

## **PETS ACROSS THE SEA**

When I had the pleasure of traveling to Europe for professional and personal reasons, I visited Denmark and Poland to meet with a few of my colleagues who work in private practice and in university settings. I decided it might be interesting to share my observations about pets and pet care in other countries.

In Europe, for the most part, veterinary care and the number of pets vary from country to country. This has to do more with mentality and national traditions than to economics. Sweden has streamlined and implemented a trapping program so efficient that there are virtually no stray cats. On the downside, however, the rat and mouse populations in cities have mushroomed to the degree that Sweden often imports spayed stray cats from Russia and Poland to help control the unwanted rodents. The majority of pets in Sweden are insured. Sweden leads the European community in the number of pets having medical coverage.

Denmark people, like those in Holland, prefer bicycles to automobiles. Pet ownership is not very popular in Denmark. Mostly, I meet dog owners that are breeders who sell their offspring litters to other Scandinavian countries. In Denmark, I saw no free-roaming cats except in villages. The dense population in Denmark's three major cities (1.5 million people in Copenhagen alone), where most people live in small apartments may be one reason why there are so few pets. Here veterinary medicine is more prevention oriented, and the well-being of a pet is the primary focus of veterinary visits.

Surprisingly, Poland has the highest pet-per-citizen ratio. Almost 90% of households own one or two pets. The common disbelief in sterilization is still prevalent. That and the genuine love for pets make pet ownership very common. State law prohibits euthanasia, and I saw many dogs that spend their entire lives in cages at local shelters.

Polish veterinarian visits focus on interventional medicine with treatment and surgical modes at the forefront. Pets are allowed in any mode of transportation in Poland, and most restaurants will allow pets to join their owners at street-side tables during the summer months throughout Europe. Unfortunately you have to watch where you step as excrement pick up is not very well enforced in any of the countries I visited.

Overall, pets everywhere in Europe are treated as family members, and their permanent placement within families is as cherished as it is here in the United States.

