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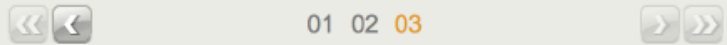
Haute dog

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Dogs don't go to heaven, but the luckiest ones end up in the next best place – Hollywood's D Pet Hotels. *Chrissy Iley* visits the luxury kennel.



Sadie gets a workout at Pant, the fitness centre in the hotel.



D Pet Hotels, Hollywood, is a place of extreme luxury and beauty where doting dog owners love to take their fur babies. No wish is too large or dog too small. Owner Alissa Cruz used to be in the property business. She and her husband had travelled the world and they knew two things: most doggy care was dirty, spartan and gave them high anxiety; and they also knew what it took to make a great hotel.

The superior suites are based on some of the chicest hotels in the world. The Paris suite for instance, with beautiful black and white photographs of Paris, is very Schragger. The New York suite reminds me of the W. All have queen-sized beds and plasma TVs to make your hound feel at home.

Throughout the hotel and the three separate dog parks spanning 560 square metres hang huge and impressive photographs by Andy Stolarek. Dogs eyes gaze down, knowing that this place is a furry heaven.



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Today my friend's puppy Sadie is having her first Hollywood photo- shoot. She is a mixed breed, perhaps Staffordshire terrier, German shepherd and Swiss mountain dog. She was rescued from a derelict building. The first picture ever taken of her was on a filthy mattress, her eyes drawing you in with a look that was frightened, hopeful and way beyond her years – perfect for an aspiring actress. She does so well that afterwards we will sign her up to the D Paws Hollywood agency for aspiring acting, modeling and dancing dogs that is affiliated with the hotel.

The dog from *Marley And Me* came to do his publicity shots in this space, but apparently Hollywood had gone right to his head. Bryan Cole, the publicist, says in a stage whisper, "I think they trained him how to behave badly and that's all he knew how to do. He would do a pose, a lie-down or a paw. But he would only hold that pose for two seconds and he'd be like, 'Right, on to the next one'."

I mention that this is just the type of place that the Osbournes might like to leave their

little dogs. "They haven't," says Cruz, "but a lot of their good friends have."

Did Mickey Rourke leave his remaining chihuahuas when he went to the Oscars? "We can't tell you that," she says, smiling. But if he had, they would have had just as good a time as their daddy, watching the ceremony on their individual plasmas.

As Sadie stretches into her queen-sized luxury bed with a little smile on her face, perhaps she is remembering that Kate Moss was discovered queuing up for an aeroplane (economy class) when she was 15. Or how Lana Turner, all those years ago, wore a tight sweater at a soda fountain just down the road. Or perhaps she is just enjoying Paris.

Cruz says that sometimes if an owner is going to Paris or New York, they like to put their dogs in Paris or New York suites so they feel they can share the experience. *Lady And The Tramp* is playing on the DVD player, but they have a selection of hundreds: *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*, *Cat And Dog Hotel*, *Bolt* and *Animal Planet: Top Picks*.

"One rock star likes to bring in the DVD of his latest tour so his little dog can watch his daddy. I can't possibly reveal who this rock star is, but let's just say everyone knows the songs, they are world famous," says Cruz.

Naturally, this is the haute couture of doggy day care in the heart of Hollywood. Actors and rock stars drop their dogs off all the time. "Sometimes we don't know who they are because the assistant drops them off, and sometimes we do but are not allowed to say," says Cruz.

What's the most eccentric wish that it has granted? "We've had so many, but if you want your dog chauffeur-delivered in a Lamborghini, we'll do it," she adds. "If you want your dog to have an all raw-food diet, we do it. One dog only eats white-meat chicken and rice, which we cook for him. We'll get any DVD, any item of clothing. The important thing is we want to create an environment that's like home for them to make the transition as smooth as possible. And if that means preparing raw eggs and raw carrots, that's fine. We adapt to their lifestyle, not the other way round.

"One dog came in and had a different dress for every day. Her name was Kensington. She was a proper lady, and she fell in love with Walter the schnauzer. But then another girl came into the relationship. It was fun to watch."

The brands the hotel carries are carefully chosen. Grooming products are at the top of the range, and the food menu offers haute cuisine. Sweet potato and bacon snacks are available, as are Happy Hips, a specialist dog food with antioxidants and glucosamine to help with dog arthritis.

