

How a Beach Trip With My Dog Helped Me Grieve

Salt, sand, sea water, and more dogs can mend a broken heart

By [LAURA RATLIFF](#) | Published on 07/25/22



Laura Ratliff

On Monday, March 14 of this year, I wrapped myself in a coat and carried Iggy, my 12-pound Brussels Griffon dog, to the elevator and down to the street, like I had many times before.

As I watched his arthritic joints strain under the weight of his little body, I knew that this morning was not like all of the others. After 15 years, he told me that our time together was coming to an end.

About a month after, Ryan, Kate, and I loaded up the car and drove north to Rhode Island, stopping in Stonington, Connecticut, for freshly fried clam bellies while Kate dragged Ryan over the smoothed rocks of the coastline. This trip, oddly enough, was more for Kate than it was for us.

We were going to [Ocean House](#), an iconic 19th-century resort set on Watch Hill, its lemon-clad Victorian exterior overlooking a sandy expanse of beach, just a few doors down from Taylor Swift's heavily-guard, much-talked-about complex. Despite the resort's grand dame exterior and interior loaded with leather and wood-paneling, you'd be hard-pressed to find a place more welcoming to man's best friend.



Laura Ratliff

Kate quickly discovered her special Annie Selke-designed dog bed and realized even faster that various staff at Ocean House hid tiny silver bowls of dog treats behind their respective posts.

But it was when we took her for her first walk on the beach I felt the lingering dark cloud begin to lift slightly. Is there *anything* happier than a dog on a beach? I thought to myself, watching her run in circles and letting the saltwater lap at her pasterns.

The freedom to focus exclusively on her for those few days was a gift: watching her play with Pete, an equally boisterous Braque Français, at the hotel's themed "yappy hour" (in which more than one human may have mistakenly consumed a snack from a bowl of freshly-cooked bacon intended for the dogs), or seeing her eyes grow big as her meal from Ocean House's pet menu, a bowl of sliced beef, quinoa, and steamed vegetables, served on white china, arrived on the first evening.

At Ocean House's sister hotel, the more rustic [Weekapaug Inn](#), set on Quonochontaug Pond just down the road, Ryan and I marveled at the dark wood-clad cottages, Kate's white-tipped tail bobbing out of the seagrass every so often, reminding us she was there. She roamed the inn at our heels, giving a wide berth to the popping fireplace and (still) running wide loops on the sandy loam lined with mussel beds, mouth agape in a permanent smile. Again, my heart felt lighter for the first time in a month.

There was something about being at the beach with her—so wild and happy and care-free—that was cathartic and healing, like this creature’s joy was so contagious that it was not just infectious but actively working as a salve, drawing the pain from my wound. Of course, seeing the kind staff dote on this beautiful, kind creature, much of her generosity and good manners learned from her late brother, made me proud and thank Iggy for the gift he had given me—one of being a good steward and life-long lover and leader of my dogs.

And slowly, throughout that long weekend, the Iggy-shaped hole in my heart grew filled with even more Kate, a once-skinny, wild-eyed mutt we had brought home nearly six years ago. The sun, the salt, the water, and most importantly, the sand, dotted with pawprints, were just what I didn’t know I needed.

Tips for Visiting the Beach With Your Dog

- 01 Do your resort homework. While some municipalities may not allow dogs on their beaches, resorts, like Ocean House, might have private beaches where restrictions are laxer.
- 02 Watch the saltwater ingestion! While most dogs won’t be inclined to drink seawater straight up, dogs who love playing fetch can unintentionally consume it, resulting in an upset stomach down the line.

- 03 Water can limit the effectiveness of some flea and tick treatments, like Seresto collars, so if your pup spends a lot of time in the water, consider replacing it after your visit.
- 04 Give your dog a quick rinse or wipe down after their day in the sand. While no one wants a sandy dog in their bed, sand can also irritate their skin and fur.
- 05 Pick up your poop. Dog feces can cause issues for fish and wildlife, so like anywhere you take your dog, take your poop with you.