

Travel agency for pet dogs targets Britain

By Michael Leidig in Vienna

A COMPANY claiming to be the world's first canine travel agency has been flooded with inquiries from dog owners wanting to take Fritz "walkies in the UK".

Flughund, based in Germany, has proved a huge success with people looking for suitable holidays for their pampered pets since it opened a year ago. It is now trying to collar the lucrative demand for UK holidays by finding suitable destinations while using the relaxation of quarantine laws to tempt British customers abroad.

Regina Winter, the managing director, said: "It's like a new land has been discovered for dog owners because of pet passports. People outside the UK love the idea of being able to walk their dog on Dartmoor or the Scottish Highlands and many others are desperate to visit London, with their dogs of course. "We have already started scouting out some UK partners to add to our catalogue. People in America in particular have shown interest in visiting the UK - these are people who have copied Liz Taylor and avoided the UK in the past because they could not take their dogs."

Flughund has everything from health farms, where dogs can be sent to work off a few pounds, to specialist hotels offering facilities such as doggie cinemas and dog massage and beauty parlours. For the gourmet, there is a hotel in France which has a canine restaurant and dog-sitters who will look after the dog if owners want some romantic time alone. There is even a Flughund club where dogs get discount holidays and special deals - such as joint owner-and-dog deals at the local hairdresser.

Mrs Winter said: "People in the UK would be surprised at the range of dog-related holidays there are around the world. The cinema at a hotel in Austria for example shows mostly Lassie films, and the dogs love it. They sit there staring at the screen - and barking and having a great time."

She got the idea for Flughund when she ran a conventional travel agency and often took one of her Belgian Shepherd dogs to work with her. So many people asked if she could recommend dog-related holidays after seeing the dog that she decided to go into business.