

NEW TOURISM TREND: TRAVELLING WITH PETS OR PET SITTING AT A PET HOTEL?

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Abstract Animals have been an important part of human life for ages. Nowadays, some people even treat pets as life-companions, which accompany them even on vacations. The main purpose of this article is a) to identify issues that owners deal with while planning a trip or when travelling with their pets and b) to present the attitudes of Slovenian pet owners regarding pet hotels. The research was conducted in Slovenia in 2019 and 2020, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The findings show that Slovene pet owners rather travel with their pets than put them in pet hotels, particularly when going on vacation by car and travelling on short trips through Slovenia or in neighbouring countries. Regarding pet hotels, pet owners are mostly concerned about professional care for their pets and less about the price of the service. The study gives important information to tourist accommodation providers and pet hotel providers on how to adapt their services to their 'pet guest' and satisfy the pet owners.

Keywords:

tourism,
human-animal
bond,
pets in tourism,
travelling with
pets,
pet hotels

1 Introduction

In the 21st century, tourism does not only involve the movement of people, but also the movement of pets (Leggat & Speare, 2000) and other non-human “travellers” (e.g. electronic devices, robots, pet rocks, etc.) (Ivanov, 2018). In the last few years, the number of tourists travelling with their pets has been increasing (Condor Ferries, 2021). Carr & Cohen (2009) highlight travelling or holidaying with family pets as the fastest growing niche market in tourism. Consequently, tourist accommodation providers have been adapting to this trend and answering this demand by allowing coexistence of pets and their owners in tourist accommodations. In Slovenia, e.g., the coexistence of guests and their pets in tourist accommodation facilities is even regulated by a special hospitality by-law.

Many researchers find that safety and comfort of the pets is the main issue the owners are dealing with, while planning trips or travelling with their pets (Leggat & Speare, 2000; Kirillova, Lee & Lehto, 2015; Peng, Chen & Hung, 2014). Desire to travel with pets is strong, but actual rates of travelling with pets might be comparatively low due to the insufficiency of pet-friendly accommodations (Carr & Cohen, 2009).

Due to various problems that arise when travelling with pets, some owners prefer to leave their pets at home with people they trust (non-professional care) or seek organized care, like pet hotels (Jetpet resort, 2021). Therefore, “hotels” for animals have been established as facilities that take professional care for pets in the absence of their owners. In Slovenia, ‘hotel for animals’ is a formal term taken from a special by-law (Rules on the protection of pets, 2009).

Exploring the relationships between owners and their pets is a common topic of studies (Berryman, Howells & Lloyd-Evans, 1985; Archer, 1997; Hall et al, 2004; Huselja, 2008; Jurgiel et al, 2020; etc.). However, only a limited amount of research can be found in existing literature on the pet-owners’ attitudes to their pets related to travel and to their decision to take pets with them (or not) when going on vacation. In Slovenia, this is the first study of its kind and is, therefore, of an exploratory nature. It is focused on Slovenian pet owners’ overall perception of travelling with pets, on the struggles they deal with while planning a trip, and on the

struggles they face with while travelling with pets. Its goal is to find the answers to two research questions:

- **RQ1:** How do pet owners in Slovenia perceive traveling with their pets?
- **RQ2:** What is the Slovenian pet owners' attitude towards pet hotels?

The two research questions were developed on findings from existent literature, which clearly show that pets are important part of many people's lives, to the point where they even take their pets on holidays (Ying et al, 2021). If their pets are not able to accompany them on travel they search for professional care for them while being on the trip.

2 Literature review

2.1 From animals to pets

The history of human-animal interaction dates way back to ancient times (Krishna, 2010). Moreover, the domestication of animals is considered one of the most important turning points in human history (Alberta, 2020). The first species that made a pass from wild to domesticated animals were wolves, the ancestors of today's dogs (Serpell, 1996). First, strong DNA evidence of that domestication dates back to 14,700 B.C.(Starr, 2017); therefore, the idea that dogs are man's best friend is a very old and valid concept (Lear, 2012).

