

WARM FUZZIES



Seven ways to enjoy the comfort of pets when you can't have them at home. BY LISA A. BEACH



Whether you travel a lot, work long hours, or live in a building with a no-pet policy, it's challenging to get your animal-loving fix when you don't own a pet. What's a dog- or cat-lover to do? Try these purr-fect ideas to spend quality time with your favorite furry, four-legged friends.

GET A DAY PASS. Pet Rescue by Judy, a Sanford nonprofit, offers a "Dog 4 a Day" program—perfect for anyone looking to spend some quality time with a dog, minus the long-term commitment. This innovative program allows you to spend several hours with a rescue dog (available from 10 a.m.-4 p.m.) and explore dog-friendly sites in the Orlando area, from breweries and restaurants with patio dining to local farmers markets and hiking trails with space to roam.

VOLUNTEER AT AN ANIMAL SHELTER OR PET RESCUE ORGANIZATION. This is a great way to spend time with animals and do good in the process. Most shelters and pet rescues rely on their volunteer force to help with tasks ranging from dog walking and grooming to playing with cats and feeding them. They'll likely take as much help as you're willing to give. Reach out to organizations such as Pet Alliance of Greater Orlando, Lovey Loaves Special Needs Rescue & Sanctuary, and the unique Fallin' Pines Critter Rescue in Christmas, which rescues exotics, farm animals, reptiles and birds.

VISIT A LOCAL DOG PARK. Pop over to one of the dog parks that dot the area and strike up a conversation with some of the pet owners. Many of them would welcome the chance to show off their pooch and let you give their canine companion a few pats on the head ("Who's a good boy?!"). Try Arbor Dog Park (Longwood), Lake Baldwin Park (Winter Park), Barber Dog Park (Orlando), Hound Ground (Winter Springs), Paw Park (Sanford) and Park of the Americas (Orlando).

CARE FOR YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD PETS. You might live in a rental that doesn't allow pets, but you can still spend time with animals that live nearby. Relieve busy pet owners in your neighborhood by offering to walk their dogs or feed their cats while they're out of town.

VISIT A CAT CAFE. Sip a coffee, grab a pastry and enjoy the feline scenery at the Orlando Cat Café in Clermont, where a dozen or so cats roam freely in their spacious play area. Or try The Kitty Beautiful in downtown Orlando, where you can nosh on locally sourced snacks,



Visitors to The Kitty Beautiful cat cafe get some cuddly time with an orange tabby.

coffees, teas, kombucha—and even host a private celebration with their Cat Party Packages. Reservations suggested at both cafes.

FOSTER AN ANIMAL. If you're up for a short-term commitment, become a foster pet parent through one of the many Central Florida animal shelters and pet rescues. It requires some training—and the ability to relinquish your fur babies when they've found a forever home. But fostering provides a temporary, loving home to sweet creatures who may have been abused or abandoned. Try Candy's Cats (Apopka), Florida Little Dog Rescue (St. Cloud), Happy Trails Animal Rescue (Orlando) and Pug Rescue of Florida (Windermere).

VISIT ALOFT ORLANDO DOWNTOWN. This hotel partners with the Pet Alliance of Greater Orlando to provide pups onsite with whom guests and visitors may engage. You can just spend time with the dogs, play with them or even take them for a walk.