

Dogtastic staycations

With research* proving that dog owners are happier, less stressed, have more confidence and lower blood pressure, our doggy-loving team take the lead and test four pooch-friendly places for you and your best friend this summer

Studies* show that it takes only 15 to 30 minutes with your dog to feel calmer. Our bodies release cortisol when we're confronted with stressful situations, such as during an argument or running late for an appointment. Cortisol will make your heart pump and give you that extra bit of energy to deal with the stress at hand. Many studies have proven that having a dog nearby and stroking a dog

can reduce cortisol levels, and petting a dog can increase oxytocin, which is the hormone released when we are in love!

We know this all too well at *Psychologies*. Oscar, our office dog, brightens our day with his antics. This is great for our working week, but not so great when Oscar needs a holiday. Trying to find lovely accommodation (Oscar is a bit of a diva!), that welcomes dogs has been a struggle – until now... >>>



>>> **For foodies and pooches who love a little glitz**

Hosts with the finest taste appreciate that dogs are part of the family, as Suzy Walker and Oscar knew all along

OSCAR, our office dog, has always had ideas above his station and that's why he loved staying at The Grand Hotel in Eastbourne. He was in good company – Winston Churchill, Charlie Chaplin, Arthur Conan Doyle and King Constantine of Greece have all stayed there. For them, perhaps unlike Oscar, it wasn't the beautiful seafront location or long walks along the South Downs and 150-year-old pier that were the main attraction, but the opulent, old-school glamour of this five-star hotel built in the 19th century and affectionately nicknamed 'The White Palace'.

We could get used to this

With outdoor and indoor pools, a small spa and several high-ceilinged lounges, there are plenty of elegant spaces in which to kick back and relax but, situated at the foot of the South Downs, it was the spectacular walk along the white cliffs to infamous Beachy Head that Oscar enjoyed the most. Twelve miles along the South Downs Way, taking in the Cuckmere Valley, the Seven Sisters and Beachy Head all in one day, we ended up in Much Ado Books, an award-winning independent bookshop located in the medieval village of Alfriston, for some blissful literary lurking. We ate a hearty lunch in Shot Coffee House, which is uber dog-friendly (it even sells dog beer!) and Oscar settled down on one of the cosy dog beds provided for snoozy pets.

For exhausted dog owners, The Grand offers in-room treatments. I tried the 'muscle soother bath experience' – bath salts, champagne and strawberries are delivered to your room for the ultimate post-walk pamper. Because you really *do* need to be in fine fettle for the 'ultimate dining experience' at the Mirabelle Restaurant – 'arguably the finest gourmet restaurant on the South Coast' – which has been awarded foodie accolades and brilliant reviews from the UK's top food writers. With the most delicious meal we've ever tasted arriving on theatrical silver platters, Oscar wasn't the only one who got ideas above his station.

● **For prices**, from £240 for two people per night, and to book, go to grandeastbourne.com; muchadobooks.com; shotcoffeehouse.co.uk. For more about walking in the area, see nationaltrail.co.uk/south-downs-way

Farm life with a splash in the sea for kids and dogs

Nikki Peterson and her family head to Suffolk for a sunny break with the animals – including oysters!

WE WERE EXCITED to set off for Gladwin's Farm and our self-catering holiday cottage in Suffolk – a family of four plus one, our dog Chase, without the need for passports or a cab to the airport. The sun was shining, the children were smiling (they had clocked the estate's indoor pool online) and Chase looked pretty happy, too. Then, to add to his bliss, there were treats waiting for him on our doorstep! The kids went straight to the honesty shop to load up with ice cream and more doggy favourites.

With 22 acres at our fingertips, we knew we'd have plenty to do for the next few days. On foot or by bike, there's oodles to explore and enjoy: an enchanting woodland trail; glorious nature; sitting by the lake watching the fishermen cast their lines... Chase lived up to his name, playing fetch as the kids bounced on the trampoline.

