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Dubrovnik as a pet friendly tourist destination

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Abstract

Pet friendly tourism is a rising industry and the number of pet travelers is increasing annually. This paper explores the current state of pet friendly tourism in Dubrovnik. Results of the research are based on a content analysis, where all the comments from Booking.com and Trip Advisor were analyzed. The purpose of the analysis was to see how satisfied tourists are with the pet friendly offer in Dubrovnik. Comments showed that pet owners who come to Dubrovnik are satisfied with the pet friendly accommodations, however guests who do not come with pets are less satisfied and their comments are influencing the overall comment rating. Also, research showed that some people that do not come with their pet mind staying in the accommodation, especially hotels, that are pet friendly, mainly because of the close unwanted interaction with pets and lack of "pet friendly" regulations. Lack of parks are some of the factors that pet owners were missing in Dubrovnik as well as they did not have any pet friendly transportation services.

Key words: Pet friendly, tourism, comments, Dubrovnik.

Introduction

A lot of pet owners consider their pets as members of their family and having a pet especially dog as a companion has grown over years (Herzog,2010). Dog is considered to be a person and is identified to be a very close or special friend (Sanders, 1999). That might be a reason for a new rising industry, which is pet friendly tourism. Pet owners are willing to spend money on their furry friends and might also influence their experience when traveling (Chen,Hung, & Peng,2011). There is also an economical potential of pet industry, in 2015 people in the US have spent $60.28 billion on their pets which includes $5.41 billion on walking, exercise and pet sitting services (Gantz, 2016). According to American Pet Product Association between 37 and 47 percent of people in America, own dogs, and dog are the most common pets in people's households. In 2017 69.51 billions of dollars was spent on dogs and in 2018 expenditures were even higher, 72.13 billion of dollars ("Pet Industry Market," n.d.).

Since people consider their pets as the part of their family, they also engage in taking their pets on a holiday with them, while they are expecting that their dogs will be treated as guests, like humans when they travel (Carr,2014). Since the owners are attached to their pet this increases their motivation to bring their pet on vacation with them (Hung et al., 2013). Survey conducted in Scotland, suggest that 96% of tourists think that being around pets is improving the quality and the atmosphere in a tourism destination (Visit Scotland, 2016). Main reasons pet owners want to go on holiday with their pets is because their satisfaction increases while being with their pet companion and because they do not want to leave them behind which can be stressful for their dog (Nieminen, 2015). The most famous holiday type accommodation searches in 2017 were 'Luxury', 'Beach and Coastal' and 'Dog Friendly'. (Skyes Staycation Index, May 2018).

Pet tourism is a growing industry, although it is still a complicated thing to do. Pet friendly accommodation can be defined as a property accommodation that allows specific types of pets that accompany customers during their stay, including permissions for pets to enter certain areas within the same property or even providing appropriate pet fencing outside of the accommodation (Kirillova et al.,2015).

Complexity of traveling with pets is a problem to pet owners (Sheivachman, n.d.). Even though there is no exact information about the pet tourism market, many facilities are accommodating pets and adjusting to them. Since people are travelling with their pets more than ever before, hospitality sector has responded as being not only pet friendly but pet-welcoming. People that travel with their pets want to make their trip hassle-free and want a stay that will accommodate all of their needs (Kurre A).

The demand for pet tourism is increasing and according to a survey on a Trip Advisor, 53% of tourists, out of 1,100 said that they travel with their pets, and 52 percent of them would like to stay at pet friendly accommodations. Furthermore, 20 percent of them said that they smuggled in their pets in a hotel that did not allow pets.50 percent of people said that they would pay extra to stay in a pet friendly accommodation and 48 percent of them would like that more accommodations are pet friendly.

According to American Express 27 percent of dog owners in the UK are expected to take their dogs on a holiday vacation and spend £227 million on them, meaning that it could bring millions of pounds to tourism sector.

Pet Relocation, which is the leading service provider in the international pet travel and transportation industry, they have done first annual Pet Travel Survey, where 6000 pet owners participated, and results showed that more than half of them travel with their pets at least once a year(Pet Relocation,2010). Also, other results showed that 61% of survey participants travel

more than 80km with their pet annually. Out of those 61 percent, 38 percent travel at least once a month with their pet. In 2011 they did another research where they surveyed more than 10,000 pet owners globally and surveyed showed that 58 percent decided to travel with their pets in next three months. Also, more people are deciding to travel to pet friendly places, booking accommodations and taking pet friendly airlines.

