



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 of 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, who isn't trained or experienced enough to recognise the symptoms of illness in dogs and cats, and allows a minor problem to develop into a major crisis before they realise that a vet should be called. Or this same person who is 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 mouth 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 good natured pet proceeds to tear the place apart. You may laugh, all the above have happened.

The responsible pet owner should also realise the problem of 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 kennels) or he gets in a fight with their dog, tears him up, gets torn up or both (call the kennel). The best one is, the dog is a monster, their holidays come up and the favour is to be returned, end of 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 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 in 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.

A pathetic sight is to see dogs looking for their owners/scavenging for food. A serious risk in travelling is where you allow him to relieve himself and/or exercise. That lovely area you are visiting can be a haven for parasites/disease such as ticks, hookworm, 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, if they won't allow you to inspect, there is something to hide, so go elsewhere. Ask questions, take nothing for granted. Are toys, bedding welcome? What food shall 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 and who are members of the Pet Industry Association of Australia (PIAA) are well trained to look after your pet. They will call the vet to any pet that they believe is ill and requires attention. Many times a particular problem is picked up in a kennel, eg. blood in urine. A warning sign that requires attention will be picked up in the kennel quicker than at home. 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/talking/petting the dog) but be reasonable (checking Rover at 2am to see if he is tucked in is not desirable).

During boarding it is possible that pets step in stools/urine and become dirty. This happens in the cleanest of kennels, check if your pet can be bathed to go home. One standard of measuring the kennel owner's interest in his profession is his membership of PIAA. You can be certain PIAA members always endeavour to keep current on the latest developments in the industry, and that they care. Their membership decal will be displayed. 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 that your pet is with someone you can trust.

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 or 5 in 1. Your pet should be wormed beforehand and not have been exposed to any contagious diseases. Don't feed for at least four hours before arrival at the kennel. Boarding at a kennel is the best alternative, but separation from owner and/or being in strange surroundings 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 complete. 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 types of things upset the pet.

UNDERSTANDING THE KENNEL ENVIRONMENT

You should understand the possible effects of stress on a 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 that 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 by the pet owner merely points out that he should recognise that successful boarding depends not only upon the kennel but also upon 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 6 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 create 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.

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