

Under the Italian Sun

N. L. (August 15, 2011)



Summer vacation is a risky time for household pets in Italy. Vacationers are too busy thinking of splashing in the water rather than taking care of their pets and the easiest way out is to abandon them on the nation's highways.

Every summer, for decades now, the streets of Italy are covered with posters, the newspapers and magazines of adds, the TV stations of long commercials... all with one purpose: the protection of household pets. Indeed every summer thousands of animals, dogs mostly, but others as well, are abandoned because their families are going on vacation and there is no time for them anymore. Italian highways become the stage of a sad destiny, where who has played with you for a year (or many years), has brought you laugh and joy is left alone under the scorching sun.



Apparently these campaigns are becoming more and more effective, and, although there still are those who do leave their pets behind, things are slowly improving.

One of the measures taken against this phenomenon is the campaign "Io l'ho visto" ("I saw him") promoted by Prontofido (Association for the protection of animals) in collaboration with national radio stations (Radio 105, Radio Monte Carlo, Virgin Radio, the web radio Radio Bau & Co) and [Aidaa](#) [2] (Associazione italiana difesa animali e ambiente, Italian association for the protection of animals and the environment). From the middle of July until the beginning of September whoever sees a lone dog wandering on the highway should stop at the first service area and send a text message to a special number (334.1051030) with the coordinates of where the animal was seen (specifying area, time and direction).

The text message informs the "anti-abandonment" teams, 1000 volunteers who cover the entire country, who immediately look for the animal and save him. Each team is made up of 4 people, who are wearing a yellow hat with the logo "Io l'ho visto," who patrol the highways from 7 am to 10 pm. In the biggest cities, like Milan, Rome and Turin, the volunteers drive around by motorcycle, instead of by car, as it is faster to reach their destination. Whoever has an iPhone or iPad can download the "Io l'ho visto" app free of charge and thanks to the GPS signal the exact location of the caller can be seen asap. In 2010 thanks to this campaign, after 2100 sightings, 613 dogs were saved, 167 were returned to their owners as they were actually lost (the microchip was essential) while 211 people were sued for having abandoned their pet. The legal consequences are becoming more and more severe and one can be jailed for up to one year.

This year, in the first two weeks of August 1290 dogs were rescued on highways, although still high, this shows a decrease of 19% in comparison to last summer.

This summer's data (provided by Aidaa) is showing that over 9 million Italian families have brought on vacation with them, about 9 million animals during the Ferragosto (mid of August) weekend.

The estimate specifies that 8million are dogs, about 1 million are cats, then there are thousands of rabbits, birds and hamsters, have left the city to go to their vacation destination. Additionally, about 300.000 dogs and 150.000 cats are housed in special facilities while their family enjoys time away. The majority of these families have shortened their vacation time from 11 days to about a week, while the favored destinations have not changed: the beach remains on top (70%) followed by the mountains and the woods (16%) and agriturismo (rural farms) or international destinations (14%).

Apparently, in order to help with the problem more hotels are allowing families to bring their pets, but there are some hidden costs. Keeping the dog with you in a hotel averagely costs 7-10 Euros a day extra on the room with no additional service. Aidaa representatives have received several statements from different areas of the country: "Tourists have been charged extra money to keep the dog with them but the hotel did not offer any service at all. If you add these costs to beach costs where in addition to chairs and umbrella you have to pay 5-7 euros a day to have the dog with you, it means that having him with you for a two week vacation will cost from 170 euros to 240 extra. At the moment only half of the 70 hotels we have contacted charges this additional fee which is applied only to large and medium size animals, while just very few charge for small ones too." "We thank all the hotels that welcome our four legged friends, as an increase of available locations is really helping a lot," Lorenzo Croce, president of Aidaa said, "We just think that charging these extra fees is a step back."

The highways are trying to help too. The company [Autogrill](#) [3] (food service and retail outlets at service areas), in collaboration with Amico Pets, (Association for the promotion of animal health) [Royal Canin](#) [4] (Producer of pet food) and [ANMVI](#) [5] (Associazione dei Medici Veterinari Italiani, Association of Italian veterinarians), has introduced, yet again, FidoPark, with the purpose of catering to each and every need of pets that are traveling with their family on the highway. There is a total of sixteen Fido Parks in sixteen Autogrill service areas, along the highways that are most trafficked during the summer exodus. These are areas where vets are available for immediate assistance as well as, for serious cases, personnel who assists the owners with locating the closest ERs. In addition, Royal Canin has put together a kit, free of charge, that includes a water bowl, plastic bags and other necessary items plus brochures with practical information on travel for whoever stops by.



Their suggestions for traveling are that, at least a couple of weeks before departure, a visit to the vet is necessary. It is recommended to have a full check up and make sure everything is OK. The pet's health card should be updated with all vaccinations and other information and brought along in case of any emergency. The dog tag should also include all updated information, especially the owner's phone number so that they can be contacted easily in case the pet gets lost. For international travel the pet should have a European passport. This is mandatory, it would be a pity to turn around after hours of driving if the pet does not have one. The pet should have had his last meal at least 8 hours before departure in order to avoid digestion problems while on the road. Before taking a long trip get the animal used to traveling by doing small trips that get longer and longer with time. Make sure there always are food, water and bowls handy. Never leave the dog behind in the car if anybody in the family needs to get out. The pet needs to walk around and to get some fresh air too. Also, as he needs to drink every two hours, he would probably need to go to the bathroom frequently. If people are traveling by train they should make sure they are not in a crowded compartment, as the noise and the presence of several strangers might make him nervous and upset. If they are traveling by plane or train cover the box the pet is in with a cotton sheet, this prevents him from seeing what is out there, thus keep him away from excessive stimuli

Yes it does require some effort, but it isn't really that bad. Much better than leaving him behind on the concrete. Believe it or not animals are not objects that can be simply thrown away.

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- [1] <http://ftp.ility.org/files/autostrada1313414895.jpg>
- [2] <http://www.aidaa.it>
- [3] <http://www.autogrill.com>
- [4] <http://www.royalcanin.us>
- [5] <http://www.anmvi.it>