Many countries have recognized the potential in pet tourism, such as UK who have introduced "Pet Travel Scheme" which allows certain countries to enter UK without any quarantine (Newton,1999). Canada has also applied first national certification programme in 2003 for pet friendly accommodations. There is more evidence on expending pet friendly tourism globally, and now more accommodations and attractions are allowing pets such as National Park in UK, Whistler Olympic Park in Canada, Beauval Zoo in France etc.(Carr,2017).

Pet friendly hotel policies in the world

Four Seasons is a pet friendly hotel that allows only small pets which are under 7 kg, with a maximum of 2 pets per room("Pet Friendly Hotel,"2019). Pets must be on leash and comply with the local legislation requirements. They are not allowed in bars or restaurants, health clubs or pools. If any damage occurs, guests need to cover the cost of the damage done by pet.

Red Roof Inns accepts well behaved dogs and that are not restricted by any state low("Pet Friendly Hotel,"2019). Pets must be on a leash or in a carrier when walking around the property. Pets are not allowed to stay alone in the room.

Ritz Carlton hotels are not all pet friendly ("Pet Friendly Hotel,"2019). 37 out of 88 their hotels worldwide are pet friendly. But some of them are only accepting dogs. Pets must

be between 4.5 and 13.5kg. Pet Fees are between $125 and $250, nonrefundable. Some hotels offer beds, cribs, treats and toys.

Rodeway Inns do not have the same pet policy's in their hotels, it varies depends on the state and local laws("Pet Friendly Hotel,"2019). Pet owners need to have vet certificate that they are vaccinated against fleas and parasites. Most of their properties have pet friendly rooms on the ground floor. Pets must be in a cage or on a leash when they leave the room.

W Hotels, all North American properties accept pets have less than 18kg, therefore they might consider heavier ones and will be accepted only if the manager gives a permission ("Pet Friendly Hotel,"2019). One pet per room is allowed with the $100 non-refundable cleaning fee. W hotels are also making luxury custom pet beds, floor mats food bowls, ID tags and many more. All pet owners will receive a "welcome kit" with information and activities that they can do.

Pet friendly hotel policies in Dubrovnik

Hotels in the chain of Valamar Riviera, if the guest wants to come with their pet they will need to charge the certain fee (Čakić,2016). Valamar has very strict rules when it comes to allowing pets in the hotel. The room in which the guest is staying with their pet needs to have a balcony with high fence or be on the ground floor with the exit to the yard. Room needs to have enough space so that the owner can fit the cot or a basket for their pet. Cleaning those rooms need to be cleaned with the detergents that cannot harm the pet. They also only allow dogs and cats and only one pet per person. Pet owner needs to present a certificate of legal vaccination against rabies and parasitic cleansing, if the pet came from abroad, they need to have a certificate from the veterinary inspector from the country that he came from which also serves as a passport.

The Hotel Pucić Palace allows guests to stay with a pet in the room (Čakić,2016). They provide carts, beds, pans, and the only condition for them is that the pet has up to five pounds. The only limitation is that pets are not allowed in the restaurant.

Pets at the Hilton Imperial Dubrovnik Hotel are allowed also for heavier category (Čakić,2016). Hotel accepts dogs to up to 35 kg, and guests are paying a fee for their pet. They do not have special rooms for pets, therefore the room is cleaned thoroughly after.

Hotel Lero accepts pets without any restrictions (Čakić,2016). Guests pay extra for those rooms that decide to share with their pet.

The Sheraton Dubrovnik Riviera Hotel receives pets, they are not limited to dogs and cats, but they still have to be approved by the director (Čakić,2016). Owners need to pay a fee for a pet. Rooms in which the pet owners are staying are mostly with tiles for easier cleaning and maintenance. They also must announce early that they are coming with the pet. The hotel also features special beds and baskets and are limited to a pet of up to 20 kg.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to see if Dubrovnik is a good pet friendly destination. There were two questions that needed to be answered, which of the venues and activities are pet friendly and how were tourists satisfied with the offer and service in such venues. Main focus of this research will be on dogs, since 84% of pet travelers go on holiday with the dog (Farris,2010). Since the present study was conducted off season, it was deemed best to analyze the comments tourists had written upon their stay in Dubrovnik.

