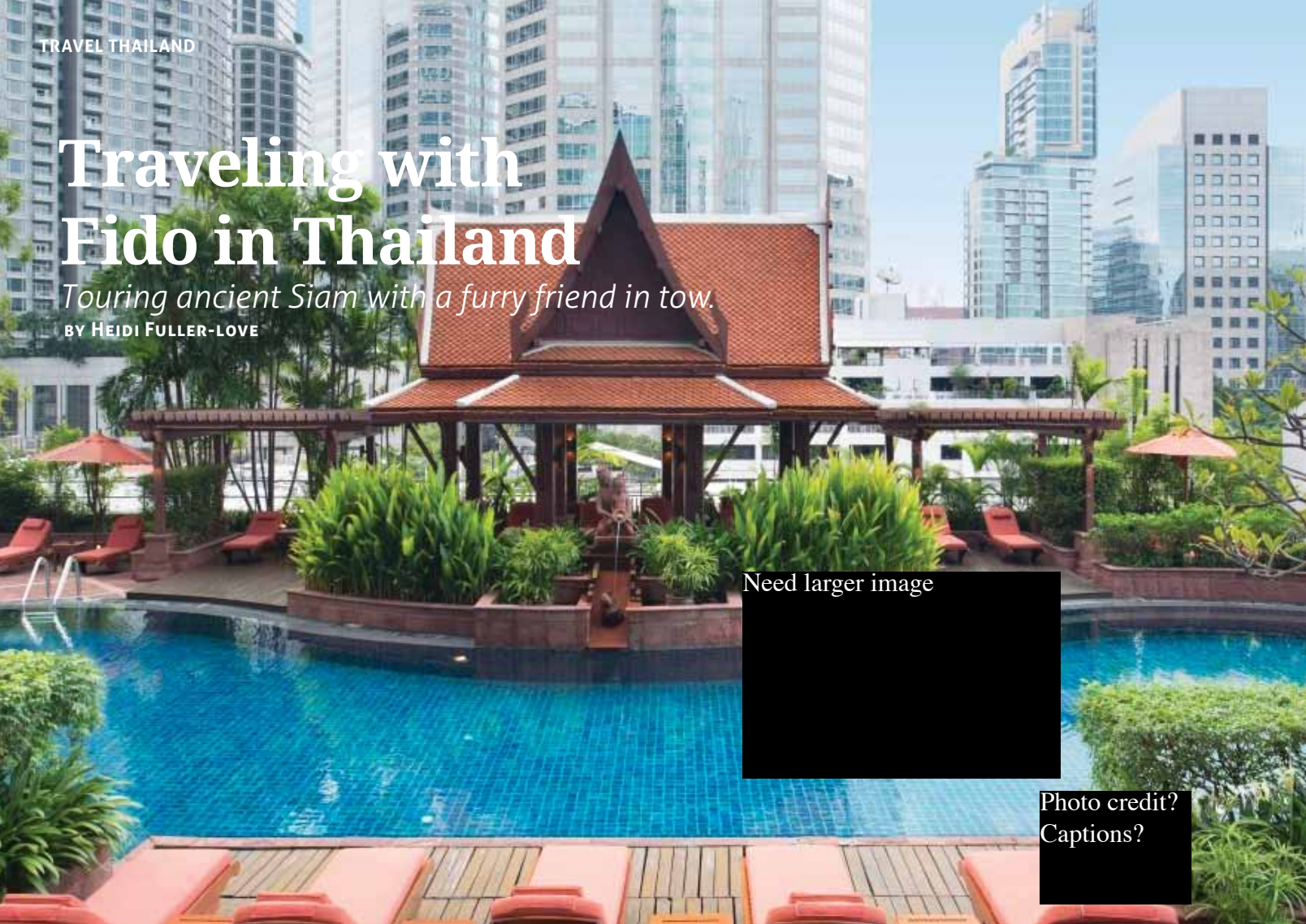


Traveling with Fido in Thailand

Touring ancient Siam with a furry friend in tow.

