

TRAVEL

Have pug, will travel

BY STEVE EDER

A few minutes after we sank into our seats, the train whistled out of the station and the conductor made his way down the aisle. It was just like any other trek between Penn Station and Union Station, except for one thing.

The conductor looked down at our printed ticket and mentally checked off my wife and me before pausing and giving a friendly but perplexed look. "Rufus and Hamilton," he read off the sheet. "You've got four?"

At our feet were Rufus and Hamilton, our two black pug dogs. They were nestled into their lined travel bags, quietly being lulled to sleep by the rhythms of the train as we headed from New York to Washington.

When we travel, the pugs come along whenever possible because, to us, they are family. We learned long ago that traveling with dogs always makes our adventures more fun, even if it is a bit of a hassle. And it turns out we are hardly alone: Many other people love to bring their pets on vacation too.

That means dogs, cats and other animals are increasingly showing up places they were once shunned, with hotels, restaurants and even airports becoming more hospitable to pet parents. Not everyone loves our pets, but the world seems to be catering to us — or at the least, tolerating us — and it is making it easier for us to take our pugs with us when we travel.

So we were predictably intrigued a couple years ago when Amtrak began allowing travelers to take small dogs on select routes for a fee. The move unlocked yet another way for our road warrior pugs to move about the country.

Eager to experience the latest mode of dog transportation, we booked round-trip tickets to Washington where we were heading for, well, a pug meet-up. We reserved spots at our feet for Hamilton, our gray-chinned 10-year-old with model looks, and his wide-eyed little brother, Rufus, a curious 4-year-old with a white paw who is stunningly friendly.

Amtrak allows pets 20 pounds or lighter to ride in small carriers for trips up to seven hours, so our 18-pound pugs qualified for the three-and-a-half-hour ride to Washington. The fee of \$25 per pet, each way, felt like a steep discount, as airlines charge at least \$100 each way for small dogs to fly in the cabin.



Rufus, left, and Hamilton on the train to Boston.

TONY CENCICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

To be sure, train travel is hardly glitch-free, and Amtrak is no exception. There can be delays, cancellations and derailments. As with other ways of getting around with a pet, the anxieties about unwanted smells, a nervous pet or a cranky fellow passenger still apply. And the waiting area at Penn Station is not exactly a majestic dog beach.

Since Amtrak began allowing dogs, our pugs have taken three round-trip journeys with us — twice to Washington and once to Boston — and with each trip, we discovered an element of simplicity to traveling with them by train that has made it our preferred method for exploring with them in tow.

Dog tickets can be reserved online, along with human tickets. One of the few

requirements involved filling out a pet waiver, in which I essentially took responsibility if the pugs caused any trouble while in transit. (They didn't.)

On each of our trips, we took the subway to Penn Station, arriving early, before killing some time in the Amtrak lounge. The waiting area can be warm on summery days — and it is a far cry from the state-of-the-art pet-friendly roof deck at Kennedy International Airport that Rufus explored before boarding a flight to California last year — but it at least provided a place to sit away from the crowds.

Traveling with a dog does not mean early access to the train or a preferred seat, but it was still far easier to board a train than a plane: there was no juggling

pugs enjoyed briefly looking out the windows as we breezed through charming New England towns.

The pugs slept in their bags at our feet, unnoticed by most of the people near us, aside from an occasional whine or bark.

Our pugs were a particularly good fit for the train, or nearly any other mode of transportation. They are good-natured and they seem delighted to hang out in their travel bags for several hours, getting an occasional treat.

Long before they took to the rails, our pugs were seasoned travelers.

Adopted as a youngster in Ohio, Hamilton soon settled into city life in New York, while making many trips — by car and plane — back to the Midwest. Before a Thanksgiving road trip years ago, Hamilton became increasingly distressed as I loaded the rental car with his things, unsure where I was going

and desperately hoping he would come along.

"Of course he was coming with me. 'Hamilton, just relax, buddy,' I tried to tell him. He didn't believe me until we were on the road — and after he had given himself an upset stomach. (We made a lot of stops along the way.)

Over the years, his confidence grew. During a flight delay in Cleveland, he entertained antsy passengers by giving high-fives and begging for snacks. One time he sat silently in his bag under my seat, conveying the injustice of me paying his travel fee while a screaming baby nearby flew for free. Another time, a stranger noticed him and assumed me to be trustworthy, asking me to watch her bags at the airport (I declined).

Rufus experienced life on the road before we even met him, as he made the journey by truck from a shelter in Texas to New Jersey, where we adopted him from a rescue organization. We rented a car for the short ride to his new home in New York, and he insisted on sharing my wife's lap with Hamilton. Since then, Rufus has been on the move with us. He greets people with his curious big eyes and his friendly demeanor could put any nervous traveler at ease.