In the first part content analysis was conducted on two sites, first on Booking.com on the types of accommodation allowing pets. Second part of the content analysis was done by collecting all the reviews and data on pet friendly accommodations from Booking.com. Third

part of content analysis was done on Trip Advisor where all the comments that were mentioning pets were collected that included all pet and non-pet friendly venues in Dubrovnik. Comments chosen for this study included all the people who have stayed in Dubrovnik with their pets and people who have mentioned pets in their comments. No time range was set, rather comments were collected from the opening of accommodation or a venue.

For the content analysis on Booking.com, there was a total of 24 reviews regarding pets from 375 pet friendly accommodations (5 hotels and 19 apartments). The comments were coded in to two categories and divided in to positive and negative comments on pet friendly accommodations. The purpose of this content analysis was to see what the things are that tourists like and dislike in Dubrovnik regarding pet friendly accommodation and other venues. Additionally, the data was collected to answer the following questions: How comments regarding pet friendly accommodations influenced the comment rating, what are the differences between hotels and apartments and if there is a difference in number of positive and negative comments from guests that came from different regions.

For the content analysis conducted on Trip Advisor, there were a total of 34 comments from hotels (26%), restaurants (41%), apartments (15%), islands (12%), camp (3%) and a tour(3%). Comments were coded in to positive and negative comments and what did they like or dislike regarding pet friendly venues. The purpose of this analysis was to see which venue more positive/negative comments has based on if it is pet friendly or not. Other factors were also considered such as: did the comments influence the comment rating and which venue received most of positive comments.

Results

According to Booking.com there are 374 pet friendly accommodations in Dubrovnik. Majority of these are three-star accommodations (64%). Also, out of 374 pet friendly accommodations in Dubrovnik there are only 10 hotels that are allowing pets (Hotel Zagreb, Hotel Petka, Hotel Lero, Hilton Imperial Dubrovnik, The Pucic Palace, Hotel Dubrovnik, Tirena Sunny Hotel by Valamar, Boutique Hotel Stari Grad, Villa Dubrovnik, Valamar Club Dubrovnik, Remisens Hotel Albatros, Remisens Hotel Epidaurus).

As noted through secondary research, there are no general rules regarding having a pet friendly accommodation, each pet friendly hotel has their own rule. For example, Ritz Carlton accepts pets that are between 4.5 and 13.5kg, while Four Seasons allows only small pets that are under 7 kg.

The overall results have shown that people who come with their pets to Dubrovnik in general have positive comments (84% from Booking.com and 58.3% from Trip Advisor) about Dubrovnik pet friendly accommodations(Table 5)(Table4).

Analysis of Booking.com comments

Comments analyzed from booking.com were all comments regarding pet friendly accommodations.

Results from Booking.com shown that there are 87.5% of people left a positive comment regarding pet friendly accommodations in Dubrovnik and 12.5% were negative comments(Table4).

Based on a qualitative analysis of all the comments, people that stayed with their dog in the hotel said that they liked that they received amenities for their dog, such as, bowls for the food and water and a dog bed: “We had our dog with us and a doggy bed and food and

water bowls were waiting for us in the room." (Suncica1,2019). Apartments also received positive comments regarding amenities that pet owners got, as well as very good service.

In the sample of the rating where the highest rating is 10, positive and negative comments have influenced the comment rating, where average rating for positive comments was 8.87 (*SD* = 1.61) and for negative comment average comment rating was lower (*M* = 6.8, *SD* = 1.67) (Table 1).

General accommodation rating was also lower for accommodations that had negative comments and higher for positive ones, accommodations that had positive comments average comment rating was 9.03 (*SD* = 0.53) and accommodations that had negative comments had a an average 8.233(*SD* = 0.40) (Table 2).

There was no significant difference regarding where the guests came from, but it was interesting to note that guests from Northern Europe and Northern America had more negative comments (33.3%) than the gusts from Easters Europe (0%), Southern Europe (0%) and Western Europe (16.7%) regarding pet friendly accommodation (Table 3).

Guests staying in apartments were more satisfied with the pet friendly accommodation and have left more positive comments (94.7%) than guests that stayed in hotels (60%)(Table 4). Hotels had more negative comments because of no areas around hotels to walk the dog and because of untrained service: "There are hardly any green areas around the hotel to take a dog out. Our first cleaning lady was scared of dogs and hence didn't want to enter the room."(Nathalie,2016).