Animals continue to play an important role in people's lives (Casciotti & Zuckerman, 2016) and some of them have even become an integral part of their families (Greenbaum, 2004). Numerous scientific and professional articles confirm that today animals, especially pets, are very useful members in the society and have positive effects on humans in many ways (Blenkuš, 2019). As the human population increases, so does the pet population (Walden, 2017). In Europe, 88 million households own a pet (FEDIAF, 2020) and statistics clearly show that industry related to pets is booming (Puac, 2021).

Demello (2012) states that an animal becomes a pet when it is given a name that allows people to interact with it and consequently they can become emotionally attached to it. Britannica (2020) defines pets as 'any animal kept by human beings as

a source of companionship and pleasure'. For Shell (1986) the term 'pet' is indispensable in expressing the relationship of intimacy between certain people and selected domesticated species.

In recent years, however, the term 'pet' has been gradually replaced by the term 'companion animal'; the new expression is more used in literature, but in public, the term 'pets' is still more common than 'companion animal'. Companion animals or pets are deeply loved and cared for (Markwell, 2015). They contribute to their owners' well-being and provide important physiological and relational benefits to their owners (Walsh, 2009). A segment of people exists that have even replaced human company with their companion animals/pets, making them immensely attached to them. As pets play such an important role in the lives of many people (Salmon & Salmon, 1981), some owners do not want to be separated from them when they travel and they take them even on vacation (Carr & Cohen, 2009).

2.2 Pets in tourism

Traveling with pets often involves more negotiation and restrictions than many other forms of tourism (Ying et al., 2021). There might be challenging policies that prohibit public transport use (Kent, Mulley & Stevens, 2020), contracting dangerous diseases (Trotz-Willias & Gradoni, 2003), or simply troubles finding suitable accommodation that allows pets as guests (Car & Cohen, 2009). While travelling, pets can be exposed to various risks (Kirillova, Lee & Lehto, 2015).

Travelling with pets might be also challenging while animals are extremely different from one another in terms of character. This is the important reason for the pet owner to estimate whether it makes sense to take a pet with him on vacation and causing it unnecessary distress. The fact that animals might not be fully capable of self-control (Ying et al., 2021) can lead into severe pet health problems, injuries, or even deaths during a trip if owners do not choose the appropriate way of transportation.

To minimize the inconveniences that might occur to pats when traveling with their owners, various providers have developed a number of gadgets. Among these products we can find transport boxes, seat covers, portable bags, pillows, drinking and feeding utensils, leashes, products for keeping animals clean, first aid kits, etc. (Furrytravelers, 2020; Petco Animal Supplies, 2021; Pettravelstore, 2021; etc.).

Pet owners who travel with their pets have become one of the fastest growing tourism segment. Many destinations and providers of tourism services have recognised that and designed special facilities and services to satisfy a wide array of pet-loving tourists (Camilleri, 2018). They allow pets to be accommodated in the same space as their owners (Carr & Cohen, 2009).

In some occasions, particularly due to different travel restraints, it is more appropriate to leave pets at home, no matter how much people love them and may want to be with their pets at all times. To avoid animals' distress, it is better for pet owners to find another way of taking care for their pet, which might include professional care, such as pet hotels.

2.3 Pet hotels

The term 'pet hotel' is used for the facility that takes professional care for animals while their owners are traveling (Anderson, 2021). In Slovenia, they are officially named 'hotels for animals' and are subject to specific regulation that requires providers of such care to undergo prior certified training. The training approved by the special institution (named Administration for food safety, veterinary and plant protection - in continuation: AFSVPP), includes technical and administrative aspects of legislation regarding animal care. People, who work at pet hotels are acquainted with animal physiology and their physical needs (in particular for water and food), with animal behaviour, and with the concept of stress. They are also trained about the practical aspects of animal treatment, care for animals in the case of emergency, and their own safety. Pet hotel owners are subject to regular inspections of the veterinary institution. They must keep detailed records about the accepted pets and their owners (Rules on the protection of pets, 2009).

