



Who let the dogs out?: Two pooches take a shopping break to stretch their legs at the Ilio store "dog run." MELINDA JOE PHOTOS

In Tokyo, nothing is too good for your pet

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Whether you're looking for a birthday cake for your beagle, or oxygen therapy for your tabby, you can find countless ways to pamper your pet in Tokyo.

Japan has become a nation of animal lovers. According to the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association of Japan, the number of domestic cats and dogs in the country now stands at 26.8 million, up from 17.8 million 10 years ago. Many cafes and shops are now animal-friendly and there are several fun places for owners to take their furry friends out for a day on the town.

The menu at Les Deux Bleue in Toyosu's LaLaport shopping complex in Koto Ward reads like one from an upscale bistro — chicken-liver pate with a bountiful mix of organic vegetables, grilled beef and *okara* (soy pulp) hamburgers, apple pie with fresh cream and mint — except that's just for the dogs. "You can try it, but you'll definitely think it has no flavor," laughs manager Tatsuaki Matsumura, who explains that the dog-menu ingredients are the same as those used in the dishes for people, but with one notable difference: The dog versions are completely additive-free. "We don't use any preservatives, salt or sugar," says Matsumura. "Everything is fresh and healthy."



Daylong companion: Toru Sakuma with his bulldog Bu, one of five dogs that keep customers company at the Copan hair salon in Nogata, Tokyo.

The cafe also specializes in elaborate doggy birthday cakes made with strawberries, blueberries, eggs and sour cream. Owners can personalize it with a message and request special decorations. These treats aren't exactly cheap — a medium-size cake costs ¥2,000, and a doggy dinner will set you back ¥1,800 — but Matsumura says they sell well. After all, for dog owners it's a small price to pay for a pet's happiness.

Perhaps after a lunch break at Les Deux Bleue, owners should pop next door to Ilio, where they can shop for designer snacks, fancy shampoos and jauntily colored toys. The atmosphere is one of unbridled cuteness, mingled with an air of sophistication. The shelves are lined with the latest in canine fashion — frilly petticoats, miniature knit jumpers and rhinestone-studded kerchiefs. Owners can even choose pet jewelry, from silver skull pendants on black leather bands to pink enameled roses on ribbons.

Most of the customers come with their dogs, which can be let loose on Ilio's "dog run" facility outside. For ¥500, any dog can roam on an open, grassy field overlooking the bay. Surrounded by a thin wire fence, the area is about the size of an Olympic pool, and there are places for owners to rest while the dogs play.

Ilio also rents dog carriages to LaLaport visitors who want to continue shopping around the complex but feel their pets need a rest. And at the end of the day, shoppers can also stop in at Belg Aube to unwind with a Belgian beer while their canine companions enjoy "Happy Lager" beer. The drink, which comes in a brown beer bottle with a kitsch label, is non-alcoholic and flavored with beef extract. The staff at Belg Aube admit, though, judging by most dogs' initial balking at the carbonation, the drink could be more fun for owners than for pets.



Pet pampering: The relaxation lounge at Wag Style in Yoyogi Uehara, Shibuya, where dogs and owners can relax in separate oxygen capsules.

If all that still isn't enough pet pampering for you, it doesn't stop at restaurants and shopping. The Wag Style dog cafe and grooming salon in Yoyogi Uehara, Shibuya, features a relaxation lounge where both owners and pets can chill out in separate oxygen capsules. For humans, the treatment involves lying inside a bed-like hyperbaric chamber and breathing in pressurized oxygen. For animals, the pet-sized acrylic and aluminum chambers resemble giant PVC pipes with metal rims.

The cafe was originally a showroom for Air Press, a company that began importing oxygen therapy equipment from the United States in 2002. Air Press started experimenting with hyperbaric chambers for pets four years ago and is now manufacturing the machines.

Oxygen therapy yields anti-aging and stress-relieving benefits for both humans and animals, says company president Tsuyoshi Hirano. Hirano, who has been undergoing oxygen therapy himself for eight years, says that both his human and canine clients are happy with the treatment. "The dogs just relax in the capsules and sleep really peacefully," he says.

Wag Style's regular customers are mostly men and women in their 40s and their 50s who live nearby. They cater largely to dogs, but the service is also available for cats. A one-hour session for humans includes a short massage and costs ¥4,500, while a half-hour pet session is ¥2,000. Although Tokyo is Wag Style's only location, Hirano hopes to expand to other cities.

For most of Japan's dog owners, pet time equals playtime. At Copan hair salon in Nogata, Nakano Ward, however, work and play overlap. Toru Sakuma and his four dogs commute to and from work together every day.

When Sakuma started his own business six years ago, he couldn't bear to leave his first dog, a black-and-white bulldog named Bu, at home alone.

"If I left her at home, she'd be too lonely," Sakuma says.

The staff at Copan has since expanded to include two more people and four more dogs, one of which belongs to another member of Sakuma's staff. When the front door opens, the dogs rush to greet customers with excited barks — a canine version of "Irasshaimase!"

The pooches have become neighborhood celebrities, and people even stop by just to say hello to them. On the walls hang portraits of the dogs painted by local artists.

Clients with dogs are welcome to bring them, too. Small dogs are placed in the pen with the little dogs at the front corner of the shop, and large dogs are allowed to play with Akane, a large and active red Boxer, at the back.

"They're very popular," Sakuma says about his salon's dogs. He smiles and gives Bu a pat on the head. "The people who come here all love dogs."

For more information: Les Deux Bleue: r.gnavi.co.jp/g694103/Ilio; Ilio: ilio.jp Belg Aube: www.belgaube.jp/page/toyosu Wag Style: www.air-press.com/wagstyle/index.html Copan: www.shindo.to/

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