Trip Advisor results

Comments analyzed from Trip Advisor were all comments regarding pets, no matter if the venues are pet friendly or not. Comments search analysis was based on the opinions that

people have about pet friendly and non-pet friendly venues. There were 34 comments collected from trip advisor from different venues (hotels, restaurants, apartments, islands, tours and camps).

Most of the people who had left *positive comments* about a venue being *pet friendly* (61.8%), were mentioning that pet owners received amenities for their dog "We had our dog with us and a doggy bed and food and water bowls were waiting for us in the room." (Table 5).

There were 17.6% of people that left a *negative comment* regarding pets about a venue that is *not pet friendly* (Table 5).. Most of those were referred to the transportation and lack of places to walk the dog: "But when we wanted to go to Dubrovnik with our dog, we discovered that the camping doesn't have its own bus and the regular bus doesn't allow pets." (Federico C., 2014) and "You should note though that the road where the property is located is not very dog walker friendly. It is narrow with no sidewalks. We usually drove our dogs with us to the nearest village where there were nice sidewalks (1 km away)" (seaglass22).

Guests that left a negative comment (11.8%) on a venue that is pet friendly were dissatisfied mostly because they don't like dogs being around them, especially when they eat: "Only criticism was that a lady was allowed to bring her pet dog down to breakfast one day - dogs and eating do not mix in my book!"(Cezanneman,2013) (Table 5).. Also, they were complaining about the noise (barking dog in the next room): "Dog in next room woke us up the first morning,"(mechret,2013). Other guests that came to the restaurant with their dog had positive comments just for the fact that it is pet friendly, and they were surprised that the dogs are allowed in the restaurants, because they didn't see a lot of pet friendly restaurants in Croatia "The pleasant surprise was that you can come with your pet which is very rarely in Croatia" (Sanja1964,2013).

Some guests (8.8%) were also satisfied that some venues are not pet friendly such as Islands like Lokrum (Nature Reserve): “There are no dogs allowed on the Island, so bunnies and peacocks run around the island freely”(Dyspeptic_Spirit,2016)(Table 5).

Comments regarding pet friendly tourism categories did not make an influence on general rating, but they had an influence on comment rating itself.

Analysis on Trip Advisor, where the maximum rating is 5 has shown that positive comments on pet friendly venues have positively influenced the comment rating ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 0.30$) and negative comments on a venue that is not pet friendly had negative influenced comment rating itself ($M=3.33$, $SD = 1.366$) (Table 8). Also, negative comments on pet friendly tourism categories had an average comment rating of 4.75 ($SD = .577$) while positive comments on non-pet friendly tourism categories had an average comment rating of 4.67($SD = 0.57$).

Hotels were mostly criticized for being a pet friendly venue (75%), the largest number of positive comments for pet friendly venues was for restaurants (57%)(Table 6). Analyzed comments also suggest that people are satisfied with specific islands not being pet friendly (66%), while there were also a few complaints about islands not being pet friendly (33%), and the not-pet friendly hotels (33%).

Discussion

Concerning that the pet friendly tourism is a growing industry, we can see that Dubrovnik is not living up to the standards as other pet friendly hotels around the world do. There is a lot of space for Dubrovnik to improve. If pet friendly venues in Dubrovnik want to have high rating on Booking or Trip advisor, they need to adjust to the standards to those pet friendly venues in the world.

There are many accommodations that are classified as being pet friendly, even though those accommodations do not differ from any other that is not pet friendly, only the fact that they classify themselves as being pet friendly. There are no rules, only few pet friendly hotels have standards regarding pets in their hotels. We could also see that some not pet friendly people had complaints regarding pets in the hotel, and how the rules are not set right, such as dogs eating the food from the buffet, which is rarely seen in other pet friendly hotels in the world. Transportation is another problem that pet owners encountered in Dubrovnik, there is no public transport that allows pets, and taxi drivers are mostly not willing to drive anyone with the pet.

As shown from the results there is a lack of places where tourists can go with their pet, there are no dog parks and no beaches where pet owners can take their dog, only few local people know about those beaches, which makes it hard for pet tourists and their pets.

Accommodations, especially hotels that accept pets need to be more respectful toward pet owners, if they are certified as being pet friendly they need to treat their pet owner guests same as everyone else and give them the same treatment. According to the data from the secondary research on downgrading guests because pet owners came to the hotel with their dog is also what Dubrovnik pet friendly hotels need to change. As other global pet friendly hotels have special rooms just for pet owners, those rooms are mostly on the ground floor so that they can be on the terrace, or if the ground floor has a yard with a higher fence so that dogs cannot jump over. Rooms need to be cleaned with special detergents which will not harm the dog.

