

As Westminster Dog Show Kicks Off, Hotels Roll Out the Red Carpet

Midtown hotels use dog concierges, 'relief areas' and other amenities to lure 4-legged guests during annual dog show

By **ANNE KADET**

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Charlene Cassidy and her traveling companion Varius, a large fellow with shaggy black bangs, were making good use of the amenities at Affinia's Manhattan NYC hotel. Varius was staying in a suite with two bathrooms so he would have his own tub, but since he couldn't use the toilet, he and Ms. Cassidy visited the 12th-floor lounge where he could relieve himself on the adjoining terrace.

"He adapts very well to hotels," said Ms. Cassidy, who hails from Houston.

Varius is an enormous black Russian terrier, one of more than 1,000 dogs currently lodging in hotels around Madison Square Garden for this year's 139th annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, a two-day event that began on Monday.

Mid-February is traditionally a slow period for local hotels, so the dogs are coveted guests. This year, more than 20 properties offered discounts to Westminsterites; some went all out in their efforts to lure the fanged set.

The Manhattan NYC, which is hosting 297 dogs this year, turned Room 1231 into a VIPaws Suite, featuring a big-screen TV playing dog shows, padded armchairs, treats and the aforementioned outdoor relief area with its specially treated plastic turf and single potted bush.

The turf will be discarded after Westminster, said manager Julie Torres, who was texting photos of the dog guests to her daughter all morning.

The hotel also contracts with a service at the show's end to deep-clean the guest rooms,

which takes three days.

The New Yorker Hotel, which is hosting 100 dogs including five dozen Yorkshire terriers, offers grooming stations and dog treadmills, said sales and marketing director John Yazbeck.

Some dogs avail themselves of room service from the hotel's Tick Tock Diner, scarfing up steaks and hamburgers.

The New Yorker also accommodates Westminster guests who request the same room year after year. "The dog owners are very superstitious," said Mr. Yazbeck.

Hotels Where the VIPs Have 4 Legs »

The Manhattan NYC, Hotel Pennsylvania and other NYC hotels host hundreds of four-legged competitors for this year's Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.



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Some hotels are reluctant to discuss their Westminster business for fear of alienating people who don't like dogs. But the huge Hotel Pennsylvania in Midtown, which is hosting more than 600 four-legged competitors, along with a dog fashion show and the annual Dog Writers Association of America awards banquet, pays a public-relations professional to promote the Westminster connection.

Jerry Grymek, an enthusiastic man dressed in a charcoal suit and dog-print tie, refers to

himself as the director of pooch relations and barketing manager. “We are a five-paw hotel, the world’s most pup-ular hotel,” he crows, handing out pink-frosted dog cookies.

The hotel’s crowded lobby offered some fine dog watching. There were shiba inus riding luggage carts and puffy white Samoyeds in wire crates looking like caged clouds. A proud poodle in a black sweater and boots wandered unaccompanied. One Maltese wore a purple-velour bathrobe, like a furry Hugh Hefner .

The Penn has no dog lounge or outdoor-relief terrace, but it does have what Mr. Grymek deems the city’s largest indoor dog spa. The pop-up salon, assembled amid the oak paneling and chandeliers of the Globetrotter Ballroom, offers treadmills, 15 grooming stations and four hydraulic washtubs, where a pair of resigned-looking Afghan hounds submitted to a bath.

The Penn’s indoor dog restroom, with its red-plastic fire hydrants and wood shavings, is tended on the hour by a two-man team. “It’s like cleaning a giant litter box,” said Katelyn Waldeck, who was excited this year to be promoted from cleaner to grooming scheduler.

Westminster guests make all kinds of sleeping arrangements for their show pets. Some request a spare cot for themselves while their dogs get the bed. Others book an extra room just for their dogs.

Debby and John Behan, who traveled from Atlanta with their four border terriers, said that for the past three years they requested the same room with two double beds, sleeping one human and two dogs per bed.

They declined to reveal the room number or even the floor. “It’s a lucky room,” said Mr. Behan. “We want to make sure we get it next year.”

The pet spa had some sponsors, of course. Steve Brooks, from Los Angeles, was selling his book of recipes that people can share with their pets. He offered free samples, including “Watermelon Woofs!” Dogs, apparently, can’t resist melon slices topped with feta and mint.

At another booth, David Ezra pitched dog beds made by Sealy, the mattress company, which offered two layers of orthopedic memory foam and two layers of “pet rest” memory foam. “It’s quad-layer technology!” he says.

As the afternoon wore on, the Penn filled with furry visitors to the point where the dogs

seemed to outnumber the people.

But Mr. Grymek said there won't be any problems. The Westminster dogs, after all, are champion guests, always on their best behavior.

"It's not a madhouse at all," he says.

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