In practice, services offered by the hotels for animals differ considerably. As the regulation define only the minimum conditions for the operation of pet hotels, there are significant differences in equipment and in the services. Some providers offer luxury dog hotels, where dogs can even enjoy acupuncture, massages, fitness centre, room service, etc. (Rupar, 2021). The closest luxury pet hotel to Slovenia is in Zagreb, where three different categories of apartments are offered for the pet care; there is a luxury spa for dogs, and services of the highest quality (Krstić, 2020).

Despite the fact that hotels for animals hotels offer very different services from traditional hotels for accommodating people, there is a common denominator between them. Animal hotels solve the problems of people who travel, but for various reasons cannot travel with their pet.

3 Methodology

The empirical research was conducted in Slovenia in 2020 and 2021. It consisted of combination of the qualitative and quantitative research methods. It designed and conducted in two steps.

Table 1: Methodology design

Research step	Type of research	Source of data	Methods for data collection	Methods for data processing	Methods for results presentation
1st	Qualitative	Primary	Focus group	Content analysis	Description
2nd	Quantitative	Primary	Online survey	Descriptive statistics	Description, Tables, Graphs

Source: own.

In the first step, the following data were collected in the focus group: on the pet owners' attitude towards pets, experiences and constraints when they travel with pets and their opinion related to pet hotels. The first researcher moderated discussion among 10 participants, 6 women and 4 men. Participants of the focus group were chosen from different geographical areas in Slovenia (all 10 from southern Slovenia), from different types of settlements (3 from rural and 7 from urban), different age groups (half of them were less than 25 and 2 of them were over 50 years old), and

from different education levels (half of participants had completed secondary school, one master's degree, and the rest had a bachelor's degree).

The pre-set questions helped in the development of the discussion, in encouraging participants to express their opinions and in guiding the discussion if participants strayed from the research subject related to pets, travelling and pet hotels. To gain a broader view and understanding of the topics and to encourage group interaction between the participants, the focus group mediator sometimes even created disagreements between the participants.

The collection of data in the focus group took place on 6 November 2020. Due to Covid-19 movement restrictions and strict lockdowns, the focus group was conducted via Zoom. With the prior consent of the participants in the focus group, the whole conversation was recorded; nevertheless, the anonymity of the participants was guaranteed. A transcript of the discussion was made based on the audio recording. The statements and opinions were processed using content analysis. The results are presented in descriptive form. The focus group discussion took place in three parts related to chosen topics (relationships between owners and their pets, travelling with pets and opinion about pet sitting in pet hotel), so the findings are also presented in three content sets.

In the second step of the empirical research, online survey was used for collection of quantitative data. The aim of the quantitative study was to get additional data for answering the research questions.

The questionnaire for online survey was based on the existing literature related to pet travelling, on results obtained from the focus groups, and on different questionnaires from other studies similar to ours (e.g. Mariti et al., 2012; Kirilova, Lee & Lehto, 2015). The questionnaire was designed by using the following types of questions: closed-ended questions with only one possible answer, multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions, and questions with Likert scale type answers (measuring the scale of agreement, satisfaction and frequency).

The survey was sent out in February, 2021. The online survey was conducted using website 1ka, which is a very common tool for online surveys in Slovenia. The questionnaire was published on the popular social network Facebook and 10 Slovenian closed Facebook groups with the main theme on travelling or topics related to pets. The number of members in closed groups ranged between 2,000 and 65,000 people of different age groups and from different areas of Slovenia. Before posting the survey in groups we obtained permission from administrators. The survey was also posted on one of the first researchers' private profile in a public post, which was also shared among friends on their wall, thus reaching an even larger audience.

To be qualified to fill out the survey, respondents were required to be pet owners, or to have had a pet in their household during the last year, though currently and temporarily they are not pet owners. The chosen sample of participants was given 12 days to fill in the questionnaire. Out of 864 people who opened the survey, 291 correctly completed it. The questionnaire contained 2 conditional "if" questions: if the responder answered 'no' at a certain point of the survey, they were unable to give answers to the following questions. Consequently, the number of the sample differs three times; a further explanation is presented in section 4.2.

The data from the online questionnaire were exported from the 1ka website and analysed with the help of the SPSS program. For data analysis, statistical methods were used: frequency percentage, mean and standard deviation. The results are presented in the form of tables, graphs and in descriptive form.