Hotels in Dubrovnik do not have trained staff, nor do they have cleaning supplies that are pet friendly. Cleaning ladies do not want to clean the room because the pet is inside, which is not professional and does not fit in with other hotels in the world. There must also be

rules for pet owners, just like other pet friendly hotels have such as Four Seasons hotels, when the dog is outside of the room he needs to be on the leash, he can be in the restaurant, only if he is well behaved and does not eat the food from the restaurant ("Pet Friendly Hotel,"2019).

As shown in the results, pet owners that were staying in the hotels were extremely satisfied with the amenities like bowls for the water, bed, food etc. that they received in the room for their dog and their rating was very high, therefore pet friendly accommodations in Dubrovnik should provide those amenities to pet owners to increase their satisfaction which will result in higher comment rating.

Enriching the tourist offer with a friendly relationship with animals is no longer just a mere trend in the world, but a matter that implies in a serious tourist destination (Kirillova et al.,2015). In Dubrovnik, however, there are many hotels and apartments that accept guests who bring their pets on vacation , and hopefully they will adjust them even more to the conditions that will allow pets and their owners to stay in their accommodation units in order to bring them to the standards that are set in the world.

Accommodations and other venues might benefit from pet owners, considering that they are willing to spend more, hotels may gain more profit on guests that come with pets ("travelers pawsitively enjoy",2013). Although there are a lot of risks that need to be taken in to consideration when going pet friendly like damages, therefore those risks need to be well communicated to the pet owners so that both sides know what the consequences are if something happens. More money needs to be invested for cleanliness.

The limitation for this research was that it was done off season. Additional research needs to be done through interviews and questionnaires with both hotel staff, apartment owners and tourists themselves. This will allow for a more detailed insight on how Dubrovnik

is doing regarding pet friendly offer and service. So, the present study is a preliminary study in a very important field of research given the growing pet friendly industry.

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Table 1

Influence of positive and negative comments on comment rating

	M	***SD***
POSITIVE	8.876	1.6115
NEGATIVE	6.800	1.6703

Table 2

Influence of positive and negative comments on general rating

	M	***SD***
POSITIVE	9.038	.5371
NEGATIVE	8.233	.4041

Table 3

Percentage of positive and negative comments based on the guest's region

	POSITIVE	**NEGATIVE**
NORTHERN EUROPE	66.7%	33.3%
EASTERN EUROPE	100.0%	0.0%

SOUTHERN EUROPE	100.0%	0.0%
WESTERN EUROPE	83.3%	16.7%
NORTH AMERICA	66.7%	33.3%

Table 4

Percentage of positive and negative comments based on the type of accommodation

	POSITIVE	**NEGATIVE**
HOTEL	60.0%	40.0%
APARTMENT	94.7%	5.3%
TOTAL	87.5%	12.5%

Table 5

Percentage of positive and negative comments from pet friendly and non-pet friendly venues

	FREQUENCY	**PERCENTAGES**

Positive comment - pet friendly	21	61.8%
Negative comment - pet friendly	4	11.8%
Positive comment - not pet friendly	3	8.8%
Negative comment - not pet friendly	6	17.6%

Table 6

Percentege of positive and negative comments from pet friendly and non-pet friendly venues

	HOTEL	RESTA-URANT	APAR-TMENT	ISLAND	TOUR	CAMP
Positive comment - pet friendly	19.0%	57.1%	19.0%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%
Negative comment - pet friendly	75.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Positive comment - not pet friendly	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%

Negative comment - not pet friendly	33.3%	16.7%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	16.7%

Table 7

Influence of positive and negative comments on general rating from both pet friendly and non-pet friendly venues

	M	***SD***
Positive comment - pet friendly	4.381	.4718
Negative comment - pet friendly	4.250	.5000
Positive comment - not pet friendly	4.500	.0000
Negative comment - not pet friendly	4.250	.6124

Table 8

Influence of positive and negative comments on comment rating from pet friendly and non-pet friendly venues

	M	***SD***

Positive comment - pet friendly	4.90	.301
Negative comment - pet friendly	4.75	.500
Positive comment - not pet friendly	4.67	.577
Negative comment - not pet friendly	3.33	1.366