

Just Rewards

Canine Training and Consulting

When the Family is Away, Where Will Fido Stay?

The holidays bring family, friends, food, festivities and travel. If you can't take your pup with you and you don't have family or friends available, what is the best place to care for him? If you're like me, you want your dogs to be cared for in a safe and comfortable environment. You also want peace of mind that your dog is getting the best care possible while you're away.



Below are some common types of boarding options:

- Boarding Kennel - there is a wide array of boarding kennels in business today. They vary from the simple concrete and chain link kennel run to posh suites with human beds, tv, and gourmet food. Many veterinarians also offer boarding.
- Cage-Free Boarding - these are usually associated with doggy daycare facilities and dogs must pass an evaluation to be accepted. Often the dogs will sleep in the same area they play for doggy daycare.
- Pet Sitter - these professionals offer services such as daily visits to your home to care for your dog, staying overnight at your home, or having your dog stay at their home the entire time you're gone.

As you can see, the options vary greatly. The first thing is to narrow down the type of care you'd like for your dog. For example, if she is a dog that likes to play with groups of dogs, you might want to consider cage-free boarding. If your dog has health issues or requires lots of medications, boarding at a veterinary office might work better. If you have a dog that does not do well away from home, a pet sitter might be best.

Once you have identified the type of boarding you'd like, it's time to evaluate the facilities and/or professionals.

For boarding facilities, you will want to visit the location in person and check the following to see if it meets your standards:

1. Cleanliness - the facility should be clean and relatively odor free
2. Kennel or other area the dog will be spending time (indoor and outdoor areas) - should be safe and comfortable
3. Bedding type (raised cots, blanket on the floor, etc.)
4. Temperature control
5. Safety (double/triple doors leading to the outside, options for fence climbers, diggers, etc.)
6. Supervision - is there staff supervising 24/7 (extremely important for cage-free boarding and dogs with medical issues); for play groups or cage-free boarding, what is the ratio of staff to dogs and how are conflicts between dogs handled
7. For boarding with play groups, the number and type of dogs in each group
8. How staff treats the dogs
9. Food/Water bowls - should be stainless steel
10. Web cam - is there a way you can see your dog online while you are away

Other things you'll want to check are whether the following are offered and if there is an additional fee:

- Bringing your own food, toys, treats, bedding
- Play time (individual or group)
- Medications given as often as your dog needs
- Potty walks
- Go home bath

Lastly, you'll want to check on the facility's vaccination, spay/neuter and flea/tick prevention policies. You'll also want to investigate how veterinary care is given in case of injury or illness

Pet sitters offer more individualized care. When evaluating these dog loving people, check the following:

1. Types of services they offer (visits to your home, overnight in your home, overnight at the pet sitter's home)
2. Are they insured/bonded
3. References
4. Ability to give medications at specific times, if needed
5. In your home - how long is each visit, are walks given or just potty breaks, ancillary services such as plant care and mail pick up
6. In their home - how many dogs/other animals will be there, how much individual time your dog receives, sleeping location, feeding options, exercise schedule
7. Emergency plan in case your dog becomes ill or is injured
8. Have your dogs meet them in person and carefully observe how they respond to the pet sitter and how he/she interacts with them. Your dog will give some clues right away whether this is a good fit.

Whatever option you choose, book your reservation early, particularly for the holidays or other busy times of the year.

With a little research and careful evaluation, you should be able to find a good option to keep your pooch safe and happy while you're away.