

DINING WITH DOGS

Cafes and restaurants that don't cater for dogs are missing out on a key consumer market – dog parents see their pets as family and are willing to spend money on a pleasurable dining out experience. Kathleen Crisley sat down with a group of diners and their Greyhounds at a Christchurch cafe to ask about their decision-making when choosing a place to eat.

High on the list of this group was establishments which allow dogs inside; this means that families can go out regardless of the weather, even during the cooler months of the year.

It may surprise you to know that it is legal for dogs – other than service animals – to be invited inside but, yes, food establishments have the ability to do this as long as they have included the management of dogs in their Food Control Plan. The plans were introduced in 2016 under the Food Act and allow a risk-based approach to site management.

Operators may allow animals in areas that are used by their customers so long as they have provisions to ensure animals cannot come into contact with food that is for sale. Places where animals are allowed, and the surfaces they are likely to come in contact with, must be regularly cleaned and sanitised.

Members of the group, all non-smokers, mentioned that when they are limited to outdoor seating only they often find themselves among smokers. Secondhand smoke is an issue for both people and dogs, so they say they will avoid such establishments.

"I really like places that advertise themselves as dog friendly," says Ben's mother, Marie Southwood, and the rest of her group agrees.

Adrienne Sykes explains: "If they advertise themselves as dog-friendly, this sets the expectation for all of their customers. If someone doesn't like dogs, then they also know that they can expect to see dogs at the premises.

Equally, it tells us that it is a place we can go and our dogs will be welcomed."

Penny Story, the manager of Christchurch's The Beach Café, emphasises the importance of being known as a dog-friendly location. Located at Waimairi Beach, the café attracts those visiting the beach or walking the tracks in Bottle Lake Forest, and families at the council's Broadpark playground across the street.

"We know that for many people, their dogs are their children. We offer a large patio which welcomes children of both the two-legged and four-legged kinds."

Being near the beach, the venue has its high season during the summer so it makes good business sense to welcome as many customers as possible. "We also offer a late Friday night dining option, and this means that dog owners can sit back and enjoy a drink and a meal after a long working week and they don't have to leave their dog at home. If it is raining or windy, dogs and their parents are welcome to sit under the marquee."

Possible interaction between children and dogs are also a concern for the diners.

"A location which has space between the tables is really important," says Marie Auckram, mother of Spot. "It's okay that kids take an interest in our dogs; we just like to be asked first because often our dogs are resting and we don't want them to be startled."

The group says it is the primary responsibility of all parents – of humans and dogs – to be aware of their surroundings and to manage their children appropriately.

"No one wants a dog that is jumping on tables and stealing food from other diners; likewise, we don't want children yelling, running up to the dogs, or handling them roughly."

Some dogs are clearly not suitable for restaurant dining. I have a client who has two Beagles in her family and she is amazed that I can bring my dog out to dine. Simply put, her beagles are so driven by food that they would never settle. And their noses would surely get them in trouble with other diners.

"It's great when establishments offer a booking system that allows you to declare that you are bringing a dog (or multiple dogs) and what size the dogs are," adds Adrienne. A Greyhound will take up more space on a patio than a Chihuahua, for example.

The best dog-friendly dining establishments

Advertise themselves as dog-friendly

Let the dogs inside (for all-weather dining)

Employ staff who like dogs

Have clean water bowls ready on arrival

Create space between tables for dogs

Have a specific menu for dogs

Encourage you to come again

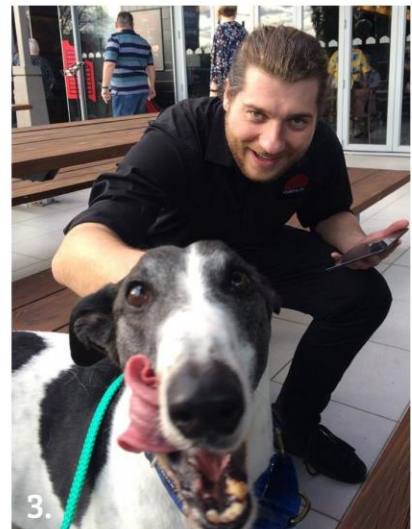
A dining establishment which welcomes dogs with fresh water bowls and treats gets high praise from this group of diners. If a café offers a dog-specific menu, that's even better.

"But what we really like," says Rachel Ah Kit, "is when it is obvious that the staff like dogs and they are prepared to interact with them and pay them attention". Just as with parents of human children who respond to positive comments about their kids, dog parents relish praise given to their dogs.

Penny Story concurs: "One of the staff perks for working

at The Beach Café is being able to see and admire all of the dogs." Staff are known to take photos of visiting dogs to be uploaded to the café's Instagram page.

I recently asked my Facebook followers to nominate their favourite dog-friendly dining location in Christchurch. Judging by the responses, it's clear that there are a number of establishments prepared to welcome dogs and their families, and, with every positive dining experience, the patrons are more than willing to promote these businesses on social media and through word-of-mouth. Win-win.



1. Drinks, nibbles and a place to rest for the dogs at the Two Thumbs Brewery.
2. A happy customer at The Beach Cafe.
3. Spot loves the attention from waiter Dylan at the Cranford Street Cobb & Co.

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