It is not always so smooth. During a road trip to Boston with Hamilton, Rufus and their pug buddy, Finn, we pulled off the road to inspect the car for a mysterious smell — and never could quite get to the bottom of it. After a drive to Chicago with the same trio left our rental car covered in pug fur, we ended up lint-rolling and vacuuming the seats before returning the car to avoid a fee. Trips on the Long Island Rail Road during the busy summer months are rather hectic when balancing a dog, especially when there are fewer seats than customers.

And even on our recent trip to Boston, our train was running 90 minutes behind, a delay that was not announced until we had nearly arrived at Penn Station. To complicate matters, it was an unusually warm day in early May, which turned the waiting area into a toasty den. But we let the pugs out of their bags to stretch their legs outside while we waited for the train to make it to the station.

If the delay bothered Hamilton and Rufus, they did not let us know. And they were raring to go when we arrived at Boston's Back Bay Station.

A London hotel with style

CHECK IN

BY LINDSEY TRAMUTA

HENRIETTA, LONDON

RATES

From around 250 pounds, or about \$330.

BASICS

Following the success of its first hotel in Paris, the Experimental Group, credited with putting the French capital on the world's craft cocktail map with its bars, made its foray into London's dense hotel market last June with the Henrietta. Dorothee Meilzichon, the group's long-time partner who designed its Grand Pigalle Hôtel in Paris, was given carte blanche to dream up the interior for the property's 18 rooms and suites and two-story restaurant, set in two converted 19th-century townhouses in Covent Garden.

In a refreshing departure from the floral-heavy English country style common to many of the classic properties nearby, Ms. Meilzichon went with an Art Deco design that incorporates nods to the neighborhood's former produce market, like a rich green color palette and terra cotta tiles, but hews to her signature penchant for graphic fabrics, vintage pieces and custom furnishings. And like its Parisian sibling, the Henrietta is designated a Bed & Beverage by the group, which means creative cocktails take pride of place in the hotel lounge and in mini bars.

LOCATION

In the heart of Covent Garden, steps from the piazza's high-end boutiques and restaurants and only a five- to 10-minute walk to West End theaters and museums like the Royal Opera House, the Lyceum Theater and the National Portrait Gallery.

THE ROOM

While each room is slightly different in layout and design, they all have retro-chic touches: velvet armchairs, brass bedside lamps, hexagonal upholstered headboards inspired by Milanese door frames, terrazzo-patterned carpets and Carrara marble skirting. The Grand Henrietta room, where I stayed, sits on the top floor and was elegantly furnished with a blush pink love seat, a desk doubling as a dressing table, a spacious armoire for storage and thick gray blackout curtains, which enhanced my restful night's sleep. But the standout feature was the unobstructed view across the city to the London Eye Ferris wheel, best experienced from the room's private balcony.

THE BATHROOM

The en suite double bathroom, equipped with a rainfall shower and a sizable claw foot bathtub, was done up in pastel pink,



The Henrietta Hotel features a lobby bar, top, and distinctive bathrooms, above.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAREL BALAS

black and white tiles and retro globe lights that could easily be dimmed. The unique touch here was the mixed selection of bath products that rotate daily from brands like Ren, Sachajuan, John Master Organic and Malin & Goetz.

AMENITIES

Beyond the expected features, like free Wi-Fi, there were a handful of others that caught my attention: a Revo digital radio and a well-stocked minibar with cold-pressed juices, kombucha, coconut water and local snacks as well as ready-to-drink house cocktails (not included in the room rate). In the absence of an on-site fitness center, guests can take advantage of the hotel's partnership with Fitness First for free gym access. Also free is the shoe polish offered at Joseph Cheaney and Sons, across the street from the hotel.

DINING

Room service is offered 24 hours every day (my dish arrived in under 20 min-

utes, warm and artfully plated) but the culinary draw is the 80-seat ground floor restaurant, Henrietta Bistro. At the time of my visit, it was overseen by Ollie Dabbous, one of London's most acclaimed chefs, which turned the Henrietta into a dining destination among locals and pre-theater crowds. The restaurant has a southwestern French- and Corsican-inspired menu and a new chef at the helm: Sylvain Roucayrol, formerly of Bar Boulud and Experimental's wine bar La Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels. Tables are also reserved for hotel guests at the group's sister bars like Experimental Cocktail Club Chinatown.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This is a stylish addition to London's selection of boutique hotels, with a distinctly Parisian sensibility and a well-executed food and beverage program.

Henrietta Hotel, 14-15 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, henriettahotel.com.

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