If you are a dog with big ideas but a smaller budget, you might enjoy a Bow Wow suite for \$65 (Dh239) a night, which is much smaller than the others, and features a simple bed and TV. Not that you spend so much time in your suite. You play all day with other dogs or go to the doggy gym. At night your suite is gated until you are ready for your morning ablutions. I have stayed in hotel rooms that were smaller than Paris or New York, and much less cosy, for around the same price of \$110.

"Some of our clients work really long hours so the parents drop off their dogs in the morning and maybe are on set all day, and they pick them up 13 hours later rather than leave them on their own. At least they get to interact with other dogs. We have a lot of older dogs. That's the sweetest part. When they get old, they have special big hearts," Cruz says.

Has the hotel ever had to turn down a dog with a famous parent? "Um, not that I know of," Cruz answers. "But we'll not just accept anyone, that's the long and short of it. And if a dog has too much separation anxiety, we may not be the best thing for them. We want them to come and have fun. Here they have lots of activities going on; in standard kennelling they would be in a cage and let out a couple of times a day."

Starting up a massively luxurious dog hotel during a recession must have been a little scary. But Cruz seems to think that canine adoration and devotion is the one thing that is recession-proof, and D Pet Hotels is planned to be the start of a worldwide doggy empire. "When my husband and I travelled a lot, it was shocking to see the choice of places we had to put our dogs. Some of them smelt of pee or the dogs were in cages."

The spa hotel smells faintly of lemon, and the floors are sanitised with the same antibacterial that's used in veterinary hospitals. Everything is immaculate. You'd be safer in here than in many hospitals.

"Our dogs are like our children," Cruz explains. "They are the most important thing for us; so we realised that a lot of people are like that."

Cruz has a chihuahua, Twix, who is friendly and barks a lot, and a mini pinscher, Snickers, who is more reserved. He takes after her husband.

"My husband and I are yin and yang, and that's how our girls are. Yes, the rock star's dog does look a bit like the rock star, and it's definitely true that dogs take on the personalities of their owners. If a relaxed owner comes in here, I can predict a relaxed dog."

All dogs have to pass an audition, a temperament test before they are allowed into the exclusive club, and they must provide their veterinary papers to show their vaccinations are up to date.

Sadie was not at all worried about her audition. She knew that her winning smile and "I-love-you" eyes would win her a place. "It also helps that she's a puppy. She hasn't had time to learn bad habits," says my friend.

Next, Sadie goes into one of the play areas where Lucas, a golden retriever, is known as the "Hugh Hefner of retrievers". He

makes his approach and for one blissful hour they are in love. There's another "Sadie", a rescue collie with one eye, who plays with them.

"You'd think that this place would attract all the pedigree pure breeds, but in fact I get more rescue dogs," Cruz says. "It's as if the owners think they've had a hard life; now they need to make it up to them."

One-eyed Sadie's coat is gleaming from a spa treatment she had the previous week. The grooming salon will not only give your poodle a Mohawk and dye it pink, but it will also give special fur treatments for dry skin or dandruff. Sometimes dogs can take stress dermatologically. Here they can be massaged and their coats treated to tip-top gleaming condition.

Sadie was coaxed into the grooming room by a red patent leather Chrome Bones collar with Swarovski crystal bones. Then the dog was told if she ever had a weight problem, or her owner was not able to take her to the park for some enhanced running, she could go on the doggy treadmill. She also didn't mind the doggy gym, where a medium-sized treadmill and a large treadmill take pride of place. "Often owners like their dogs to have a little workout at the end of the day," Cruz says. "They do about 15 minutes usually."

A dog trainer is also on hand. "Some dogs may be toy-aggressive or fixated, or have pulling problems when they walk. Our trainer teaches them all with positive reinforcement. If they do something you don't want them to do, you give them another option that's more exciting with treats. We also do studio training whether it's runway, commercials or feature films," says Cruz.

So can they get acting classes? "Yes, and they can cry if they need to with specific clicks on a clicker."

Sadie seems to be gently listening to all of this and only momentarily worried that there might be more grooming for success. She seems very happy that next up was relaxation, in the communal TV room where dogs can rest in velvety beds or lie back on pillows shaped like bones. In the second play area, the little dogs jumped and played, all with smiles on their faces and their tails wagging.

Do they know they are being treated with such luxury? I believe they do.

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