

Grrr! French excel at hound hospitality

Britain is apparently failing to take the lead in giving pet dogs a warm welcome, **Valentine Low** writes

Britain, as everyone knows, is a nation of animal lovers. France, on the other hand, has such a suspect relationship with all creatures great and small that they even eat horses.

That long-held and smug sense of self-satisfaction about our dealings with domestic pets is, however, not quite as justified as we think it is.

A host of campaigners claim that we give dogs a thoroughly miserable time, in contrast to France and Germany, where restaurateurs and bar-owners welcome them in with open arms.

Chris Packham, the leading naturalist and broadcaster, who has a second home in southwest France, led the way as he complained bitterly about the treatment of his two black miniature poodles called Itchy and Scratchy, whom he describes as “the centre of my universe”.

“If we want to pop into the patisserie, or pop into the newsagent, or the post office [in France], we just go in with the dogs on the lead,” he told *The Times*. “No one scowls at you. In all of the cafés you are welcome with your dog. You can even give it half a croissant if you want, and no one screams.”

In contrast, he and the dogs had a chilly reception when he went into an ice-cream shop in Buxton. “I just stepped through, and said, ‘Would it be all right if I bought an ice cream, only there’s nowhere to leave my dogs?’ The guy hit the roof. ‘Get those dogs out of my shop! What are you thinking?’ I thought, ‘Blimey, they’re only a couple of dogs’.

“I can appreciate you would not want to take them into a butcher’s. Chaos would result. And fresh food areas, there might be a real concern.”

He said that our unwillingness to welcome dogs arose from an old-fashioned fear of catching something from them. “We have become completely preoccupied with the idea that the outside world, and animal life, is toxic. As a consequence we have to constantly cleanse ourselves from it,” he said.

Speaking to the *Radio Times*, he described Britain as “dog-ist”. “When I’m in France, no one gets het up at all, and why



Chris Packham says that taking his dogs Itchy and Scratchy into shops in France is no big deal,

unlike in Britain, where people have a fear they might “catch something” from animals

would they? The dogs sit under the table. No problem.”

Packham was supported by Beverley Cuddy, the editor of *Dogs Today*, who said that Britain was “lagging behind” other countries in its willingness to welcome dogs into public places, even though there has been an increase in the number of hotels which pride themselves on being dog-friendly.

Most supermarkets and food shops will not allow dogs other than guide dogs, nor will most museums. Small shops and restaurants vary in their attitude. “We have been labouring under the misconception that we are a nation of animal lovers, and are very pleased with ourselves, but we have slipped behind,” she said.

Heather Stimmler-Hall, a Paris-based travel

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Friend or foe

May Wong, the dog-loving blogger's verdict on:

Germany The most dog-friendly. We go to nice, trendy, top-end restaurants. We didn't even have to make a reservation saying, 'Can we bring a dog?', we just walked in. You have to have a licence to have a dog, it is very proper.

The US Terrible. They don't let dogs into any restaurants. I've taken Darcy there. They let them into shops, not food stores, and people tie their dogs outside stores in New York. Even outside dining, you have to tie them outside the barricade.

Sweden OK. They don't really mind it. We were in Stockholm, we went to a department store, we asked beforehand, they said no problem. But one of the customers saw us and complained. They shrugged their shoulders and said, 'They're not doing any harm'. But that customer was so awful, they looked at us with such disgust.

Belgium We went to Bruges for the Christmas market. There was a restaurant there that was top-top. I was on my own with Darcy. I saw this cute little restaurant and said 'Can I bring my dog in?' They looked at me going, like, 'Why do you even ask?' We had a lovely meal.

Italy Reluctantly welcoming. You do have to ask, and most of the time they do, 'Oh well ... OK you can.'



writer who until recently had two miniature pinschers, said that Spain was bottom of the list for dog lovers, with their presence in public buildings generally frowned upon.

“[In Paris] I go to the bank, I go to the post office, I go to the baker's — basically anywhere except the supermarket,” she

said. “On the bus, you have to take them in a bag. You couldn't take a big dog on the bus. It's the same thing on the Metro, you're supposed to have them in a bag, but I just walked them around.”

Other experts cited the United States as a place where pooches were given a hard time.

May Wong, a London-based interior designer who also writes a blog about her cockapoo, Miss Darcy, said that Britain varied widely in how dog-friendly it was. “In all of London by far the dog-friendliest area is Chelsea and south Kensington. I live in Chelsea and I go to lots of places. I'm spoilt for choice.”

She added: “We go shopping all along the King's Road, and the only three places besides the food shops that are not dog friendly are Peter Jones, Marks & Spencer and Boots. I can go along Sloane Street, too. All that high-end retail, amazing. Prada knows Darcy's name. They follow our blog.”

Kittens sold as bait for fighting dogs

Simon de Bruxelles

The RSPCA is investigating claims that kittens are being advertised for sale as “live bait” for fighting dogs.

Concerns were raised over a photograph on Facebook that showed a cat with its head in a dog's jaws above the caption: “Got some now, anyone want to put a bet on who wins?”. Another post with pictures of kittens read: “Will have a litter ready for Christmas (dog bait).”

The animal charity said: “The RSPCA can confirm that it has received complaints about kittens being sold for dog bait in the Liverpool area and will be investigating.

“Any reports of animals being used to

attack other animals are extremely disturbing and anyone with information should contact us.”

The charity believes that the sellers are part of a network and use female names to avoid attracting suspicion. Accounts on Facebook often close before being reopened under different names and the sellers are also reported to operate on Gumtree, a classifieds website.

Heather Prescott, a trustee of the Rescue Me animal sanctuary charity in Crosby, Merseyside, said that she was aware of people looking for entire litters. “People have asked us to help with homing their kittens but, by the time we get there, somebody will have

already bought all of the litter,” she said. “They take the kittens as a job lot and sell them for quite a serious profit.”

Elisa Allen, an associate director of the animal rights group Peta, said that selling animals over the internet was dangerous. “These animals are vulnerable and it's hard to ensure that they are headed to responsible, loving homes,” she said. “Online ads appeal to impulse buyers, who likely won't give serious thought to the lifelong commitment needed to provide an animal with stability, and [to] people who deliberately hurt animals.”

Merseyside police said that the matter was not their responsibility to investigate.

Prisoners score top marks in criminology experiment

Prisoners at a high-security jail studying criminology have scored higher marks than some of the university students they were working alongside in a ground-breaking academic course.

The Inside-Out programme, which has already been a success in the US, was run by Durham University.

Set up a year ago, groups of students were taken into Frankland top-security prison and the lower category HMP Durham for ten weekly sessions with inmates. They studied the same texts, held discussions, then wrote up essays on criminology and the justice system.

Professor Fiona Measham said that some prisoners already working on Open University courses scored highly.

The scheme will now be expanded to include Low Newton women's prison.

Jermain James, released after serving 13½ years for attempted murder, said: “It changed everybody. Some students cried at the end because they saw themselves in us, as humans that make mistakes; likewise we saw ourselves in them as people who make mistakes but had the ability to change their prospects and gain social change via transformative education.”