

Walking the dog: a get-out-of-jail card in lockdown Spain

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Once a twice-daily chore that drew a chorus of complaints, walking the dog has become an enviable get-out-of-jail card in lockdown Spain with some wily punters even offering their hounds out for hire.

Unlike in Italy, where people can go out to stretch their legs despite a national lockdown, Spain has banned all such sorties under its state of emergency.

But they can go out if they have a four-legged friend—for a brief walk and only to carry out the bare necessities.

"You go out more often but for less time," says Luis Fe, a 49-year-old teacher walking Dara, his border collie, near a church in Madrid.

Other dog owners are the same, he says: going out "just because they can, or because they are bored at home."

With numbers of cases spiralling, Spain on Saturday introduced a nationwide lockdown to try and curb the spread of the virus that has now infected more than 17,000 people, making it the fourth worst-hit nation in the world.

And barking is one of the few sounds that break the silence of Madrid's eerily-deserted streets.

Rent-a-dog

With no [scientific evidence](#) that animals pass on the virus to humans, having a dog is now seen as an enviable freedom pass for housebound Spaniards.

"One dog owner told me someone had sent him a message asking if they could rent his dog," Fe says.

And the idea seems to be catching on.

"If anyone wants to get out for a walk, I will rent them my dog," read one advert on Milanuncios, Spain's online classifieds site.

Not everyone thinks it's funny.

"That's a nightmare—for other people's health and for the dog itself who's going out with a person they don't know," tuts Alicia Barrientos, 39, who is out walking her Australian sheepdog.

And rival classifieds site Wallapop also pooh-pooed the idea, urging users to report any such dodgy dog offers.

But the subject had sparked a flood of humour on social media, from posts of pups punting themselves out at 15 euros a walk, to others collapsing in exhaustion: "But you've already taken me out 38 times today".

At least one man in northern Spain thought he could get away with faking it—until police caught him dragging a stuffed toy along by a leash in a hilarious moment caught on camera by sniggering neighbours on a nearby balcony.

And it has caught on online with Facebook and Twitter flooded with similar clips, with one even showing a man getting ready to "walk" his daughter who is disguised as a dalmatian.

It's not only in Spain, with a mayor in Sardinia forced to issue a public clarification that the [dogs](#) being walked "have to be alive" while in Rome, some people have even been spotted walking pigs.

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