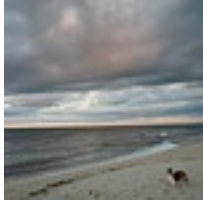


## Four-Legged Fun in the Sun

By

[Margaret Montet](#)



Dog-friendly beaches are hard to come by, so Gladys and I appreciate ours at the Delaware Bay in Cape May. Many of our neighbors use the beach the same way we do, as a place to walk, run, relax, bird- watch, and sun. There are many more people around in the warmer months, but in the cooler weather we often enjoy secluded solitude. We obey the leash laws that require us to remain tethered to each other unless there are no other people in sight. Unleashed, my loyal sidekick won't stray far, but she races like a maniac after her airborne orange-and-green beach toy. This is the best exercise she gets and she never looks happier than she does during those beach visits.

Gladys is my Shetland Sheepdog, and she enjoys the Delaware Bay beach by trotting beside me on long walks or by chasing her waterproof beach toy with unrestrained doggie delight. When she was a fuzzy new puppy, she had a bout with kennel cough which caused her to sleep too much and seem generally uninspired. I had an idea: maybe a trip to the beach would lift her spirits. (It works for me.) I bundled her up in her tiny pink sweater to keep her from shivering (her adult dog coat hadn't come in yet). Off we went with a beach blanket, water bowl, tether, treats, and camera. The beach worked like a charm and cheered Gladys up just like it always brightens my mood. These days, the adult Gladys with her thick coat prefers beach walks in cooler weather or summer sunset picnics after the heat of the day.



Then there was Bambi, my wild-man mutt who was adopted from the pound when I was six. He liked to explore every nook and cranny of this beach and he loved to climb on the jetties made of boulders. He was a scrappy guy who I always kept leashed, just in case. I suspect those few times when he went AWOL he was actually camping out at the beach without supervision.

Those are my two dogs' experiences of the beach, but other dogs have their own preferences. Both of mine love(d) the sand and smells but neither

like(d) the water. Gladys watches with incredulity as other dogs, usually retrievers, fetch toys and sticks from water up to their noses! The more athletic dogs run for miles alongside their people at the water's edge. Gladys would rather network and has become well- socialized at the beach.



Whenever we are in a situation where there are other dogs, she uses the canine social skills she has learned at the beach to greet them. It took longer for her to learn about humans. Most people, but not all, enjoy petting a fluffy Sheltie. Gladys learned from her beach-walking experiences to approach people tentatively and wait until they call her over or put their hand down to pet her. Eventually, she also learned not to jump up on people with her sandy paws. If we decide to lounge rather than walk, Gladys will act as *la chien d'etiquette* and welcome walkers passing by her beach spot. We've learned to check our smartphone app to see when low tide is. When the tide is out, there is more room to run around on the strand.

There are other beaches nearby, but we visit them less because they have more restrictive dog policies. Some welcome dogs only from October to May because of the flocks of tourists who recreate on the beaches in summer. Some of the beaches nearby are strictly off-limits to dogs all year because of bird nesting areas. Cape May is a bird-popular spot because of its geographic location and because it sits midway on a main migration route. Cape May sits on the far south of the peninsula of New Jersey with the



Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Delaware Bay to the west. It is approximately the same latitude as Washington, DC, and about a three-hour drive south from New York City. There's a salt marsh nearby that attracts many pairs of the once-threatened osprey, oystercatchers in abundance, and all varieties of heron. One bird species in particular, the Red Knot, stops at our Delaware Bay beach to feast on the greenish eggs of the native horseshoe crab. All year 'round we see various species of shorebirds, gulls, sandpipers, plovers, and hawks, with more varieties in summer. It is not unusual to see egrets and eagles, herons, terns, and plovers on the beaches of Cape May.

