A Place at the Table: What a Dog Menu Does for the Guest Who Brought the Dog

What the Toronto Dining With Dogs Study Means for Hotels and Restaurants

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Executive Summary

Researchers at Toronto Metropolitan University have tested something hotels and restaurants have been guessing at for years: whether a menu for dogs changes what the owner does. Their paper, "Dining with dogs", was published in the journal Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality in November 2025, and this is our reading of it for the people who run dining rooms, terraces and bars.

The test was simple. Two hundred dog owners were shown the menu of a diner with a patio that welcomes dogs. Half saw six dishes for people, and half saw the same six with six cheap dishes for dogs added underneath, with everything else identical. The owners who saw the dog menu were more likely to say they would eat there, more likely to say they would tell friends about the place, and expected to enjoy it more. They also planned to spend more, $16.47 against $12.82, by cutting their own order a little and putting about $5 on the dog.

The detail that matters is that the dog was welcome in both versions, so the patio alone was already drawing the owner and the lift came from giving the dog something to order. A second part of the research, a survey of 630 owners, looked at who wants to bring a dog to a meal at all. The answer is the owner who is kind to the dog, who praises it, trains it with rewards and notices how it feels. Owners who shout at or smack their dogs were no more likely to come than anyone else, and the dog menu worked on every kind of owner alike.

One caution governs everything that follows. Nobody in this study ate a meal or paid a bill, and what it records is what owners said they would do with a menu in front of them. We treat it as good evidence of appetite and say plainly where it stops.

In an operator's words, letting the dog in gets the owner to your door, and giving the dog something to order is what makes them sit down, spend and talk about it. The rest of this paper sets out the findings, what to do with them and what the study cannot tell you, with an account of who the researchers are and how they worked at the back.

SECTION 1

The Study in Brief

Before the findings, a reader needs to know three things: who asked the question, how they tested it and what was being compared.

1.1 Who asked the question

The lead author, Rishad Habib, is an associate professor of marketing at the Ted Rogers School of Management in Toronto. Julie Kellershohn is a professor of hospitality and tourism at the same university, and Karun Tangri is a doctoral student there. The idea came from an ordinary lunch: Habib visited a restaurant that had a menu for dogs, wondered whether it made any difference, and the three of them set out to measure it. This is independent university research. It was not paid for by a restaurant group, a pet food company or anyone else with a dog menu to sell, and it went through peer review before it was published.

The work comes from people who study customers and hospitality for a living and have nothing to sell.

1.2 The test: one diner, two menus

The researchers invented a restaurant called Mel's Diner and asked 200 American dog owners to imagine passing it on the walk home from the park, on a sunny day, with the dog beside them. A menu was posted outside. It offered pizza, a hamburger, fried chicken, fries, a hot dog and ice cream, at $4 to $12, and at the foot it said dog friendly patio.

Half the owners saw that menu and nothing more. The other half saw the same menu with a dog menu added, offering a patty, a drink, bone bites, waffles, whipped cream and ice cream at $2 to $6, and chance decided who saw which. Each owner then said how likely they were to eat there and to tell friends about it, clicked on what they would order, and rated how much they expected to enjoy the visit. Because the two groups differed in one thing only, any gap between their answers can be put down to the dog menu.

The diner and its welcome for the dog were the same for everyone, and only the six cheap dishes for the dog differed.

1.3 The survey: who wants to bring the dog

Before the experiment, the team surveyed 630 Canadian dog owners who had eaten out in the previous three months. They asked how likely each was to bring the dog to a restaurant or café with a patio that takes dogs, how much they would enjoy it, and how they treat the dog day to day.

That last set of questions sorts owners into three kinds, and this paper gives them plain names. The kind owner pays attention to how the dog feels, comforts it and lets it have a say. The trainer praises, rewards and practises good behaviour step by step, while the scolder raises their voice, tells the dog off and may use a slap or a check chain. The researchers' own terms for the three are in the appendix.

The two parts of the research answer different questions. The survey shows which owners want to bring a dog to a meal, and because it only records what goes together it cannot show cause. The experiment shows what a dog menu changes, and because chance decided who saw it, the difference can be put down to the menu itself.

