

BOARDING

BY LISA TREEN



You've booked your air tickets and accommodation and now you look into those big puppy dog eyes and realise that your best canine friend has to also find accommodation—a boarding facility.

But luckily for you (and your pets), there are plenty of options on offer. Gone are the days when kennels or catteries were stark and uninviting places. Modern practices and savvy operators have realised that pets need their creature comforts, too, and deserve a home away from home.



There are plenty of options to suit all breeds and stages of life. Because I have two active dogs, I tend to board them in a facility that offers plenty of activity. They also have a pick up and delivery service, which is really convenient for me as I don't have time when I'm rushing around packing to drive the 40 or so minutes in traffic. My two know

the sound of their dog limousine as it pulls into the driveway. The excitement level for them is huge and I've never had a sad face from either of them.

For the care of the other household pets—our cat, parrot and rabbit—we enlist the help of our teenage neighbour. He diligently pops in twice a day to check on the critters. In the past I've often had houseguests to stay and care for the smaller pets. This past year I used a service that finds house sitters for you. My vacation was just on three weeks, so it was good to have someone coming and going, collecting mail and dealing with home maintenance. I came back to a house cleaner than when I left it and the garden was in optimum health!

If you have a senior pet or a pet needing regular medication, then one of the smaller boutique boarding facilities might be the answer. These are often good for smaller dogs as well.

Modern catteries often cater for all sorts of feline temperaments. Some offer rooms for reticent cats with

larger spaces on offer. And if you have a cat that enjoys the great outdoors, many facilities have secure areas with garden spaces to climb, claw, stretch or just lay in the sun.

Specialised bird or parrot boarding can be harder to find. Some vets will provide this service, so you should ask or seek advice from a fellow bird owner. Changes in a bird's environment can lead to bad behaviour and even feather picking. So if you have a sensitive parrot or bird you may want to consider someone to stay in your home or a service that provides daily visits.

Always book boarding facilities well in advance, and don't forget that school holidays, Easter and Christmas are prime times when kennels and catteries can be completely booked out.



SmallPaws is the only pet hotel in Sydney dedicated to small dogs and cats. After 16 years of operation, the staff at SmallPaws know how to truly pamper and care for your pets.

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413 Killawarra Road, Duffys Forest NSW 2084

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"Okay, but if you're gonna charge me for food, I get to choose my own menu."

Part of planning for a holiday includes budgeting for your pet's accommodation. Be direct with the boarding facility up-front. Ask about the base boarding fee per day based on the size and type of dog you have. Find out if there are any hidden costs or add-ons, such as fees to feed your dog a special diet, administer medications or take your dog for extra walks. Try to get a written estimate in advance if possible. Most reputable facilities won't add on fees for a special diet or medication—but always check. In the case of my dogs, the facility is happy to put them into their jackets or jumpers for cooler evenings. Also, some facilities may board your dog in a run with another, so ask if this is likely to occur. Some dogs don't suit this kind of arrangement.

Some facilities also provide training or lessons in dog manners. So you may come home to find your tear-away terror is now much more well mannered! But there's no point in paying for training unless you actually do some of the work as well.

Remember also to supply your pet's tick or flea medication or preparation. All dog boarding facilities should ask you to provide documentation on the dog's vaccinations — especially for kennel cough.

Most facilities should welcome inspections but be sure to find out what times are suitable, as often staff are at their busiest in the morning and evenings. Also check what items from home are permitted —whether it's a favourite blanket to lie on or a valued toy, something with the smells of home can be comforting.

Always supply contact details in the case of an emergency. Or provide contact details of a reliable relative or friend. One time I received a call from my boarding facility to let me know that there were some irregularities in my dog's urine. So they got her checked out by their local vet. It wasn't anything life threatening, but it gave me peace of mind that they acted on it before waiting to contact me.

Once you've found the right facility, book your pet in and relax in the knowledge that you've found the right place and your pet will be well cared for.

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Submissions are invited for this short story contest which is open to everyone who is a legal resident of Australia. Entries should be pet-centric and written from the human point of view. The theme for this contest is "**The Most Embarrassing Thing My Pet Has Ever Done**".

For full details of the contest and rules please go to:
www.urbananimal.net/writingcomp



The cut-off date for submissions is 1 November, 2012 and entries received after this date will not be eligible. The winner will have their entry published in Urban Animal (at a date to be solely at the discretion of Urban Animal) and will be notified by email and/or phone.