4 Results

4.1 Focus group results

The findings of focus group research are presented in three subparts:

- The relationship that participants have with their pets
- Pet-owners' opinions about travelling with their pets and their possible travel habits with them and
- Views from focus group participants regarding professional care in pet hotels

Relationship that owners have with their pets

The results reveal that participants in the focus group have different relations with their pets. Majority of them perceive their pets as family members and are emotionally very attached to them; some of them even perceive them as 'their children'. The other members of the group do not perceive their animals as pets and not even allow them to enter their house or apartment.

We also noticed differences in perceptions of pets of the same species within a single family, e.g. the purebred dog can sleep on the bed while the mixed breed is not even allowed to enter the common living spaces and does not travel with the family.

Travelling with pets

Focus group participants expressed different approaches about traveling with their pets. Participants with a high emotional attachment to their pets also travel with them. This applies especially for travelling with dogs. Focus group participants think that travelling with other types of pets (except dogs) would cause unnecessary distress to them. They are certain that it is only appropriate or acceptable to travel with dogs, while other types of animals must be excluded from accompanying their owners on tourist trips or vacations.

The participants who travel with their pets regularly travel with dogs on day trips around Slovenia. They also travel and spend the night in various accommodations with pets within the country and in the neighbouring ones, particularly to Croatia. When owners travel with their pets to Croatia, Italy, Austria, or Hungary, they always chose private tourist accommodations where pets are allowed. Two of the participants also noted that their dog not only travels with them in private accommodation, but also in traditional hotels that welcome pets.

Those focus group participants who travel with their dog completely adapt their trips or vacation to the needs of their animal. If the dog is not suitable for participation in a given tourist activity, they leave it at their place of accommodation for the time they are engaged in such activity. All participants who travel with a dog are certain that their dog enjoys traveling with them and thus they enrich its life.

About care in hotels for animals (pet hotels)

None of the pet owners in the focus group had ever used services of pet hotels. Due to various concerns and limitations regarding their pets, they would not even choose professional care in a pet hotel in the future. Participants strongly believe that their pet is not accustomed to separation from the family; it would be in a crisis were it placed in a professional care away from familiar places or people. Owners believe that changing the environment would not suit their pet, because in the past it led to health and behavioural problems, also due to separation from family. Furthermore, in most cases, pets of the focus group owners are not accustomed to coexisting with other animals, which can be a problem in a professional care, where they take care of more pets at once.

Pet owners with a low level of attachment to their pet were highlighting the potential behavioural problems of their animals. Some pets are not accustomed to staying indoors, which means that they are unsuitable for handing over to professional hotel care. Participants are afraid and do not rule out the possibility that their pet will get sick while staying at the pet hotel. Some pets had previously health problems and are not vaccinated, making the possibility of care in animal hotels impossible. Owners are most concerned about the fact that their pet would be lonely and miss the human company and interaction that they are used to every day at home.

Moreover, pet owners in the focus group do not trust the staff at pet hotels and doubt in the proper care of their pet. They believe that an animal placed in hotel care would not be given the same attention as at home. They are sure that they would think about their pet in professional care all the time on a trip and it would be difficult for them to relax and enjoy the vacation.

Most participants have the opinion that the cost of professional care in a pet hotel is excessive and that everyone would much rather use professional pet care at home. One of the main reasons why focus group participants never used hotel care is the fact that everyone has someone to take care of their pets while they are away from home on vacation. For help with their pets, they always ask family members, friends, or neighbours.

4.2 Online survey results

The first group of the results of the quantitative research (Table 2, Figure 1) are based on 291 answers collected by online questionnaire. The second group of the results (who passed the first “iP” question) were processed using 176 answers (Table 3-9 and Figure 2), while only those pet-owners who take their pets with them when travelling answered the following questions in the questionnaire. The third group of results (Table 10-11) are based only on 35 answers, while only so many participants have had experiences with pet hotels.

