

Choosing a Boarding Kennel

Need to go out of town? A boarding kennel can give your pet quality care while you're away, giving you peace of mind. However, before you load Fido and Fluffy into the car and drive them to the nearest kennel, it's important to do your homework and find the right facility for your pets. You'll then need to prepare your pets for boarding.

What are the pros and cons of using a boarding kennel?

Your pets depend on you to take good care of them, even when you're out of town. Friends and neighbors may not have the experience or time to properly look after your pets, particularly for longer trips. So, next time you have to leave your pets behind for a while, leave pet care to the professionals by finding a reputable pet sitter or boarding kennel.

A facility specializing in care and overnight boarding allows your pet to:

- avoid the stress of a long car or airplane ride to your destination.
- stay where he's welcome (unlike many hotels).
- receive more attention and supervision than he would if home alone most of the day.
- be monitored by staff trained to spot health problems.
- be secure in a kennel designed to foil canine and feline escape artists.

Potential drawbacks to using a boarding kennel include:

- the stress related to staying in an unfamiliar environment.
- the proximity to other pets, which may expose your pet to health problems.
- the difficulty of finding a kennel that accepts pets other than dogs and cats.
- the inconvenience of the drive to the kennel, which can be especially hard on a pet easily stressed by car travel.

How do I find a good kennel?

Ask a friend, neighbor, veterinarian, animal shelter or reputable dog trainer for a recommendation. Keep in mind that some non-profit animal shelters, cannot give specific referrals to privately owned businesses. However, you can also check the Yellow Pages under "Kennels& Pet Boarding." Once you have names, even ones you received from reliable sources, it's important to do a background check.

First, find out whether your state requires boarding kennel inspections. In Ohio, the Ohio Department of Agriculture does inspections twice a year, so make sure the kennel you are considering displays a license or certificate showing that the kennel meets mandated standards.

Check, too, with your Better Business Bureau to see whether or not any complaints have been lodged against a kennel you are considering. Online reviews from consumer websites such as www.yelp.com and www.cityvoter.com can also be helpful and provide feedback from other customers' experiences.

After selecting a few kennels, confirm that they can accommodate your pet for specific dates and can address your pet's special needs, if any. If you're satisfied, schedule a visit to tour the kennel yourself and make an informed decision before leaving your pets.

What should I look for?

On your visit, ask to see all the places your pet may be taken. Pay particular attention to the following:

- Does the facility look and smell clean?
- Is there sufficient ventilation and light?
- Is a comfortable temperature maintained?
- Does the staff seem knowledgeable and caring?
- Are pets required to be current on their vaccinations, including the vaccine for canine kennel cough (Bordetella)? (Such a requirement helps protect your animal and others.)
- Does each dog have his own adequately sized indoor-outdoor run or an indoor run and a schedule for exercise?
- Do outdoor runs and exercise areas provide shelter from wind, rain and snow?
- Are resting boards and bedding provided to allow dogs to rest off the concrete floor?
- Are cats housed away from dogs?
- Is there enough space for cats to move around comfortably?
- Is there enough space between the litter box and food bowls?
- How often are pets fed? Can you bring a pet's special food?
- What veterinary services are available?
- Are other services available, such as grooming, training or bathing?
- How are rates calculated?
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How do I prepare my pet?

Be sure your pet knows basic commands and is well socialized around other people and pets; if your pet has an aggression problem or is otherwise unruly, she may not be a good candidate for boarding. Before taking your animal to the kennel, make sure she is current on vaccinations.

It's also a good idea to accustom your pet to longer kennel stays by first boarding her during a short trip, such as a weekend excursion. This allows you to work out any problems before boarding your pet for an extended period.

Before you head for the kennel, double-check that you have your pet's medications and special food, if any, your veterinarian's phone number, out-of-town contact information for you and a local backup.

When you arrive with your pet at the boarding facility, remind the staff about any medical or behavior problems your pet has, such as a history of epilepsy or fear of thunder. After the check-in process, hand your pet to a staff member, say good-bye and leave. Avoid long, emotional partings, which may upset your pet. Finally, have a good trip, knowing that your pet is in good hands and will be happy to see you when you return.