The survey tells you who is coming, and the experiment tells you what the dog menu does once they arrive.

SECTION 2

What the Dog Menu Did

Both groups in the experiment were offered a patio where the dog was welcome, and one group was also shown food for the dog. The table gives the results as the authors report them.

What was measured	No dog menu	With dog menu
Would eat there (out of 5)	3.79	4.26
Would tell friends and family (out of 5)	3.50	3.84
Expected enjoyment (out of 5)	4.13	4.39
Planned spend on people	$12.82	$11.40
Planned spend on the dog	none	$5.07
Planned spend in total	$12.82	$16.47

2.1 More of them would come in

Willingness to eat at the diner rose from 3.79 to 4.26 out of 5, a solid difference and far too large to be luck. Put another way, the average owner who saw the dog menu was keener to come in than about seven in ten of the owners who did not. It helps to keep in mind what was being compared. The owners who saw no dog menu were not being turned away: they were offered a patio where the dog was welcome, and they were already fairly willing. The dog menu added to a welcome that was already there.

A patio that takes dogs already draws the owner, and a menu for the dog draws more of them from the pavement.

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2.2 More of them would talk about it

Willingness to mention the restaurant to friends and family rose from 3.50 to 3.84. The gain is smaller than the first, and it may be the more valuable one, because people who travel and eat out with dogs are hard to reach with ordinary marketing. They find places through other owners, so a reason to recommend is worth more with this customer than with most. A dish with a silly name that the dog eats at the table is also something people photograph and post. The study did not measure that, but the operators who do this well build on it, and the Paws Patio evenings at the InterContinental Miami are one example.

2.3 The bill went up

Owners shown the ordinary menu planned to spend $12.82, and owners shown the dog menu planned to spend $16.47, which is $3.65 or 28% more. What sits inside that figure is the interesting part. They spent a little less on themselves, $11.40, and added $5.07 for the dog, so the owner trimmed their own lunch and still left a bigger bill, with nearly a third of it ordered for a guest who cannot read the menu. The researchers did not test the spending figures as rigorously as the other results, so the direction is sound and the exact 28% should be treated as a guide.

Owners moved money from their own plate to the dog's and still spent more.

2.4 Why it worked

The researchers checked how the menu does its work, and the answer is enjoyment. Seeing food for the dog raised how much the owner expected to enjoy the visit, and that expectation is what made them more willing to come in and to recommend the place. Their reasoning is that a meal is better shared. A dog that is allowed on the patio is present without taking part, while a dog with its own dish has joined the meal. Habib told the university's news service that restaurants with dog menus are "embracing dogs as part of the dining experience, and even as customers."

Permission lets the dog sit under the table, while a menu gives it a place at the table, and that is what the owner pays for.

SECTION 3

Who Brings a Dog to Dinner

The survey answers a question every operator has about dogs in the dining room: what sort of owner is going to turn up?

3.1 The kind owner and the trainer

Two kinds of owner said they would bring the dog and expected to enjoy it, the kind owner and the trainer, with the kind owner the keener of the two. The experiment found the same pattern among its American owners. Neither is a rare type. When the Canadian owners scored themselves from one to five, they averaged 3.9 as trainers and 3.6 as kind owners, against 2.3 as scolders. Most people with a dog are patient with it most of the time, so the owner this study describes is the ordinary customer with a dog.

The owners who want to eat with their dog are the ones who are good to it, and they are the majority.

3.2 The scolder is no more likely to come

How much an owner scolds made no difference either way: scolders were neither keener to bring the dog nor less keen. Some press reports said harsh owners find eating out with a dog stressful, which goes further than the paper does. All it shows is that harshness tells you nothing about who will come. The researchers' explanation makes sense. A shared meal is fun when the owner cares whether the dog is enjoying it too, and an owner who mainly corrects the dog has less reason to go looking for one.

3.3 The trainer is the one who tells friends

One result deserves more attention than the paper gives it. When the researchers looked at who would recommend the diner, only one kind of owner stood out, and it was the trainer. The owner who praises, rewards and practises with the dog was the one most likely to pass the name on. Earlier Dutch research found that owners who train this way praise their dogs more and hold their attention, while scolding went with tension on the lead. Our reading is that the customer most likely to recommend you is the one who has put the work into the dog. The study did not watch any dogs, so it cannot say how they behave at a table.

