



BOARDING YOUR CAT

For a variety of reasons, more and more people are discovering the delight of living with cats (as you are aware no one *owns* a cat.) In urban areas, flat dwellers find that cats offer companionship, without the need for frequent exercise periods outdoors. In rural areas, cats still fulfil their function as rodent catchers for many households. If you are a cat owner, you are undoubtedly very attached to your furry roommate. However, there will be times when you will have to make arrangements for his care when you are travelling on business, vacations, or when guests may stay with you who are allergic to cats. Therefore, it would be well to examine some of the facts about cat care which will help you understand the advantages of boarding your cat with a PIAA member kennel.

What Options Are Available?

It is important to remember that cats do not usually travel well. They do not usually enjoy it, nor do they adapt well to travel. Many people who try to take their cat along with them on their vacation end up spending most of their vacation time searching for their escaped pet.

Leaving your cat with friends is just as unsatisfactory. Cats must go through an adjustment period in a new environment and this means they will not look upon your friend's house as "home" for quite a while. Therefore, your cat will try to escape from the strange house at every opportunity. Most cat owners recognise that it is not fair to impose this kind of responsibility on their friends, nor is it a safe arrangement for their pets.

Having a kennel care for your pets in your absence is, therefore, the best alternative. Obviously, the most satisfactory way of arranging for such care is to entrust your cat to a PIAA member kennel, where the security arrangements are adequate to ensure that your cat will not escape, and where the personnel are trained in observing and handling the problems which might arise in your absence.

How Do You Arrange For Placing Your Cat in a Kennel?

Stop by your local PIAA member kennel and visit with the owner. Get acquainted with the people who will be caring for your cat. Ask questions, take nothing for granted. Find out if toys or bedding is welcome. Find out about the diet that the kennel provides. (If there is a special diet that you would like your cat to adhere to, most kennels will allow you to provide such food and will see to it that your cat is fed only what you request.) Discuss safety features. Boarding cats requires good security to prevent escapes. Discuss frankly any qualms you may have about boarding your cat. The kennel will appreciate your frankness and your interest.

The experienced personnel at a PIAA member kennel are trained to recognise the warning signs of potential health problems, and will contact a veterinarian if they feel it is called for. Many times it is easier for kennel personnel to detect problems than it is for the owner of the cat. For example urinary problems, a warning sign that deserves attention, can more easily be detected in the kennel than at home, because the cat is closely supervised.

But is not part of the kennel's job to diagnose or to prescribe. If your cat requires veterinary aid while he is in the kennel, you should be aware that you are financially responsible for such aid. Discuss before boarding, any medication your cat might need or any special care. Most kennels offer a certain amount of individual care (playing with, talking to, and petting) but you must be reasonable. (Asking the kennel owner to allow your cat privileges, which might result in an escape, is not fair to either the kennel or your cat.) Make certain that you understand the rate structure for all services and hours of operation. The fee for boarding includes not only the care of your cat but also your peace of mind that comes from knowing he is safe and with someone you can trust.

One standard of measuring the kennel owner's interest in his profession is his membership in the Pet Industry Association of Australia (PIAA.) You can be certain that PIAA members are trying to keep current on the latest developments within the industry and that they truly care about your pet. Their membership certificate and PIAA Code of Practice will be proudly displayed.

Facts to Consider

Keep in mind that cats react much differently in a strange environment than do dogs. Cats are instinctively solitary animals, they do not run in packs as dogs do. Therefore, when confronted with strange surroundings, a cat's normal response is to withdraw physically and mentally into a protected, solitary state. For this reason, cats enjoy the "protected" feeling they get from being caged while in the kennel. While it is true that most dogs want to run around and get acquainted, your cat will probably want to sit in a corner of his cage and stare, until he feels comfortable in the new environment. Human contact does not normally accelerate this period of acclimatising. It has to take place at the cat's own speed. A common reaction of cat owners to the idea of caging is "my cat loves to run around". Perhaps he does at home, but while he is in unfamiliar surroundings, his cage gives him a feeling of safety. "But what about exercise?" Here again, the difference between a cat and a dog must be understood. Dogs need space in which to get their necessary exercise, whereas some cats exercise isometrically. This means that if a cat has enough room to stretch, he can exercise every muscle in his body. When your cat is in strange surroundings, around strange cats, he will undoubtedly much prefer "safety" to "space".

Immunisation

Fortunately, within the last several years, there have been significant advances in immunisation programs for cats. In past years, there were a number of contagious airborne viruses, which caused serious respiratory problems in cats. These viruses could not be controlled by any means except complete isolation of all cats from each other. Now, however, thanks to advances made by the veterinary pharmaceutical companies, there are effective vaccines available to prevent such diseases. Most kennels have strict policies regarding the immunisation programs for these diseases. You should be aware of the kennel policy and discuss it with your veterinarian prior to boarding your cat. In fairness to the kennel, you should also make sure that your cat is not exposed to any contagious cat diseases prior to boarding.

Stress Is a Factor

Any animal in strange surroundings suffers from stress. This means that his normal immune process is affected, as well as his eating and digestive habits. Your PIAA member kennel will do everything possible to minimise the effects of stress on your cat. (For this reason, it is a good procedure for them to allow your cat to adjust to the kennel environment at his own rate). However, you can help to minimise the effects of stress by trying to make the boarding experience as pleasant as possible for your cat. Remember that the more often your cat boards, the more adjusted he will be to the kennel environment, and the easier the boarding process becomes for him. Therefore, several short periods of boarding prior to a lengthy vacation will probably do more to help your cat adjust to boarding than will anything else.

Welcoming Your Cat Home

After you pick your cat up from the kennel, be sure to keep him locked in at home for a few days before allowing him to roam. Just as he had to adjust to the kennel, so will he have to adjust to being home again. Allow him to find that "at home" feeling again before letting him out of the house.

Remember your PIAA member kennel owner is in the business of boarding because he loves animals. He wants boarding to be a pleasant experience for you and your cat. Give him a call.

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