Our beach has its unique natural aspects, but it also has some historical tales to tell. Just a few blocks north of our favorite spot is a neighborhood called Townbank. This is where whalers from New England and Long Island set up a log cabin village in the mid-1600s and expected to start a whaling industry. Whaling was not as profitable as they had hoped in the Delaware Bay, so they learned other trades and stayed in the area. Many of the names found on ships' manifests survive in the Cape May area to this day. A few hundred years later, the Cape May beaches a mile or so to the south of us played an important role in World War II. Cape May and Cape Henlopen, Delaware, across the bay (known as the Twin Capes), form a gateway from the Atlantic Ocean to the Delaware Bay. During World War II, this gateway had to be guarded because the important shipping, shipbuilding, and ordnance manufacturing cities of Camden and Philadelphia sat less than one hundred miles north on the adjacent Delaware River. German submarines lurked in the Atlantic coastal waters threatening our vessels and ports. Fort Miles was built on the two capes to guard the bay and river. At the very end of the war, a German U-boat was captured just off the Cape May coast. The vessel and its crew were brought to the larger part of Fort Miles on the Delaware side to be processed. The fort is gone now, but bunkers, lookout towers, and other artifacts survive.

That's the story of our "Dog Beach." Try to locate a dog-friendly beach near you and then consider a visit with your loyal companion. This endeavor takes a bit more planning than just showing up with a towel and sunglasses, but it will be well worth it. I have been researching the following list of tips since I was six years old, first with Bambi, and then with Gladys. It may look long, but we guarantee all of the items below will fit in a good-sized beach bag, except the umbrella, and will add safety and fun to your beach visit.

#### SAFETY FIRST:

- 1  To prevent dehydration for you both, take along some water. Collapsible water bowls and dog-friendly water bottles (some with cords for carrying) are available at pet supply stores.
- 2  Have you heard of sunscreen for dogs? This is a necessity for lighter-color dogs and should be applied wherever their skin is exposed

and on noses and ears. Avoid using sunscreen intended for humans because there could be ingredients toxic to dogs, and it is quite possible that Rover will attempt to lick it off.

- 3 ☒ Bring an umbrella. You may prefer to enjoy the beach without one, but Fido may prefer shade. On warmer days I noticed Gladys seeking out shady spots behind or under my chair, so I started bringing a small beach umbrella just for her.
- 4 ☒ Speaking of sun safety, be on the lookout for signs of heat stroke. According to WebMD, we should watch our dogs for pale gums, weakness, and excessive panting. Check out this site for more information on the symptoms and treatment of heat stroke and dehydration: <http://pets.webmd.com/dogs/heat-stroke-dehydration-dogs> .

BE NEAT AND ORGANIZED:

- 5 ☒ Poo-poo bags are required: do not think you are going to bury those treasures, Scallywag .  
Other beach visitors, their kids, and their dogs will be digging in that sand after you leave.
- 6 ☒ Bring a towel for drying, but also for brushing off sand from human feet and canine paws.
- 7 ☒ Besides a leash, consider bringing a stake and a tether. Gladys and I use a corkscrewed stake that stays put in the sand and a short tether which keeps her near my blanket. This gives her some freedom if space permits. It also saves me from having to hang onto her leash if there are people and other dogs around. I do admit to occasionally letting Gladys off-leash, but only when the beach is unpopulated and only because I'm confident she will stay near me. I was not so confident with Bambi.

FOR FUN:

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- 1 ☒ Bring treats and kibble.

- 2  Bring toys that float and are easily rinsed off because they will get sandy.
  
- 3  Bring a camera. I get some great shots of Gladys on the beach while lying on my beach blanket with the camera at her eye level. I work with a partner who throws the toy in my general direction and then gets out of the shot. I click as many photos as possible and look through them later on for the best. My goal is to capture all four paws off the ground! Gladys and I are grateful for the opportunity to enjoy the beach together, but we are mindful to obey the laws and not be a nuisance to others. Our beach is our playground, just like it is for many from our town and beyond. A visit to the beach raises our spirits, exercises our bodies, and helps us bond. In the words of Alain de Botton, “Nature is an escape from the human anthill.”

Got a question about dog beaches? Send Margaret an [e-mail](#)

Or, visit her [blog](#).