Table 2 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the survey participants. More women than men answered the questionnaire. More than the half of the respondents belonged to the age group 25-44. A good tenth was under 25 years old, while a quarter was between 45 and 64 years old. The largest share of respondents had a tertiary or higher level of education. Most respondents live in smaller cities or in rural areas. Only 5.2% of respondents live alone, a quarter live with another member of the family, and most have more than two household members.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the study sample

		f	f%
Gender	Male	70	24.1
	Female	220	75.9
Age	Less than 25	34	11.7
	25-44	175	60.1
	45-64	79	27.1
	65 and more	3	1.0
Education	Primary	7	2.4
	Secondary	104	35.7
	Bachelor	131	45.0
	Master	39	13.4
	Doctor	10	3.4
Settlement	Ljubljana with suburbs	45	1.5
	Larger city with suburbs	26	8.9
	Smaller city with suburbs	87	29.9
	Rural site	133	45.7
Household	One	15	5.2
	Two	75	25.8
	Three	69	23.7
	Four	74	25.4
	More than four	58	19.9
Total		291	100.0

Source: own

Note: f- frequency (n=291), f% -percentage

Figure 1 shows that 40% of respondents never take their pet on trips or vacations; however, more than half of the pet owners do (60%).

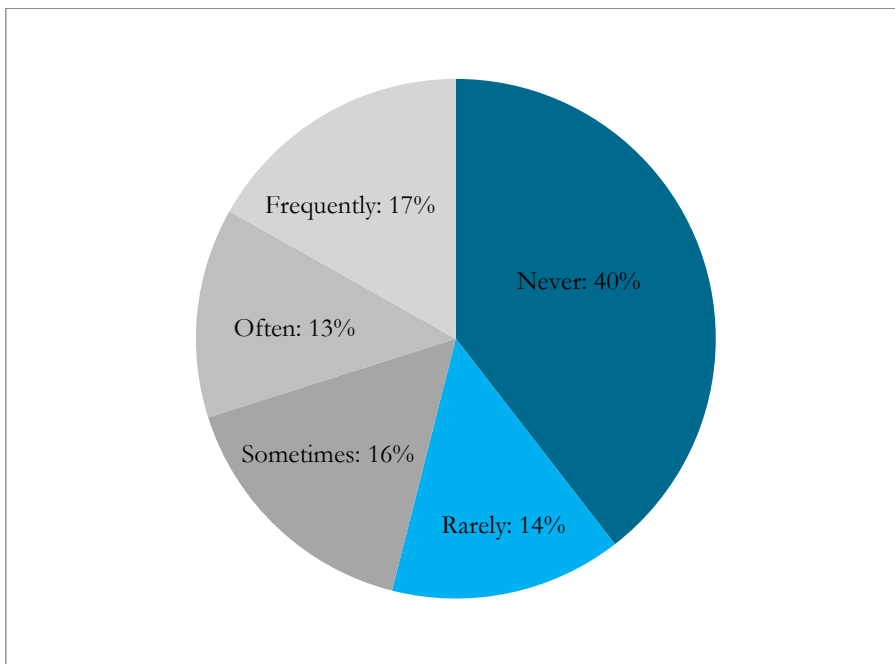


Figure 1: Travelling with pets

Source: own.

The following answers (Table 3 to 9) were processed on 176 respondents, those, who travel with their pet.

Most Slovene pet owners are accompanied on their journeys by dogs (92%) (Table 3). Some owners travel with cats (8%), with rodents (1.7%), with smaller or larger birds (0.6%), and with other species (1%), such as lizards or guinea pigs. In general, results reveal that the share of pets other than dogs that travel with their owners on vacation is very small.

The value of all travelling pets (f%) exceeds 100% because several answers were possible due to the fact that some owners travel with more than just one type of pet. For example, some owners travel with a dog and a cat, or with a dog and a lizard, etc.

Table 3: Pet species that travel with owners

	f	f%
Dog	162	92.0
Cat	14	8.0
Rodents	3	1.7
Birds	1	0.6
Other	2	1.1

Source: own.

Note: f- frequency (n=176), f% -percentage.

Table 4 presents the choice of travel destinations. This question allowed only one answer. Most owners (28.5%) travel with their pet in Slovenia and in its bordering countries. Out of 176 participants that travel with their pet, one-fifth of them travel only in Slovenia, while only tenth of them travel with their pet everywhere they go.

