The attractiveness of Porto as a pet-friendly destination: A comprehensive investigation

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Objectives | This study aims to comprehensively investigate the pet-friendliness of Porto as a tourist destination, and to determine the extent to which it caters for visitors travelling with their pets. Specific objectives include assessing the presence of pet-friendly facilities at Porto Airport, examining accessibility and transport options for visitors with pets, investigating the availability of pet-friendly accommodation on platforms such as Airbnb and Booking, and identifying restaurants and food establishments that welcome visitors with pets, with a particular focus on The Fork. Furthermore, the study aims to assess the inclusivity of tourist activities and attractions in Porto for those accompanied by pets, based on the most popular categories on TripAdvisor. It also seeks to map the locations of veterinary hospitals, clinics, pet shops and dog parks across the city, and to assess the accessibility of services such as pet sitting and dog walking in Porto. Through these targeted objectives, the research aims to provide valuable insights into understanding and improving pet-friendly tourism in the vibrant city of Porto.

Methodology | In view of the multifaceted nature of our research objectives, a mixed-methods approach is considered to be appropriate. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the pet-friendly tourism landscape in Porto, blending the depth of qualitative insights with the necessary quantitative data.

Our threefold methodology begins with online data analysis, leveraging platforms such as Airbnb, Booking, The Fork, and TripAdvisor. This initial step assesses the availability of pet-friendly options in accommodation, restaurants, and tourist attractions, providing valuable quantitative insights.

Following this, a survey will be conducted using a concise questionnaire designed to gather qualitative information on the experiences, challenges, and preferences of tourists who have visited Porto with pets. Closed questions will yield objective data on challenges and satisfaction, while open-ended questions will capture richer qualitative insights.

The final step involves social media content analysis, utilizing tools to examine posts and comments across platforms. This qualitative approach, focused on the same platforms, adds valuable context to pet-friendly experiences in Porto.

The integration of these methods will be achieved through triangulation, allowing for the combination of qualitative and quantitative findings. Triangulating data from surveys and content analysis will provide a robust understanding of pet-friendly tourism in Porto.

Main Results and Contributions | Research on pet-friendly tourism in general exists (Carr & Cohen, 2009; Carr, 2009; Dotson, Hyatt & Clark, 2010; Chen et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2014; Kirillova et al., 2015; Carr, 2017; Ying et al., 2021; Tomassini, 2022), but there is a lack of studies on specific destinations such as Porto that comprehensively assess all aspects of the tourism experience for visitors travelling with pets.

According to the Global Market Insights Report (2023), Pet Travel Services Market size was valued at USD 1.8 billion in 2023 and is estimated to grow at a CAGR of 9.5% from 2024 to 2032. The market growth can be attributed to the growing awareness of pet well-being coupled with a rise in disposable income, increasing adoption of pet insurance, and the shift towards pet-centric lifestyle worldwide. Also, factors such as increasing pet ownership, rising number of tourists travelling with pets and growing humanization of pets is fuelling the market size.

Pet owners often sacrifice the length and frequency of their holidays as a result of having pets, and many value pet-friendly accommodation and destinations. Increasing the options and ease with which pet owners can bring their furry friends may encourage these travellers to take longer and more frequent trips and holidays (Pet Travel Advisor, 2023).

Recent statistics show that pet ownership is on the rise in both the European Union and Portugal, with nearly 2 million (54%) Portuguese households having at least one pet, an increase of 9 percentage points in just 4 years. This trend is explained due to changes in family structures, as well as evidence that pets contribute to the physical and psychological well-being of their "owners" (GfKTrack.2Pets Portugal). Since 2020, the number of pets living as part of a family in Portugal has increased, largely due to the pandemic - as the isolation of quarantines and the need, for many, for a companion to go for walks, has led to an increase in the number of adoptions. In the municipality of Lisbon alone, there are 112,127 registered pets, of which 75,881 are dogs, 36,160 cats and 86 other species, according to the latest data from the Companion Animal Information System (SIAC). And the total across the country since records began was 4.19 million at the end of November 2023- with dogs making up the majority at over three million.

However, despite this increase in pet ownership, pet travel statistics for top tourist destinations show that many destinations are still not fully prepared to meet the needs of travellers with pets.

This suggests that there is a gap in knowledge about how destinations can become truly pet-friendly and provide a positive experience for pet travellers. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by

carrying out a detailed investigation into the attractiveness of Porto for tourists travelling with pets, identifying the factors that contribute to a positive and recommendable experience.

In doing so, the study contributes to the literature by offering valuable insights for tourist destinations interested in attracting this growing market segment and by highlighting the importance of inclusion and accessibility for tourist satisfaction.

The expected results aim to highlight strengths and opportunities for improvement regarding Porto's attractiveness as a pet-friendly destination. This will include insights into the direct and indirect influence of attractions and supporting services.

The findings of this research aim to enhance Porto's reputation as a pet-friendly tourist destination while offering practical guidance for destinations aspiring to attract pet-owning tourists. Additionally, the study aims to provide insights into the impact of inclusive practices and amenities on tourist satisfaction and identify key drivers of destination attractiveness in a competitive environment.

Limitations | Potential limitations may include the subjectivity of online reviews, fluctuations in the availability of services over time, and reliance on tourists' self-reported experiences. Additionally, it can be noted as a limitation the data provided by online platforms, as they may be subject to the influence of their respective algorithms.

Conclusions | The conclusions will highlight the most influential factors in Porto's attractiveness as a pet-friendly destination, offering practical recommendations to enhance the experience for tourists traveling with pets.

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