

# Accommodating travellers with pets: is Auckland ready?

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Yiqi Chen is a Master of International Tourism Management graduate from Auckland University of Technology. Raising a variety of pets since childhood combined with her passion for travelling has sparked her interest in pet tourism. Yiqi completed a Master of Marketing at Brunel University and worked for several years promoting China's metropolitan expansions before moving to New Zealand to pursue her passion.



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New Zealand is considered a nation of pet lovers, with 64 percent of households owning at least one pet [1]. The aim of this study [2] was to explore what the main considerations were for hospitality operators in Auckland with regards to offering pet-friendly services. To answer this question, several key aspects were considered: pet tourism trends; market expansion of pet-friendly accommodations; the profitability of allowing pets; and operational implications, such as additional investment and labour costs. This explorative research interviewed ten accommodation providers in Auckland: five pet-friendly and five non-pet-friendly. These operators represented owners or managers of hotels, motels, lodges and apartments spread across Auckland and Waiheke Island. Research on operators' perspectives on pet tourism is unexplored, with previous literature focusing on tourists' perceptions [3–5]. This study hopes to provide practical implications for the industry, especially for the New Zealand context.

New Zealand's pet tourism market is considered small and mainly domestic. According to popular global dog travel directory Bring Fido [6], in 2017 there were a mere fifteen pet-friendly accommodations in Auckland, in stark contrast to other cities such as New York (367), London (96) and Paris (643). Interviewees' opinions on the profitability of accommodating pet tourists varied. Non-pet operators rejected the idea of allowing pets due to an abundance of non-pet customers and were reluctant to accept perceived pet-related risks. Their pre-conceptions were likely formed by operating in silos without conducting any research on pet tourism and its market landscape. There was a genuine fear of negative online reviews which cannot be easily amended and can have significant longevity. Their key perceived risks were related to hygiene and allergy concerns for other customers. Preventative measures were believed to involve significant investment into property renovation.

Pet friendly operators, who mainly accommodated dogs, shared a different perspective through their own experiences. They expressed high trust and optimism for pet tourists and had rarely experienced any major pet-related incidents. From a hygiene and allergy point of view, the risks were considered minimal and customers bore the responsibility when stating their allergies. Pet-friendly operators stated that no additional workload or costs were incurred through accommodating pets. Significant renovations were not deemed necessary, instead relying on what they already had. However, in the unlikely

and adolescents in tourism;  
sociality in tourism;  
femininities and (paternal)  
masculinities in tourism  
research; innovative and  
qualitative research  
methodologies; and critical  
theory development in  
tourism and hospitality.



event of a major pet-related incident, the interviewees expressed that their trust towards accommodating pets would waver, meaning their tolerance of risk was not resilient. At the time of the research, pet-friendly operators were relaxed about pet policies and had not formalised them. The majority were conveying rules to pet tourists through word of mouth, such as that pets must be on a leash in public areas, instead of through written and signed agreements. Tellingly, pet-friendly operators did not perceive New Zealand's pet tourism market as lucrative. They were allowing pets as an extension of service and lacked motivation to expand or to cater for more pets.

The study highlights the potential for growth in the domestic pet tourism market despite the current stalemate, where those who allowed pets were supportive and vice versa. Improving this situation might require unified pet-friendly associations and certain levels of government intervention. In parallel, all operators should break out of silos and socialise more with their pet-friendly peers to gain knowledge and validate assumptions. Pet-friendly operators could improve engagement with pet tourists through standardised policies and formal agreements. With guidance and support from their peers, more accommodations may be capable of handling pets. Pet owners could look forward to a day when travelling with pets becomes much more accessible due to abundant pet-friendly accommodation.

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