Table 4: Choice of travel destinations

	Only SLO	SLO and border countries	Everywhere	Answered	Missing (if)	Total
f	61	83	32	176	115	291
f%	21,99	28,5	11.0	60.5	39.5	100.0
VP	35%	47%	18%	100%		
CP	34.7%	81.8%	100%			

Source: own.

Note: f- frequency (n=176), f% -percentage, VP-valid percentage, CP-cumulative percentage.

When travelling with pets, respondents rarely use other types of transport (Table 5) than car. Driving is extremely prevalent over travel by other means of transport. The lowest asymmetric mean and standard deviation show that, when traveling with pets, Slovenians rarely use air travel. The biggest fluctuations of opinions are when respondents are using a motorhome as a type of transport. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

Table 5: Choice of transportation

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Other	77	1	5	1.44	1.045
Plane	176	1	5	1.06	.336
Train	176	1	5	1.27	.695
Ship	176	1	5	1.39	.875
Motorhome	176	1	5	1.44	1.057
Car	176	1	5	4.37	.977

Source: own.

Note: N-number of answers, Min-lowest value, Max-highest value, M-mean, SD-standard deviation.

When asked about the number of overnight stays with pets on the trip (Table 6), 176 out of 291 answered - only those respondents who actually travel with their pets. Only a fifth of the respondents do not go with their pet on longer trips, but make daily trips with them. Most respondents coexist with a pet for more than just one day; even more, they stay with their pets for more than a week when they are travelling together.

Table 6: Number of overnights with pets

	Only day trips	1	2-3	4-7	More than 1 week	Answered	Missing (if)	Total
f	39	6	34	33	64	176	115	291
f%	13.4	2.1	11.7	11.3	22.0	60.5	39.5	100.0
VP	22.2	3.4	19.3	18.8	36.4	100.0		
CP	22.2	25.6	44.9	63.6	100.0			

Source: own.

Note: f-frequency (n=35), f%-percentage, VP-valid percentage, CP-cumulative percentage.

Table 7 shows the degree of agreement with certain statements in relation to the reasons why respondents do not go on a trip with their pet. The results show that the most important reason is the fact that owners on a trip with a pet cannot attend all the desired activities. Respondents largely agree that taking a pet on vacation is too challenging because they have to adapt too many things (e.g. choice of transportation, destination, and accommodation) to their pet. The highest standard deviation (1.345) suggests that there are also large deviations regarding whether traveling on holiday with pets is too stressful, because owners have to adapt too many things to meet their pet’s needs. The lowest score in all statements refers to the occurrence of pet death along the way (1.32) and lowest standard deviation of 0.750 indicates minimal deviations in response to this claim. Respondents’ answers show that it is not very common in Slovenia for pets to have health problems when traveling. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 7: Problems, related to pets when traveling with them

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
I have already experienced the death of my pet while I travelled with it.	291	1	5	1.32	0.750
On trips, my pet experiences severe health problems.	291	1	5	1.94	1.089
I am afraid the pet would suffer injuries and die.	291	1	5	2.30	1.260
My pet is not suitable for travel.	291	1	5	2.34	1.323
On the trip, my pet has behavioural problems.	291	1	5	2.93	1.330
On trips, my pet has mild health problems.	291	1	5	2.51	1.301
It's too stressful because I have to adapt too many things to animals.	291	1	5	2.68	1.345
I can't attend all the activities I want with a pet.	291	1	5	3.33	1.227

Source: own.

Note: N-number of answers, Min-lowest value, Max- highest value, M-mean, SD-standard deviation.

Respondents often travel with their pet on day trips, on vacation or other tourist activities. The lowest standard deviation indicates that many respondents travels with their pet precisely because of tourist motives. The lowest number of respondents travel with their pet on business or for exhibition purposes. Among other reasons for traveling with pets, 70 respondents also listed different types of visits (friends, family, etc.) or change of their residence, hiking, etc. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 8: Reasons for traveling with pet

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Other.	40	1	5	2.50	1.601
I travel with pets for business or exhibition purposes.	176	1	5	1.63	1.114
I take pets with me on vacation or tourist activities.	176	1	5	4.18	.969
I travel with pets on day trips.	176	1	5	4.23	1.061
Valid N	176				

Source: own.