Morning, Mr Goat

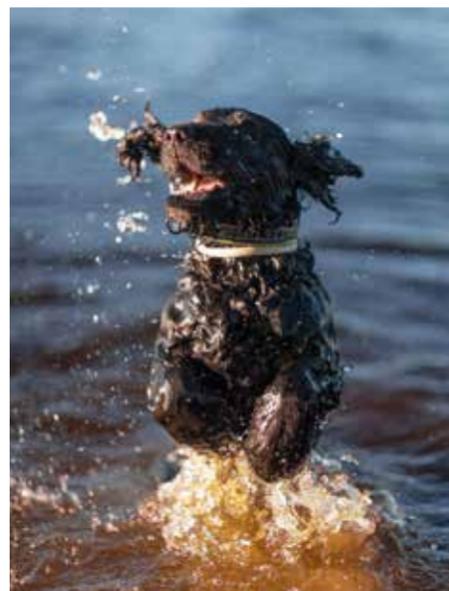
A mere 30-minutes' drive away is the dog-friendly beach at West Mersea,

perfect for a stroll on the sand. Its charms are even greater if you like oysters – with a lovely riverside oyster bar overlooking the creeks of Mersea Island. There are plenty of dog-friendly pubs around in which to wash down the fruits of the sea and take in the salty air in sun-drenched gardens.

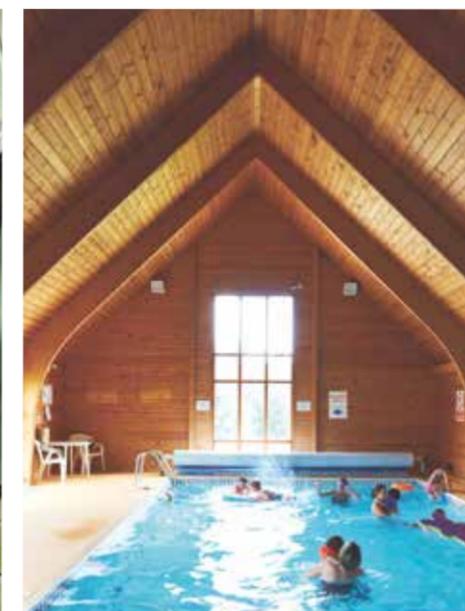
Every morning, my daughters, aged seven and eight, walked the dog before visiting the farm animals. They fed our scraps to the pigs, said hello to the goats, petted the horses and collected freshly laid eggs from the chickens. As they went about their farmyard routine, we watched over them while relaxing on our patio eating croissants, delivered warm and fresh to our door every morning. What a way to start the day! In the evenings, as the kids grew tired, we hopped into our hot tub with a cool drink to chill out, a contented Chase resting alongside. A perfect time for reflection and connection, and to re-energise worn-out legs after hours of adventures.

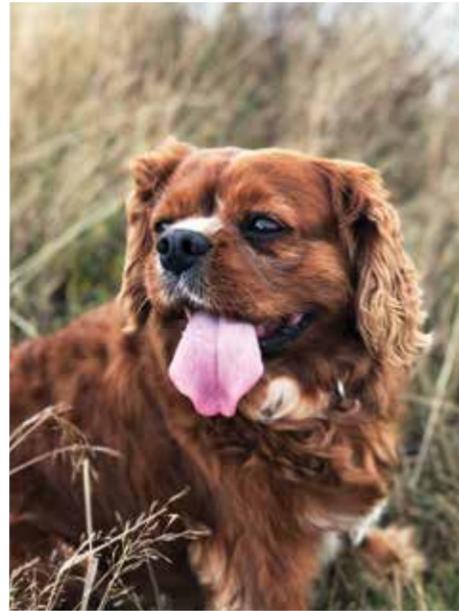
● **Premier Cottages' collection** features 1,000 four- and five-star self-catering cottages across the UK. Properties range from small, romantic boltholes to large family-friendly country estates. It includes pet-friendly accommodation and many properties have onsite facilities such as swimming pools, gyms, spas, games rooms and play areas. A week's stay for four in Lavenham Cottage on Gladwin's Farm costs from £705 and a three-night weekend from £525. premiercottages.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES; HELPGUIDE.ORG/ARTICLES/MENTAL-HEALTH/MOOD-BOOSTING-POWER-OF-DOGS-HTML



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT The Grand Hotel in Eastbourne is fitting accommodation for a travelling Oscar of a certain standing; time for a gent to 'take the waters' and rediscover his zest for a dog's life; an invigorating walk along the cliffs to Beachy Head; Nikki's girls and their pal, Chase, head into the woods for adventure; a self-catering haven on Gladwin's Farm; the seaside charm of West Mersea, and time to shuck some oysters; family pool time (sorry Chase, you'll have to sit this one out); eggs for a farmhouse brekkie, anyone?





CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT Curved lines and peaceful views from The Spa at South Lodge; Oscar makes the most of the colourful, fragrant countryside; stately country house hotel Spa Lodge; who wouldn't feel *Poldark* romantic in picturesque Cornwall?; Herbie cuts a cute figure in the long grass; Mevagissey was once the centre of Cornwall's pilchard fishing industry and still has a working harbour; you couldn't dream the prettiness of Bosinver Farm Cottages; Gorran Haven beach – a happy place for Leanne, her man and Herbie!