BY HEIDI FULLER-LOVE



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WHEN I TOLD FRIENDS THAT I PLANNED to travel to Thailand with my dog they thought I was crazy. “But they eat dogs out there!” one pal shrieked in horror. Two months later, on a beautiful December day, my four-legged friend and I disembarked in bustling Bangkok, my drowsy pal was greeted with a welcoming pat at immigration and then we’re whizzing in a taxi to Sukhumvit. I had been concerned that I’d have problems getting in from the airport, but it was easy to find a taxi that would take me and my small dog, as long as she traveled in her crate.

Wanting to be right at the heart of this historic city with its fascinating mix of canals and temples, historic buildings and bustling markets, we stayed at The Plaza Athenee, a sumptuous haven with glittering chandeliers and an art deco staircase just a short stroll away from the city’s main sights. You’d think dogs would be disorientated in such a big, brash city, but Greek rescue dog Mavri very quickly had the measure of the Soi (soi means street) dogs and, as long as I kept her on a leash, we had no problems ambling along sidewalks or sitting out at cafes.

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Most mornings I would head out to visit gems like the fabulous 18th century Grand Palace full of beautiful architecture and intricate carvings, or the city’s exotic and chaotic Chinatown, or I would hire a boat and explore the vivid fruit and food stalls of the Damnoen Saduak floating markets.

Meanwhile my pet, who found those blistering, early morning pavements a bit too painful on her paws, lounged in the air conditioned luxury of our deluxe junior suite overlooking the pool.

After a lazy lunch, I’d take my pal to the pet-friendly K-Village community mall where she’d have her nails trimmed or relished a relaxing spa at the Twinkle Pet shop, before supping on one of the shops’ gourmet snacks.

Unfortunately, very few of Bangkok’s parks accept canines. Luckily a friendly local dog owner told us about Ozono, a 3,200 meter square park dotted with quirky cafes and shops, where

TIP BIT

Did you know that there are more than six million Soi street dogs in Thailand—many of them are temple dogs, cared for by animal-loving Buddhist monks after they were abandoned outside the temples as puppies.

THE PLAZA ATHENEE, A SUMPTUOUS HAVEN WITH GLITTERING CHANDELIERS AND AN ART DECO STAIRCASE JUST A SHORT STROLL AWAY FROM THE CITY'S MAIN SIGHTS.



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my pal loved to romp off leash every evening whilst I enjoyed dinner in a restaurant close by.

Although I'd chosen to travel in the relatively cool month of December, temperatures still soared during the daytime, so on the last day of our stay I took my pal to Doggie Doo, a well equipped canine kennel and training centre with a fresh, clean pool for pets, where she romped in her dog-tailored life jacket for several blissful hours.

BANGKOK TO KHAO LAK

After a few days in super hot Bangkok we were ready to head for the beach, but it's difficult to travel with a pet on public transport in Thailand, so I hired a car at the airport, then set out for Khao Lak. Outside of the city driving was quite laidback, although Thais do drive on the left and you do need to watch out for the odd assortment of traffic, ranging from overload Tuk Tuks, to bikes and buffalo carts, that are often found hogging the road.

The distance from Bangkok to the laidback beach resort of Khao Lak is about 750kms. To make the trip more bearable for my pal, we stayed for several days at the sleepy seaside resort of Prachuap Khiri Khan, an ideal halfway point where we bought fresh crab and other gourmet delights from the night market, and spent our days strolling along silky sands or frolicking in the waves at Jack Beach, a charming resort where canines are given a warm welcome.

Famed for its turquoise waters and golden beaches, Khao Lak is a pretty resort overlooking the Andaman sea where we stayed at the Luckanawadee Boutique Beach Resort, a pet-friendly paradise with tropical gardens and ten private beach-view villas.

After a couple of days lazing on the beach, we hired a vividly coloured long tail boat and spent

TIPS FOR TRAVELING IN THAILAND WITH FIDO

● STAY COOL

Even short-haired dogs have difficulty coping with ancient Siam's heat and humidity, so have your pooch clipped before you go and make sure your four-legged pal gets plenty of water to drink.