Note: N-number of answers, Min-lowest value, Max- highest value, M-mean, SD-standard deviation.

When respondents do not take their pets with them on holiday, they find care for them with relatives, friends, or neighbours (Table 9). During their absence, they rarely find any options for pet-sitting (1.41), which is also confirmed by the low standard deviation of 0.975. Among the ‘other’ options, participants listed leaving their pet with well-known people with a high level of trust. Leaving animals alone during absence of its owner is not a common practice, which is shown by the mean of 1.19 and the low standard deviation of 0.685. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

Table 9: Care for pet during owner’s absence

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Other.	69	1	5	1.41	.975
During my absence I leave my animal alone at home.	291	1	5	1.19	.685
I arrange for care at a pet hotel.	291	1	5	1.35	.891
I provide professional and paid pet care at my home.	291	1	5	1.46	.973
I leave the care of my pet to relatives/friends/neighbours.	291	1	5	3.69	1.339
Valid N	291				

Source: own.

Note: N-number of answers, Min-lowest value, Max- highest value, M-mean, SD-standard deviation.

Out of 291 surveyed people, only 35 (12%) had used services of pet hotels at least once (Figure 2). The study showed that most pet owners do not have experience with pet hotels and most of them prefers to travel with pets or look for another form of care.

When asked about the frequency of using services of a pet hotel (Table 10), only 35 people or 12% of all sample answered this and the following questions. Majority of the responders of this group left their pet in a pet hotel 1-3 times. A fifth of the responders left their pets in a pet hotel 4-7 times, while a little less more than 10 times.

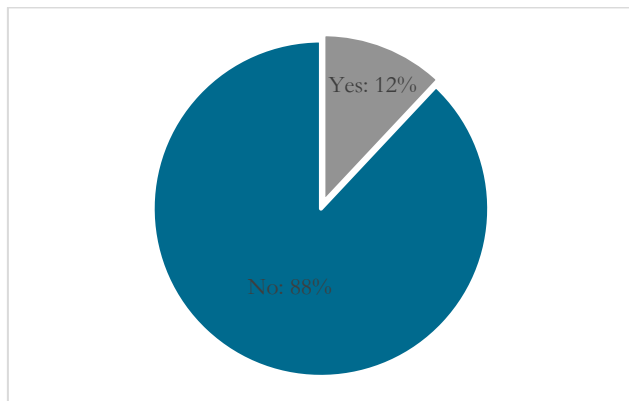


Figure 2: Experience with pet hotels

Source: own.

Table 10: Frequency of use of pet hotels

	More than 10	7-9	4-6	1-3	Answered	Missing (if)	Total
f	6	3	4	22	35	256	291
f%	2.1	1.0	1.4	7.6	12.0	88.0	100.0
VP	17.1	8.6	11.4	62.9	100.0		
CP	100.0	82.9	74.3	62.9			

Source: own.

Note: f- frequency (n=35), f% -percentage, VP-valid percentage, CP-cumulative percentage.

Only 35 respondents answered the following questions (those who used pet sitting at pet hotels at least once) (Table 11). For them, the most important thing in a pet hotel is the personal attitude of the hotel’s administrators towards the animals left to them for protection. This is closely followed with the same value (3.9) by the implementation of additional activities for the animal in care (such as walks and games), arranged infrastructure and hotel facilities, and an excellent range of services. For the respondents, the favourable price of accommodation for a pet is the least important factor in the case of using the services of hotels for pets.

Table 11: Importance of factors related to pet hotels

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Good price.	35	1	5	3.3	1.132
Special services (grooming, school and socialization).	35	1	5	3.6	1.140
Proximity of the pet hotel to my home.	35	1	5	3.7	1.022
Suitable equipment in boxes/cages.	35	1	5	3.8	1.132
Great range of services.	35	1	5	3.9	1.051
Arranged infrastructure and hotel facilities.	35	1	5	3.9	.951
Implementation of additional activities for animals (walks, playing).	35	1	5	3.9	1.110
Personal relationship of caregivers.	35	1	5	4.1	1.040

Source: own.