>>> **Dog-lovers need revitalising spa breaks, too!**

Can't imagine your furry friend tagging along on a luxury spa weekend, asks Suzy Walker? Think again

LORD MINTY, the fluffy sheep mascot 'in charge' of South Lodge, an award-winning country house hotel in West Sussex, gave Oscar the office dog a warm welcome. With a doggy bed, treats and 93 acres of gardens with views of the South Downs, Oscar was happy. *I was happy to enjoy the 44,000 square foot spa (yes, you read that correctly), which had just opened after a £15million investment. The Spa at South Lodge is beautifully designed, with decor inspired by nature – indoor trees, curved lines, soft velvet green sofas and ancient oak desks. With floor-to-ceiling windows leading to outdoor decking, you can eat your 'Wasted vegan burger' (made from leftover ingredients from the morning's juices), in style at Botanica restaurant, overlooking the UK's first heated outdoor natural swimming pond.*

Nirvana for two

The spa has 14 unique treatment rooms, a mud room and a menu of more than 50 treatments, with award-winning Hungarian skincare from Omorovicza (the only spa in the UK to use these products made from healing natural ingredients). With hot stone and bamboo massages as standard, you might want to earn your relaxation in the gym, outdoor training terrace or spin studio... To please both members of my party, I headed out on the jogging trail past the 150-year-old, 25-foot tall rhododendron bush – the largest in Britain – and visited the pretty kitchen garden, which supplied fresh ingredients for our nourishing dinners. Besides a run, my greatest challenge of the weekend was stopping an exuberant Oscar from chasing six Sussex-bred chickens tasked with laying the eggs for my breakfast!

Reminiscent of Downton Abbey on the outside, with plenty of gorgeous places for walking, and with a spectacular, cutting-edge spa for indoor pampering, South Lodge is heavenly for both you and your dog.

● **An overnight stay with spa access at South Lodge, near Horsham in West Sussex, is £265 per room, based on two people sharing; southlodgehotel.co.uk. To enquire about spa days and annual membership, go to the Exclusive Hotels and Venues website exclusive.co.uk/the-spa-at-south-lodge**

Cornish doggy dreams come true in a romantic hideaway

Leanne Bracey takes her boyfriend and pooch to atmospheric Cornwall for a change of scenery

HERBIE, MY CAVALIER King Charles Spaniel, is one lucky dog. His daily walk is along the south-eastern tip of the Kent coast, on a pebbly beach. He swallowed one once, resulting in a £600 vet's bill. That's why we love Cornwall – vast sandy beaches where he can run free, bark at the sea with abandon and steer clear of stones.

There are plenty of dog-friendly places to stay in Cornwall but I fell in love with Bosinver Farm Cottages in Trelowth, St Austell – individual, stylish properties in 30 acres of woodland. Pat and Dave Smith, who bought

the original chalet park in 1998, have developed it into a fabulous high-end sustainable cottage location. Our dog-friendly nest is one of 10 and there are 10 more for dog-free guests.

Outside it's chocolate-box cuteness, inside it's Designers Guild accessories, Smeg fridges and cosy interiors. The owners have thought about even the tiniest detail: a welcome afternoon tea for us and everything Herbie could possibly

“They've thought of everything: afternoon tea for us and everything Herbie could possibly need”

need, including a hosepipe wash for post-beach mess, an array of treats and a dog-sitting service if required.

Us time and Herbie time

There are plenty of things to do onsite: swimming, gym, tennis, fishing and horse-and-carriage rides, and it was lovely to feed free-roaming animals: longwool sheep, ducks, pygmy goats, geese and chickens. Bosinver is ideal for couples but it's also a great base for families and group gatherings.

You don't have to use the car if you don't want to. We walked the quick mile to Polgooth village for supplies and a pitstop at The Polgooth Inn. Back at the cottage, I booked a massage in the therapy room and ordered a meal from local caterers Angels in the Kitchen.

We did take a drive to nearby Charlestown, where we were spoilt for lunch choices and scenery and visited the Shipwreck and Heritage Centre. A lazy afternoon strolling around the tight streets of Mevagissey comes highly recommended, but Herbie's favourite was running along Gorran Haven beach. Happiness all round.

● **Rose Cottage at Bosinver Farm Cottages costs £515 for a week's stay in low season. Go to bosinver.co.uk for special offers and late availability; angelsinthekitchen.co.uk; shipwreckcharlestown.co.uk**

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES; LEANNE BRACEY