The owner most likely to send you new customers is the one who trains by reward.

3.4 What this means for your rules

Operators tend to write their dog rules for the owner they fear, the one who lets the dog bark through dinner. This study suggests the owner they will mostly meet is a different person, attentive and practised at managing a dog in company. That is an argument for judging each dog by how it behaves, the principle of the Friendly Dog Policy in The Fine Print, and against rules that turn a dog away by breed or weight before it has walked in.

It is also a note on service, because this customer notices how the dog is treated. A water bowl put down without being asked for, a word to the dog by name and a table with room beside it are small things, and this is the person who registers them.

Write your welcome for the customer you will actually get, an owner who cares about the dog and notices whether you do.

3.5 The menu worked on all of them

It would be natural to expect the dog menu to work best on the kindest owners, but when the researchers checked, it lifted every kind of owner by about the same amount. So the two findings stack. The kind owner and the trainer are the likeliest to arrive with a dog, and once any owner is at the door, the dog menu makes them more willing to come in. An operator does not need to guess who is standing there.

SECTION 4

What to Do With It

These five steps are our reading of the findings, for a hotel or a restaurant. They are not the authors' instructions, though the authors do say that a few dishes for dogs is a practical step any restaurant can take.

4.1 Give the dog somewhere to eat with its owner

Nothing in this study works without a table the dog is allowed at. Both menus said dog friendly patio, and owners were already willing to come before any dog dish appeared, so a dog menu in a house with no terrace, bar or corner of the dining room that takes dogs has nothing to add to. Start there, and tell people where the dog may sit before they arrive.

4.2 Put the dog menu where people decide

In the experiment the menu was posted outside, and it worked before the owner sat down. Most operators miss this, and a dog menu that the customer finds by accident after they have ordered has lost most of its value. It belongs in the window and on the terrace, on the website and on the booking page. A hotel should print it with the room service menu and mention it in the confirmation email to any guest bringing a dog.

The study's menu worked from the pavement, so yours should be seen before the customer chooses where to eat.

4.3 Keep it short, and keep one thing cheap

Six items produced every result in this paper, and four of them cost $4 or less. That is a handful of plain dishes made from ingredients you already buy, with at least one that an owner will add without thinking, and it does not take a second kitchen. A card might look like this.

Dish	What is in it
Chicken and rice	Poached skinless chicken, white rice, steamed carrot
Salmon bowl	Poached salmon, sweet potato, green beans
The steak	Grilled lean beef, white rice, steamed carrot
Breakfast bowl	Scrambled egg, plain cooked oats, blueberries
Pupcake	House baked pumpkin and peanut butter cake, xylitol free
Blueberry oat cup	Plain cooked oats and blueberries, served cold

Nothing on it is seasoned. Price the first three to suit your house and keep the last two low. How to price a dog menu, and what it earns, is the subject of The Highest Margin Plate in the Hotel.

4.4 Make it safe before you make it clever

The dishes at Mel's Diner were names on a page, and one of them was whipped cream. Serving real food to a real dog is a responsibility the study does not discuss: salt, onion, garlic, chocolate and a good many everyday ingredients can make a dog ill, and a treat is not a meal. The second half of The Highest Margin Plate in the Hotel is a working guide, drawn from veterinary sources, to what belongs in the bowl and what must never go in it. Read it before the chef writes the menu, and print a line on the card asking owners to mention any allergy.

An owner who orders for the dog is trusting your kitchen with it.

4.5 Tell the staff why it matters

The study found that the menu works because the owner enjoys seeing the dog included, which makes the server part of the product. A dish carried out with the same care as the owner's own finishes what the menu started, and one plonked down as a joke undoes it. A five minute briefing covers it, and The Canine Hospitality Playbook sets out what to say.

The menu promises that the dog is a guest, and the person who carries the bowl out keeps that promise.

SECTION 5

For Hotels: The Guest Who Cannot Go Elsewhere

The study was set in a diner and never mentions hotels. This section is our view of why the finding matters more to a hotel, and where a hotel should be careful with it.

