



Boarding your Pet

Going on vacation or traveling for work? That means it is time to figure out what to do with your dog or cat while you are gone. There are many different options for you to choose from – how do you know what is right for your pet? I am hoping to make your decision a little easier and possibly shed some light on some practices that you may not be aware of.

I want to address cats first because they are the more sensitive pets. Most cats REALLY don't like their routine changed – they can get stressed very easily. Stress can affect cats in different ways including litter box issues, anorexia and/or aggression that can be temporary or permanent. The best option for cats is to have someone stay at your home or have someone come by once or twice a day to love them, play with them, feed them and do the maintenance on litter boxes. The only time I ever recommend a cat be boarded away from the home is when the cat has an illness that needs to be monitored – and then they should only be boarded at your veterinarian's office.

Dogs are more resilient, so you have choices. I am listing the choices in what I believe to be best order with the first option as the best and the last option as the least recommended. Red flags are facilities that don't ask for your pet's vaccine records, don't have a business license or insurance, un-friendly staff and not answering your questions, a pet care "broker" (someone who makes money finding other people to care for your dog) or not giving you a tour of the facility.

1. By Far, the best option is to have a friend or family member stay at your house and take care of your pets with as little interruption to their normal routine as possible. If you can't find anyone to stay over or just don't want someone staying in your home, the next best option is to have your pets stay at a friend or family's home that you and your pet know and trust (providing that person is knowledgeable and responsible). This is especially good for dogs that are not dog friendly and would prefer not to be in the company of other dogs.

2. Overnight house/pet sitting – The next best option is to hire a professional that will stay in your home, care for your pets while being consistent enforcing your house rules. An overnight professional will be able to make your house appear lived in, water plants, take out the trash and bring in your mail while taking care of your pet in their own environment.

3. Family Style Boarding - This is a person that boards pets in their home. There are a few around that do this well and know what they are doing and how to keep your dog safe and there are some that just like dogs and want to make some easy money. Your dog

doesn't stay in a cage; they live in the person's home along with their own dogs and family. Just be sure to check the person out, ask a lot of questions and make sure you and your dog are comfortable with not only the home but the human as well. You should never use this option if they don't require a meet & greet prior to boarding. This can be as simple as taking your dog by to meet the person and their dogs or leaving your dog overnight for a trial before you schedule your boarding. Don't be surprised if they ask you to leave the premise while they introduce your dog to their dogs – owners being present can very negatively affect the greetings. ***One rule of thumb to remember is – you get what you pay for. Safety, dog knowledge, business license and insurance are non-negotiable!***

4. Day Care or “Free Range” Boarding – Many day care facilities offer boarding, some boarding facilities offer play time and some veterinary offices offer day care so that your dog friendly dog gets to play and socialize during the day and sleep in a kennel overnight. Some facilities have someone on premise 24 hours a day, some don't – either is ok, it is just what you are more comfortable with. All dogs need down-time along with daily exercise, be sure to use a facility that provides your pet their own private room at night.

5. Extended Boarding Kennels – I classify this as facilities that have indoor/outdoor runs so your dog can have space to move around, work their muscles, potty in one area, eat and/or sleep in another. The size of the run should be no less than 6X8 for medium to large dogs and 4X6 for small dogs. There should be something elevated for your dog to lie on if they want to, a dog door so they have access to the outside portion of the run and have a visual or space barrier between them and other dogs. The facility should let you tour the area where the dogs are being boarded so you can check cleanliness – if they don't let you see it, go somewhere else. Some will say you can see it on the video camera, but there is no substitution for seeing it up close and personal. Your dog will likely be in his kennel for 24 hours a day.

6. Boarding Kennels – I classify this as a facility that has stacks of cages; some being 2X2, 3X3, 3X5 up to an indoor dog run of 4X6 with no outdoor area. In these facilities, your dog may be in a cage for 23-24 hours a day. Some facilities walk the dogs a couple of times a day, some just rotate dogs to clean kennels as they clean the dirty ones and some just clean up the cage while your dog is tethered somewhere. This is a miserable experience for most dogs and after a stay at one of these places many dogs come home with some behavior issues.

7. Veterinary Offices – ***With the exception of veterinary offices that offer day care!*** Veterinary offices are full of...sick pets – some contagious, some not. Vet offices are typically very busy leaving very little time for the staff to interact with your dog. Your dog is usually kept in a small cage for 23-24 hours a day. Some vet offices have dedicated kennel staff that comes in just to clean cages and walk dogs, but even then, your dog gets very little attention. Most vets are not on premise 24 hours a day, so your dog is alone typically from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am and if your dog did not eliminate on their last walk of the day, they will likely eliminate and then be forced to sleep and/or eat in

their own mess. Most vets prefer not to board, they only offer it as a convenience for their clients. This can be the best option for ill or senior dogs and cats.

Make a checklist with all the questions you want to ask and take that with you when you visit a facility (be sure to leave your dog at home while you are interviewing and interview several places). The boarding facility you choose will be caring for an important part of your family and you will most likely be spending a fair amount of money there, so don't be shy! Expect good customer service, clean facilities and knowledgeable, professional and skillful care from the staff as well as the owner.

Bottom line, in my opinion, is – cats should not be boarded unless there is a health issue, no dog under 6 months should EVER be boarded in number 4-7, don't force a non-social dog into a social environment and no dog should be caged for 23-24 hours a day. You plan on having fun while you are on vacation, make your dog's stay a safe and happy vacation, too!

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