

Where: Sydney

Rate: An additional charge of \$100 per night covers up to two dogs.

Services: Dog bowls, bed and toys provided; complimentary pet in-room dining.

Restrictions: Dogs only.
theoldclarehotel.com.au

W BRISBANE

Where: Brisbane

Rate: An additional \$50 per night, plus \$150 cleaning fee.

Services: Pet beds, bowls, toys and treats provided, plus a litter tray for feline visitors.

Restrictions: One pet per room. Cats and dogs welcome. Dogs must be under 18kg.
marriott.com.au/w-hotels/brisbane

PIER ONE SYDNEY

Where: Sydney

Rate: An additional \$90 cleaning fee per stay.

Services: Rooms with direct access to the pier outside; bed and bowls provided.

Plus: Owners can request a minibar filled with dog-friendly snacks.

Restrictions: Dogs only.
pieronesydneyharbour.com.au

THE LANGHAM

Where: Sydney

Rate: An additional charge of \$120 per pet, per night.

NOTES FOR OWNERS

Before booking your fur-friendly getaway, make sure to touch base directly with the hotel and let them know you plan to bring your pooch. It's worth flagging the size and age of the dog, just to check there won't be any issues. The Langham, for instance, won't allow dogs over 20kg.

Think about how you plan to spend your time while away. Most pet-friendly hotels will not let you leave your dog unaccompanied in the room, so you will either need to take them with you or book a pet-sitter. And if you're planning a gourmet getaway in the heart of Melbourne or Sydney, you're likely to find your options are limited when you have a dog in tow.

While many of the hotels offer in-room dining and dog-friendly catering, you may prefer to bring your own pet food rather than risk unsettling your dog's stomach in a plush hotel room. And if you haven't travelled with your dog before, be aware that they may find an unfamiliar environment stressful and experience separation anxiety if you leave them.

Finally, on behalf of travel-loving pet owners everywhere, please be a responsible owner and don't ruin it for the rest of us!