● THINK LEASH

Your pal might be used to roaming off leash in the safe fields and footpaths back home, but Thailand—with its roaming street dogs, non-signed street hazards and streetside trash piles - is fraught with hazards for your pet, so think leash and be safe.

● RESPECT RULES

As a Buddhist country, Thailand is generally quite a pet-friendly country, but taking your pet into a temple is generally frowned upon so leave your pal outside—and do remember that you, the pet's owner should cover shoulders and knees before entering a temple, too.

● ASK FIRST

The first rule in Thailand when it comes to traveling with pets, is that there are generally no rules. Although you'll see a lot of Thais with four-legged friends in the big cities, traveling in the countryside with pets is fairly rare, so if you're not sure whether you can go to that idyllic beach with your pal or eat at the terrace of that restaurant with your pooch in tow, ask the concierge at your hotel, or make a call to the local tourist office where someone is sure to know.



Dog and Cat Rescue Samui Foundation. Our temple team Jay and Linda working hand in hand with the monks at the temples around Samui.



Dog and Cat Rescue Samui Foundation. Brigitte Gomm Manager at the sanctuary with some of the dogs.

a fascinating day exploring the limestone caves, strange-shaped rocks, rugged islands and hidden coves of Phang Nga Bay. On the way back from visiting this national marine park, where scenes from the James Bond movie *The Man With The Golden Gun* was filmed in the seventies, we stopped off to visit Khao Lak's monkey cave temple, a cool grotto filled with huge gold Buddha statues, and chattering monkeys who flocked around in fascination when they saw my long-haired pet.

KHAO LAK TO KOH SAMUI

Last stop on our ten-day tour, Koh Samui is quite a lively island, so we opted to stay at W Resort, a luxurious haven with infinity pools surrounded by dense coconut groves and several acres of paw-friendly gardens, where our chic villa had its own private pool, state-of-the-art TV and other modern gadgets. Over the next few days we visited the local fishing villages, picnicked in the lovely lush grounds of our hotel and made the scenic drive to Nam Tok Na Muang, the islands highest waterfall, where we played fetch and swam in ice cool rock pools.

On the last day, I left Mavri to enjoy our air-conditioned villa and headed out to visit some less fortunate pals at Samui's Dog Rescue Center. I only had a couple of hours, but it didn't seem to matter. Along with other volunteers I sprayed the dogs for ticks and fleas, painted a kennel and gave loving cuddles to a couple of orphaned cats. It was wonderful to spend a few hours giving back in this pet-friendly country and I was glad to learn that they rarely eat dogs here anymore—although they do have a surprising fondness for crickets and other bugs. 🦋



◀ **HEIDIFULLER-LOVE** From food reviewer for *Asia Life* in Cambodia, to trainee gaucho on a farm in Argentina, food, travel and lifestyle writer/photographer Heidi Fuller-love regularly contributes features and photos to 68+ publications around the globe and travels the world reporting LIVE from different destinations each month for her award-winning city/country guide show for British Airways inflight radio.

Need contributor photo.



🏠 THE PLAZA ATHENE

Pet policy: under 7kgs limit; from \$45 per pet per day. From \$138 USD per night; 61 Wireless road, Bangkok. +66 2650 8800; plazaathenebangkok.com.

🏠 LUCKANAWADEE BOUTIQUE BEACH RESORT

From \$150 per night. Pet policy: no weight limit; no charge. Petchkasim Rd., Laem Kaen, Thai Muang, Khao Lak; +66 81891 9051; luckanawadee.com.

🏠 JACK BEACH RESORT

From \$35 per night. Pet policy: no weight limit; no charge. 56/4 Moo 7 Huay Yang District | Tubsakas Prachuapkhurkhan; +66 8308 24056; facebook.com/JackbeachResort.

🐾 DOGGIE DOO

F from £10. 71 Soi Yenakart Nanglinchee road, Chongnonsee. Bangkok;grooming; + 66 2286 6849; doggiedoo.net.

Are these photos by Heidi?

leave no dog behind.