5.1 Your guest has fewer choices than a passer-by

The owner in the experiment was walking home and could have kept walking. A hotel guest with a dog is in a different position, because they cannot easily leave the dog alone in the room and in most places they cannot take it into a restaurant indoors. The hotel's terrace, bar and room service are where they will eat, and The Highest Margin Plate in the Hotel calls this the captive guest. If a dog menu can stop a passer-by who has every restaurant in the street to choose from, it should do at least as much for a guest who has few. The study does not test that, and it is the reason we think a finding from a diner is worth a hotelier's time.

The study tested the dog menu on the customer with the most alternatives, and your guest has fewer.

5.2 Hotel prices are a different test

The dog dishes at Mel's Diner cost $2 to $6, and owners spent about $5 on them. Hotels charge more. Across the published hotel dog menus we collected for The Highest Margin Plate in the Hotel, a main course for a dog has a middle price of about $15 at an upscale hotel and about $20 at the top of the market. So this study does not tell you whether a guest will order a $30 steak for a dog. What it shows is the cheap end, where the price is small and owners add the dog's dish without much thought. Keep something at that end of your menu, a biscuit or a small bowl, alongside the statement dish.

5.3 It will not raise your room rate

A dog menu earns its money in the restaurant and in recommendations, and it does not let you charge more for the room. A Korean study we cover in What Dog Owners Will Pay For in a Hotel found that a restaurant the dog could eat in added almost nothing to what owners would pay per night. What raised the rate was space for the dog and trained people to look after it. Nor does a dog menu make a hotel dog friendly. The research in More Than Permission found that guests judge a hotel first on its facilities, its rules and its staff, so get those right first. The dog menu is the first extra to add once they are in place.

The welcome comes first, and the dog menu is what you add once it works.

5.4 Do not stop at the terrace

The study is about a patio, and patios close in winter. The Roch Dog Friendly Standard asks a hotel to let the dog join its owner in at least one indoor space, a bar, a lounge or a restaurant, unless the law forbids it. A welcome that ends at the terrace door lasts only as long as the weather. Nothing in this study tests a dog menu indoors. We expect it to work there too, because the owner is paying for the dog to be part of the occasion, and a bowl set down in the bar on a wet evening includes the dog just as well as one in the sun. Room service is the other place a hotel has that a diner does not, and we would expect a guest who eats upstairs to keep the dog company to order for both when the dog's dishes are printed on the same menu.

The study covers the terrace, and nobody has yet tested the bar.

SECTION 6

What the Study Cannot Tell You

The limits of the study are gathered here in one place, so that an operator can weigh the findings against them.

6.1 Nobody ate anything

Every result is something a person said they would do. Mel's Diner does not exist, nobody paid a bill, and people are generous with imaginary money. The authors say so themselves and call for a study in a real restaurant.

This is evidence that owners want it, though not yet of what they will spend.

6.2 It was a casual diner on a sunny day

The scene was as friendly as it could be. Habib has said owners might respond differently at a formal restaurant, where a dog fits less easily, and fine dining, hotel dining rooms, room service and higher prices were not tested. The finding holds for a casual patio, and anything beyond that is judgement, ours included.

6.3 The owners were North Americans who eat out

The survey was of Canadians and the experiment of Americans, all recruited through paid research panels. The finding about which owners come is also a pattern in a survey, which shows what goes together and not what causes what. Customers elsewhere may differ, and the research behind More Than Permission found that Americans accept a welcome limited to the terrace far more readily than Europeans or Asians do.

These were North American owners who already eat out, and customers from elsewhere may expect more than a patio.

6.4 The other customers were not asked

The study spoke only to dog owners. It says nothing about the person at the next table who did not bring a dog, and you have to look after both. Owners themselves worry about behaviour, hygiene and space, as an earlier survey by two of the same authors found. Those worries are answered by sensible seating, proper cleaning, staff who will step in, and rules applied the same way to everyone.

A dog menu is a reason for owners to come, and no substitute for the management that keeps the room pleasant for everyone else.

SECTION 7

Conclusion

I draw three conclusions from this study.