Note: N-number of answers, Min-lowest value, Max- highest value, M-mean, SD-standard deviation.

5 Discussion

This study gives insight into Slovenian pet owners' perception about travelling with pets and addresses their attitudes towards pet hotels.

The results of the study reveal that pets have become a very important part in the lives of many pet owners. The majority of Slovene pet owners travel with their pet, mainly for tourist reasons. They take their pets with them on trips or vacation, particularly when travelling by car; they rarely use any other type of transport. They avoid air transportation, as they are aware that most pet accidents and deaths occur when pets travel by planes.

The reason that Slovene pet owners do not have many negative experiences with pet travelling might be in the fact that they mostly travel around Slovenia and in some cases also around neighbouring countries. During vacations of this kind, animals are exposed to less risk. Due to the shorter length of the route in familiar environments, pet owners avoid many restraints and regulations that can make travelling with animals more difficult.

Existing studies show that travelling with pets improves owners' overall holiday experience, and this study shows the same for Slovene pet owners. In general, pet owners are ready to deal with many restrictions to travel together with their pet (Kirrliova, Lee & Lehto, 2015). This study reveals that the majority of Slovene pet owners are also ready to adapt their travel plans (destinations, routes,

accommodation) to take their pets with them. Slovene pet owners are encouraged to travel with pets if the destination has pet-friendly rules and regulations.

The most surprising result of the study was that Slovene pet owners rather take their pets with them on vacation (regardless of many restrictions and difficulties that can arise while travelling with pets) than use services of pet hotels. If they are unable to take their pet with them, they usually ask family members or friends to take care of it. They avoid putting their pets in pet hotels. Searching for this kind of professional care would cause them too much concern about their pets' well-being, about their health condition, and about the distress the animal might be exposed to due to an unfamiliar environment.

Furthermore, the study reveals that majority of pet owners in Slovenia do not have sufficient trust in pet hotels' personnel. However, this might be just their prejudice. Therefore, the findings of this study might be an opportunity for pet hotels' providers to address this huge share of pet owners that have never used their services and correct mistrusting sentiments about proper care for animals. Pet hotels should promote their activities and better present their services to reassure owners about the well-being of their animals.

In comparison with other tourism studies, the field of pets in tourism is still quite unexplored. In recent years, this field has gradually gained recognition in foreign literature, while it remains rather neglected in the Slovenian academic world. Due to the quickly evolving pet tourism segment, it would be appropriate to encourage research on this field in the country. E.g., in 2020, there was around a quarter of a million registered dogs in the country (Željan, 2020). On 9 July 2021 according to data, 244.127 dogs were registered in Slovenia (Šoln, 2021). If – according to the results of this study - 60% of pet owners travel with their pats, that means 150.000 Slovene households. 100.000 households should be addressed for using pet hotels' care. Those numbers present a visible potential for tourist accommodation and pet hotel providers.

Better understanding of pet travelling trend would offer improvements, which tourism providers can make and satisfy needs of pet owners and their pet that are travelling. Further research should also be focused on a group of people who frequently use pet hotel services and learn more about their demands, their

expectations and requirements. It would be beneficial to increase the number of studies on pet hotel providers in Slovenia and identify the challenges they currently face with. Furthermore, this study might encourage the studies on how tourist accommodation providers might address the pet owners' segment market. Moreover, further studies might address the general attitude toward animal treatment and related regulation in Slovenia, EU in other part of the world.

Certain limitations need to be addressed with this research. The first one is related to the limited number of existing studies of this field. The second one might be in collection of focus group participants and subjectivity with the interpretation of their answers. However, as results of the online survey is very consistent with the focus group results, the limitation might be minor. The following limitation can be viewed in the population, addressed with the questionnaire in the study, in the number of collected questionnaire and the gender structure of the participants. Therefore, the sample might not be generalised to the Slovenian pet owner population. However, the consistency of the results of the qualitative and the quantitative study indicates that the findings comprise an appropriate assessment of the actual state of the research fields.

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