

## Jet-Setting Pets Get a New Place to Be Pampered at Kennedy Airport

Square Feet

By JANE L. LEVERE MARCH 21, 2017



From left, Sue Bruns, Kristen McGowan and Shannon Walker handling the mare Messina at the new Ark at JFK center at Kennedy International Airport. The center assists in-transit animals left by their owners before they fly, or by pet shippers or airlines. Credit Johnny Milano for The New York Times

Airports have long been known for offering high-end services to their human passengers — for a price. Now, at [Kennedy International Airport](#), the same can be said for animals.

Dogs, cats, horses, birds, fish and even sloths will be able to have their own special accommodations at a new center called [the Ark at JFK](#). Services will include things like “pawdicures” for dogs, fancy stalls for racehorses and quarantined lodgings for sick birds.

The offerings at the Ark, which occupies nearly 80,000 square feet and is opening in stages, will range from the essential to the luxurious. Its operation will be far more extensive than that of the previous animal center at the airport, Vetport, which closed in December.

Pet owners willing to part with some extra cash have the option of using the Ark's [Pet Oasis](#), which opened in January and assists in-transit animals left by their owners before they fly, or by pet shippers or airlines. Ark vehicles can transport animals from jets to the 4,000-square-foot Pet Oasis. Staff members groom, feed, water, walk and play with the animals. Rates, which vary by service, are available by request only.



A dog was weighed at the Pet Oasis at the Ark center, which houses various in-transit animals. Credit Johnny Milano for The New York Times

[Paradise 4 Paws](#), an animal resort that already has outposts at airports in Chicago, Dallas and Denver, will open its flagship location at the Ark in early summer, with 20,000 square feet there for its posh accommodations. It will serve dogs and cats of traveling pet parents, as well as animals owned by airport employees and people living nearby.

The resort will have 150 suites, 130 for dogs and the remainder for cats. The largest, the 9-by-12-foot “Top Dog Suite,” will contain a full-size bed and a 32-inch flat-screen TV. Owners will be able to keep tabs on their pets via a 24-hour webcam.

Paradise 4 Paws will offer massages and nail treatments, along with a bone-shaped splashing pool for dogs. Rates will range from \$35 to \$125 a night, depending on the size of the accommodations and type of pet.

For jet-setting horses, a 5,000-square-foot, 23-stall export center opened in January. Its luxurious stalls have nonslip flooring and high-end hay for animals to eat and bed down on.

A 20,000-square-foot equine import and quarantine center, with 48 stalls, will open by June. It will serve racing, polo, sport and show horses being imported into the United States. Special vehicles will transport the horses directly from jet stalls to the center, and Olympic grooms will be able to exercise the horses there.



Contractors working to finish the stalls at the equine quarantine area at the Ark. Credit Johnny Milano for The New York Times

Birds — from tropical species and penguins to gulls — will find lodging in a 5,000-square-foot aviary that will serve both individual and commercial bird shippers.

The Ark, which cost \$65 million to build, will not be all dog massages and conciergelike hotel services. It will also have a veterinary hospital and perform federally required quarantines and disease prevention.

Horses, birds and some other animals that enter the United States must be quarantined three to 30 days so their health can be monitored and any medical conditions treated before they are admitted. (In many cases, dogs and cats do not need to be quarantined if they have the proper certificates.) Sloths, for example, are highly regulated by the Department of Agriculture and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and will be provided a safe, warm environment while quarantined.

If medical conditions are not resolved, the animals cannot enter the country. The [Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine](#) is overseeing quarantining and other kinds of disease prevention for horses and birds at the Ark.

The Ark owns its 178,000-square-foot building, once occupied by Airborne Express, and subleases the surrounding 14.4 acres from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates J.F.K. (Worldwide Freight Services rents the remaining space.) The building is a seven- or eight-minute ride from the airport's passenger terminals.



John J. Cuticelli Jr., the founder and chief executive of the Ark, at its loading area for departing horses. Credit Johnny Milano for The New York Times

The Ark was developed by John J. Cuticelli Jr., who serves as its chief executive. It is a subsidiary of [Racebrook](#), a New York-based real estate [private equity](#) firm that Mr. Cuticelli has run since 2004. He and his wife and business partner, Elizabeth A. Schuette, the managing director of the Ark, also own the [Cornell Ruffian Equine Specialists](#) hospital building in Elmont, N.Y., next to Belmont Racetrack.

In addition to receiving input from the Cornell veterinary school, Mr. Cuticelli worked on the Ark with Gensler, the architecture firm that designed Terminals 4 and 5 at J.F.K. He also consulted with Temple Grandin, a designer of livestock handling facilities and professor of animal science at Colorado State University, and Lachlan Oldaker, an equine architect. Holt Construction is the Ark's general contractor and construction management company.

Derek Huntington, managing director of Capital Pet Movers and president of the [International Pet and Animal Transportation Association](#), said the Ark was the only major United States airport facility dedicated to handling

inbound and outbound pets. Mr. Cuticelli conferred with Mr. Huntington while planning the Pet Oasis.

The association estimates that two million pets and other live animals are transported by air annually in the United States. The figure rises to over four million worldwide.

Outside the United States, Lufthansa has operated a 43,000-square-foot “Animal Lounge” at the airline’s hub airport in Frankfurt since 2008. Far older is the Heathrow Animal Reception Center, operated by the City of London since 1977.



Dogs in the kennel at the Pet Oasis at the Ark, which opened in January. Credit Johnny Milano for The New York Times

Typical airline passengers traveling with pets will not be required to use the Ark. At less expense, they can still arrange for their pets’ transport on their own, by flying them in cargo or in some cases in the airplane cabin of their flight.

Daphna Nachminovitch, senior vice president for cruelty investigations for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, said flying animals in cargo always involved risks no matter who was handling the transportation.

“If you are traveling with an animal companion, the safest way to do that is to have the animal travel with you in the cabin, under the seat, if the animal fits,” she said. “We strongly recommend against flying an animal in cargo. We’ve seen so many things go wrong, so many animals lost forever, injured or killed.”

“If the animal is too large,” Ms. Nachminovitch continued, “drive if you can, get someone else you trust to drive, see if Amtrak will allow the animal as they sometimes do, or, if you have the funds, rent a private plane.”

The Ark advises that all animals be microchipped and registered, said Ms. Schuette, the Ark’s managing director. She added that microchipping ensured animals’ safety while in transit and at home.

Pet Oasis maintains communication with the airline or cargo handler transporting an animal to ensure that the airline information affixed on the outside of the animal’s crate matches all information it receives from its owner, she said.

Ms. Nachminovitch said: “If someone has the money to spend on something like the Ark that makes for a safer trip, we are all for it. It’s expensive to look after an animal properly and an obligation to safeguard them and assure they are not traumatized or in discomfort.”

***Correction: April 4, 2017***

*An article on the Square Feet page on March 22 about the Ark at JFK, which offers high-end services to animal passengers at Kennedy International Airport, referred imprecisely to the ownership of the Cornell Ruffian Equine Specialists hospital in Elmont, N.Y. While the developer of the Ark, John J. Cuticelli Jr., owns the hospital building and its equipment with his wife and business partner, Elizabeth A. Schuette, they do not own the veterinary practice itself. (Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, which leases the building and equipment from them, owns the equine practice.)*

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