

# Travel Courier<sup>®</sup>

Canada's **FAVOURITE** Travel Trade Magazine



## Animal House

BC group  
rescues  
cats and dogs  
abroad

Darci Galati and Sue Urie

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN ARMSTRONG FOR TRAVEL COURIER

By Ted Davis

No one wants to see animals suffer, especially while they are on vacation. Yet it is the presence of abused animals at popular vacation destinations that is helping to drive the dog-and-cat rescue mission by a tourism-based organization in BC.

CANDi – for cats and dogs international – is the result of a determination by a few key individuals in the Canadian travel industry to help reverse the plight of abandoned and abused domestic animals in the world's tourist hotspots.

Amongst these is Cancun, which CANDi has chosen as the location for its first animal sanctuary project. Located in a poor, dirt-road neighbourhood near the Mexican tourist mecca, the sanctuary is in fact a large, empty house that has been adapted to the needs of the animals with rooms for staff, mother dogs with puppies, food and drug storage – and one cat, at the moment.

The house sits within a large, walled yard, in which some 80 dogs (and counting) roam about freely in large, happy packs. They set upon visitors in a relentless, tail-wagging rush.

These are the lucky ones, found abandoned and often injured on the streets by sanctuary manager, Maria Alicia Salgado. Outside the walls, these stray, abandoned dogs wander the streets and yards of Mexico in astonishing numbers.

She tempts them into the back seat of her small car with food and water, then bundles them back to the facility for some TLC. Some live, some die. For instance, in some cases, newborn puppies

are thrown into the garbage. The mother is still full of milk and has no way to express it, so becomes infected and dies horribly, says CANDi.

These animals aren't just in the residential neighbourhoods of Cancun. They wander into or near the many resorts, seeking food, comfort and companionship. "It is distressing for tourists to witness the pain and suffering of these animals," says Darci Galati, founder of CANDi. "North Americans love their pets as part of the family."

But it is this reality check that forces motivation upon some visitors.

"When they travel on holiday and witness this, it somehow changes their vacation," says Galati. "Through tourism, we have the power to make changes."

Galati started planning CANDi about two years ago, and its non-profit status was established last year. It launched in December 2007 with a web site, which is now being redone to reflect other CANDi operations (Puerto Vallarta and Playa del Carmen) in Mexico that are in the early phases of starting up. Galati is the president of Dargal Interline, which sells cruises and resorts to airline employees and their families. It is the largest interline agency in North America.

"We are focusing on Mexico and will be expanding to the Caribbean as well," she said. "What can be done in Cancun can easily be done anywhere in the world."



On the run in Mexico...

Adoptions are one solution that CANDi offers. Preparations for adoption and travel are quick and inexpensive, including some documentation and vaccinations. The animal must be flown out of the destination within 10 days, and

no quarantine procedure is necessary.

But adoptions are just one approach. The root solution is in preventing the female cats and dogs from breeding, through having them spayed/neutered by a vet.

The potential breeding multiplier by cats and dogs is daunting. For

instance, a single female cat can have three litters a year, with an average of five kittens per litter. In only seven years, she and her offspring could potentially produce 420,000 cats. In just six years, one female dog and her brood can produce as many as 67,000 puppies.

CANDi's immediate goal is to hire a vet (at \$800 per month) at the facility so it can start offering free spay/neuter clinics to the poor communities. It also wants to raise \$100,000 to build a permanent facility.

To do so, it is looking for support to help with awareness and funding, by using some new programs. For instance, posting the CANDi logo on a company web site can help raise awareness and show tourists how they can help, says Galati.

Also, for the month of May, Dargal will be donating part of each booking to CANDi to help

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## New vision for Conquest in West

Conquest Vacations recently consolidated its western Canada sales team in Vancouver to better reflect the realities of the labour marketplace.

Finding and keeping a sales manager in the hot Calgary employment market has proven challenging, says the company. So, it has instead hired an additional area sales manager that is based in Vancouver. Both Derek Legault and Lisa O'Neill now handle all the travel agency business in western Canada. O'Neill is the key accounts manager for BC, Northern Alberta and Manitoba, while Legault is the area sales manager for BC, Southern Alberta and Saskatchewan.

"There is an apparent shortage of travel professionals in the marketplace, especially in Alberta," said Marilyn Stecko, director of sales, western Canada for Conquest. She said that former area sales managers in Alberta had been drawn away by other companies offering more senior positions and bigger salaries in Alberta's competitive labour market.

"The love of travel doesn't cut it anymore...when you hear that in Alberta people are making close to \$17 an hour to work at Tim Horton's, it leaves our industry in the dust." The idea of a centralized sales team that includes inside sales makes a lot of sense, says Stecko. "Everything is filtered through one office, so that enables us to provide the same excellent coverage and support as in the past. And there is always someone in the office that can assist our clients."



## West Edmonton Mall welcomes water park

West Edmonton Mall is now home to the largest indoor interactive water play feature in the West. Caribbean Cove opened in World Waterpark, and the area of some 2,000 square metres features mini-slides, water toys and a 1,200-litre tipping bucket that "constantly fills, then tips to douse guests with water."

"Caribbean Cove provides people of all ages with a variety of ways to entertain themselves in one specific area of the park, and we believe families, in particular, will find endless enjoyment with this attraction," said Stacey Claffey, West Edmonton Mall manager. Caribbean Cove's volume of circulating water amounts to 143,846 litres a minute, and the attraction also has three slides, 25 platforms and visitors will also find a net climb, net bridges, crawl tube, water guns, tipping cones, pipe falls, pull ropes, water curtains, bubble jets, tipping troughs, and funnels. ([www.westedmontonmall.com](http://www.westedmontonmall.com))



## Vancouver to welcome new boutique

Boutique Hotels & Resorts of British Columbia is adding L'Hermitage Hotel to its collection of luxury hotels and resorts. Set to open in May, the 60-suite L'Hermitage will offer "the latest in modern luxury and comfort within the vibrant and cosmopolitan heart of downtown Vancouver." The downtown hotel has suites with plasma televisions and kitch-

ettes. Amenities include a health club and a Library Lounge where a complimentary continental breakfast will be served each day. A full-time concierge will be available to assist with all guest requests from theatre tickets and shopping suggestions, to dinner reservations and nightspot recommendations. (1-888-855-1050, [www.lhermitagevancouver.com](http://www.lhermitagevancouver.com))

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raise funds. As well, some companies have offered to do a "round-up" promotion, whereby a booking is rounded up to the next dollar, and the extra monies given to CANDi.

CANDi is also promoting the concept of "cat cafés." That is, tour operators and hotel chains can partner with CANDi on projects whereby a resort builds an outdoor shelter – cat café – for the stray cats that congregate there and would be otherwise exterminated. The resort would work with local vets to capture and spay/neuter/vaccinate the cats, then release them back into the resort, where they would be fed daily.

Guests will see this and applaud the resort for their humane treatments of the felines. Result? Great publicity of the resort at a minimal cost, says Galati.

"If we could get the tourist industry involved in this, it would be a win-win situation for everyone," said Galati. "CANDi is looking to partner with major airlines, tour operators, travel agency chains, resorts, hotels, and cruise ship lines." ([darci@candiinternational.org](mailto:darci@candiinternational.org))