The first is that letting the dog in is where the return starts. Every owner in the experiment was offered a patio that welcomed dogs. The ones who were also offered food for the dog were more willing to come in, more willing to recommend the place and ready to spend more. The welcome was identical in both cases, and six dishes made the whole difference. An operator who allows dogs and stops there has done the hard part and left the reward on the table.

The second is that most dog rules are written for the wrong customer. The owners who want to bring a dog to dinner are the ones who praise it, train it and care how it feels, and the trainer is the one who tells friends where they ate. Rules written with the worst owner in mind are aimed at someone who, on this evidence, is no more likely to walk in than anyone else.

The third is that a dog menu does its work before anyone orders. In this study it was a sheet of paper outside a door, and it changed what people meant to do before they sat down. Most dog menus are found by accident, after the decision is made, and a menu the customer has not seen cannot bring them in, be mentioned to a friend or be the reason they chose you. Moving it to where the decision is made costs almost nothing, and it is the step I would take first.

So my ask is small, and it goes to any hotel or restaurant with a kitchen and a table a dog can sit beside. Put six plain dishes for dogs on a card, price one of them low, show it to people before they choose where to eat, and count what happens over a season. You will have run the real world test these researchers have called for, and you will know what the dog at the table is worth to your business.

Appendix: Who Did the Research and How

The paper. Habib, R., Kellershohn, J. and Tangri, K. (2025), Dining with dogs: investigating the impact of parenting styles on shared human-dog experiences, Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality 21(3), pages 370 to 381. It appeared online on 28 November 2025. The journal is peer reviewed, is published by Emerald, and was known until 2022 as the International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research, the name the university's press release uses.

The authors. Rishad Habib is an associate professor of marketing at the Ted Rogers School of Management, Toronto Metropolitan University. Julie Kellershohn is a professor in the university's Ted Rogers School of Hospitality and Tourism Management. Karun Tangri is a doctoral student in management. Kellershohn and Habib had earlier surveyed 550 Canadian dog owners about eating out with their dogs, in a 2024 paper in the World Leisure Journal.

The survey. An online survey run over five days in autumn 2023 through Canview, a Canadian research panel. Respondents lived in Canada, were aged 18 to 54, owned a dog and had eaten in a restaurant or on a patio in the previous three months. 630 answers were used.

The three kinds of owner. The sorting comes from a twenty statement questionnaire built by a Dutch team led by Ineke van Herwijnen in 2018, which applies to dog owners the styles psychologists use for parents. The researchers' names for the three are authoritative intrinsic, which we call the kind owner, authoritative training, the trainer, and authoritarian correction, the scolder. Each owner receives a score on all three, so these are tendencies and not separate groups of people.

The experiment. 200 American dog owners recruited through Prolific, with an average age of 44. Each was assigned at random to one of the two menus described in section 1.2. Intention to eat there and intention to recommend were each measured with three questions on a five point scale. The differences between the two menus, in the statistic the authors report, were 0.52 for intention to eat there, 0.34 for recommendation and 0.30 for expected enjoyment, conventionally read as medium, small and small. The spending figures are reported as averages without a test of significance.

How we read it. The article is not open access. We read it in the authors' accepted manuscript, which Professor Habib kindly sent us, and every figure here is taken from that manuscript. The published version is the version of record, and where the two differ it governs. We have reproduced nothing from the article beyond its title and its reported results, and the menus are described in our own words. The quotation from Professor Habib and the account of how the research began come from the university's news report of 27 August 2026. Sections 4 and 5, the sample menu and every statement of what a finding means for a hotel or restaurant are Roch Dog's reading and not the authors' claims.

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The Study

1. Habib, R., Kellershohn, J. and Tangri, K. (2025). Dining with dogs: investigating the impact of parenting styles on shared human-dog experiences. Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality 21(3): 370-381. Read in the authors' accepted manuscript.
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Roch Dog Research

8. Roch Dog Friendly Standard (RDFS-02)
9. RDWP-FD-01: The Highest Margin Plate in the Hotel
10. RDWP-PFD-01: More Than Permission
11. RDWP-WTP-01: What Dog Owners Will Pay For in a Hotel
12. RDWP-HPP-01: The Fine Print
13. RDWP-PB-01: The Canine Hospitality Playbook



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