



photo courtesy of K-9 Resorts Daycare and Luxury Hotels

Boarding Solutions for Beloved Pets

The Best are Pet, People and Planet Friendly

by Sandra Murphy

The holidays bring buffet feasts, ribboned gifts, stockings of goodies, ornaments and tinsel that to animals all look good enough to eat. Pets can get into trouble, especially if they're away from home. Boarding may be the best alternative when the family travels for holidays.

Take a Tour

Brad Nierenberg blogs about dogs at PawsitivelyBradleyNierenberg.com, from Wilmington, Delaware. He relates an experience when friends watched Bitsy, his Cavalier King Charles spaniel, and she escaped out the front door. Fortunately, a neighbor found her. Afterward, he says, "I asked other

dog-crazy owners which kennel they'd recommend."

Kennels used to be an indoor cage with a dog door to a fenced run area outside. Dogs could see each other, but not play together. Well-heeled facilities offered fancy amenities, geared more to impress the owner than comfort the pet and were generally bereft of enriching experiences.

"Pets are living, breathing, loving creatures, and boarding facilities not yet up to speed need to catch up to how people feel about pets today," says Charlotte Biggs, COO of the nonprofit International Boarding and Pet Service Association, near Austin, Texas. It helps its members create safe, responsible pet care facilities by

including holistic, positive and green practices in their safety and training manuals.

Susan Briggs, co-founder of the independent Professional Animal Care Certification Council for the pet care industry, in Houston, advises, "Take a tour. Kennels should be clean and organized. You should feel comfortable with the staff."

"Do the employees talk about your pet like you're bringing the car in for an oil change? If it's ignored in favor of paperwork, maybe you should keep looking," says Josh Brown, owner of Far North Kennel, in Anchorage, Alaska. "You want to go where the staff bends down and lets your pet come to them. It should be obvious your dog's going to get positive human interaction. When you walk out after touring the facility, you should feel better about boarding than when you walked in."

Ask Questions

Costs vary, so ask what's included in the basic fee, such as group play, treats, administered meds, special bedding and feeding the same food as at home. The pet also should be able to have their bed, toys and favorite things with them. Also be clear about medications, health or mobility issues



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and special bedding or grooming preferences. An apparent bargain can be either less than expected or more expensive once all costs are totaled.

“Ask if titers are accepted in lieu of current vaccinations, and don’t feel pressured to over-vaccinate,” advises Briggs, who explains that titers assess levels of immunity from previous vaccinations. She also suggests asking about the facility’s emergency plan, including evacuation.

The more information everyone has, the better the pet’s stay will be. Socialized dogs or cats should be able to enjoy group playtime or a communal catio (enclosed indoor/outdoor space for felines); others would rather watch from afar. Stays should be individualized, not uniform. Facility owners suggest first booking a day visit and then an overnight as a test.

Before booking, also ask about unseen factors. Josh Parker, co-founder of K-9 Resorts Daycare and Luxury Hotels, in Fanwood and other New Jersey locations, recommends that boarding clients look for features such as eco-friendly cleaning products; air purifiers and ventilation systems to prevent spreading of germs; a floor plan that reduces stress by limiting views of other animals; lighting that dims at night for restful sleep; a good ratio of



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staff to pets that allows employees to spend time with nervous boarders, spot any signs of illness or distress early on and intervene if quarrels arise; and availability of an on-call veterinarian with access to the family vet or nearest emergency facility. Leave a medical directive explaining what should be done if an owner can’t be reached.

Flooring at better resorts is antibacterial. Outdoors, artificial grass made of recycled products is soft on paws, drains better than grass and is easier to clean. It’s eco-friendly because it requires no watering, mowing or pesticides.

Stay in Touch

“Some facilities like ours offer webcam options so you can ‘visit’ with your dog while you’re traveling,” says Brown. Texting kennel updates and selfies of an employee with a pet can also ease any worries.

“I just want my pet in a place where she is safe, secure, well cared for and loved,” says Nierenberg. Though apart, pets and their people can all enjoy a fresh adventure.

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