



ASSOCIATION OF PET BOARDING & GROOMING (QLD) INC.

Boarding Your Dog

The following are a few thoughts on what pet owners should be considering before boarding their pet.

Happily, more and more responsible pet owners are choosing to board their pets at professional boarding kennels/catteries rather than choosing alternatives which often prove to be both costly and dangerous. However, the phone still rings all too frequently at boarding establishments as inexperienced people ask kennel owners to come to their rescue in near tragic situations involving pets left in their care. It is to those of you who may still be hesitant about boarding your pet that these comments are addressed.

What Is The Alternative?

Do become aware of the problems that can be caused by other methods of trying to provide pet care. The problem with another person caring for your pet while you are away, for example, is that they may inadvertently leave the front door open for just a second, just long enough for "Rover" to dash out to look for his owner...and never come back. Or, they aren't trained or experienced enough to recognise the symptoms of illness in dogs or cats, and allow a minor problem to develop into a major crisis before they realise that a vet should be called. This same person may be kept out of the house by a dog who is protecting his owner's property (when the kennel is called for help, the first words out of their mouths are 'Rover knows me as well as my own dog'). Of course, the most costly result of leaving your pet at home is that he might get the idea that his owner has played a dirty trick on him by leaving without him, so the normally well-behaved pet proceeds to tear the place apart. You may laugh, but all of the above have happened.

The responsible pet owner should also realise the problems involved in leaving their pet with friends. Even though the pet knows the people, he may still try to escape in an attempt to find his owner. Or he does not enjoy being teased by the children of the house, so he takes a slice out of them, (call the kennel), or he gets in a fight with their dog, tears him up, gets torn up, or both (call the kennel). When it comes time for a friend to return the favour, your dog may become "that monster" and end the friendship.

There are drawbacks to boarding at the vet's hospital. It should be realised that they don't have large exercise areas, and charge hospital rates which are far above boarding rates.

You should also be aware of the hazards of taking your pet with you on holidays. Most motels will not accept dogs, some that do charge extra, and will not tolerate any noise from the dog. It is illegal to take pets into national parks. Therefore, it is not possible to have a pet in a campsite at a national park. Pets can become ill travelling, usually from the changes in water. It should also be remembered that it is an offence to leave a dog locked in a car while sightseeing. It is a pathetic sight to see dogs looking for their owners or scavenging for food. A serious risk while travelling is where you allow him to relieve himself and/or exercise. That lovely area you are visiting could be a haven for parasites/disease such as ticks, hookworms, fleas, mange etc. That area may also be your neighbour's backyard.

Why A Boarding Kennel Works

Visit a kennel, talk to the owner, inspect the premises. Ask questions, take nothing for granted. Are toys and bedding welcome? What food will your pet be fed? Who are the vets that service the kennel? What are the kennel hours? Can friends visit your pet?

The people who run kennels are well trained to look after your pet. They will call the vet to any pet they believe is ill and requires attention. Many times a particular problem, eg blood in urine, or a warning sign that requires attention, will be picked up in a kennel quicker than at home. However, it is not the kennel's job to diagnose or treat your pet. If your pet requires treatment while it is boarding, you will be responsible for the account.

Most kennels offer a certain amount of individual care (playing with, talking to, petting), but be reasonable (checking Rover at 2am to see if he is tucked in is not desirable). During boarding it is possible for pets to step in stools/urine and become dirty. This happens in the cleanest of kennels, check if your pet can be bathed to go home.

Make sure you understand the rate structure for all services and hours of operation. The fee for boarding not only includes the care of your pet but the peace of mind that goes with knowing your pet is with someone you can trust.

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PO Box 1336 Fortitude Valley 4006

www.qldpetboarding.org.au

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A Partnership

Let us suppose you choose to board your pet. This is a shared responsibility. There are a few things that you must do before boarding. Make sure all vaccinations are current. This must include the vaccination called C5. Your pet should be wormed beforehand and not have been exposed to any contagious diseases. Always have control of your pet. All dogs must be on a secure lead upon arrival at the kennel.

Boarding at a kennel is the best alternative, but separation from owner and/or being in strange surrounds can induce stress in your dog. Stress can result in lowered resistance and sometimes even temporary changes in behaviour. Be sure to inform kennel owners of any special idiosyncrasies or medical problems that are applicable to your pet, eg fear of thunder etc. Dogs should be prepared for boarding as soon as their vaccination program is completed. Puppies usually enjoy boarding. Some kennels offer day care services so that you can leave your dog for a few hours at a time, this is the easy way to introduce your dog to boarding. After a few visits, your dog accepts this as a normal way of life. This preparation is important as it also teaches your dog to socialise with new people and other dogs.

Naturally, a dog that is relaxed about people/dogs etc will board well. It almost goes without saying that the owner should not cry or moan over the pet upon leaving him, nor should they bring out the suitcases at home the day before the trip. These type of things upset the pet.

Understanding The Kennel Environment

You should understand the possible effects of stress on your dog. You should be aware that some dogs carry viruses in their systems for months and only show symptoms when under stress. In other words, they can catch a disease from themselves. Sometimes temporary behaviour changes occur as a result of unfamiliar surroundings. Dogs tear up beds that they have slept in for years. Or "Killer", that rowdy neighbourhood scourge, turns into a little lamb. Eating habits change also, some who pick at home eat like vultures at the kennel. They may put on a few kilos. Others can lose weight though eating well or lose weight because they run it off as they charge around barking and having a wonderful time. These dogs often go home exhausted but happy and spend the first couple of days at home sleeping.

All the preparation necessary by the pet owner merely points out that successful boarding depends not only upon the kennel but also on how well the owner prepares his pet for the experience.

Home Again

When you pick up your dog he will be very excited to see you (dogs do not have a sense of time – 5 minutes or 5 days, there is no difference). Do not feed him for at least six hours (even though he acts hungry) and do not over feed him. Also, excitement will cause him to pant a lot, lose body water and be thirsty. Give him a few ice cubes to tide him over to feed time. Again, food and water can cause problems when he is in an excited state.

Remember your kennel owner is in business because he loves animals. That goes for your pet too.

