

# Does Leaving Your Pet When You Travel Cause You Inner Turmoil?

Have trouble relaxing when you travel because you're worried about your pet? Get the inside scoop on how to hire a high-quality caregiver who has your pet's best interests at heart. Don't leave it to chance. Be sure you look for these six things in daycare, boarding or at-home care.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Using a pet sitter when you travel means your pet gets to stay in his familiar surroundings, has less stress and isn't exposed to contagious diseases at a boarding kennel
- Choosing the right pet sitter is crucial to your pet's well-being and safety (as well as the safety of your home)
- Be confident of your pet sitter's qualifications and experience, and discuss your expectations and pet's needs in detail, before leaving home

**Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published February 20, 2015.**

If you're a pet owner who travels, arranging for care for your animals while you're away can feel like an overwhelming decision. More than nine in 10 pet owners consider their pet to be a member of the family,<sup>1</sup> which means you're probably looking for caregivers who will not only provide for basic needs like food and water, but also companionship, reassurance and playtime while you're away.

There are many pet parents who haven't left their home in years because they don't have a person or facility they trust to care for their beloved pets. There are many options for pet care in the US, of course, but the key is finding the right option for you (and your pet).

You can take your pet to a boarding facility, leave him with a friend or family member, or even set him up in a doggy vacation home. Each choice has pros and pitfalls. Unless you're fortunate enough to have a kennel like this one nearby, typical boarding facilities are stressful for pets accustomed to living in the comfort of your home. The chance of your pet contracting a contagious disease is something you must consider, and in addition, most traditional boarding kennels require vaccinations you may object to, or with a frequency you object to.

If you have a trusted family member who is already familiar with your pet, that can be a good option — but many people do not, or may feel uncomfortable asking for such a large 'favor.'

## Thinking of Hiring a Pet Sitter? Here's What to Consider

A remaining option is hiring a pet sitter to come to your home an agreed upon number of times each day, or in some situations, to move into your home while you're gone. Your pet gets to stay in his familiar surroundings, which is significantly less stressful than taking him to a new location. He also won't be exposed to diseases unnecessarily, but

you still have to put your trust in someone you may have met only briefly.

Choosing the right pet sitter is therefore crucial to your pet's well-being and safety (as well as the safety of your home). If hiring a pet sitter is on your radar in the near (or distant) future, here are the top factors to consider.<sup>2</sup>

- **Find the right sitter** — Referrals from friends, neighbors, family, your veterinarian or your dog trainer are often the best sources of pet sitters. You can also check for 'pet sitting services' in your area by searching online or contact the **National Association of Professional Pet Sitters** or **Pet Sitters International**.
- **Qualifications and training** — During your interview with your potential pet sitter, ask about past experience, what types of pets she's cared for, and whether she's completed any special training. Additionally, if your pet has any special needs or behavior issues, the sitter must feel comfortable managing them while you're gone.
- **Insurance and bonding** — Your pet sitter should be able to provide written proof of commercial liability insurance (in case of accidents) and should be bonded (to protect against theft).
- **Communication** — How will the pet sitter communicate with you while you're away? Many pet sitters will record daily notes about your pet's activities, eating habits or mood. Others will send you digital photos or daily text messages to put your mind at ease.
- **Services and fees** — It's important that you're both on the same page about what's expected, and the fees involved. How many visits will occur each day? At what times and for what duration (some pet sitters will even stay overnight in your home)? Will the sitter provide grooming or walking services? Will she clean up accidents, water plants or do any other vacation care responsibilities (like bringing out your garbage)? Will she bring your pet to a veterinarian in an emergency? Also, if you're delayed can the sitter care for your pet until you're able to get home?
- **References and interactions** — Your sitter should provide you with references of past clients (and you should contact each of them). In addition, the sitter should interact with your pet in your home environment prior to your trip.

## Tips to Ensure a Positive Pet-Sitting Experience

Once you've chosen the right sitter, you may want to start out slow. Try having her care for your pet while you're away on a day trip or weekend getaway. If all goes well, you'll feel more comfortable leaving her in charge for a longer trip, and will be able to resolve any problems ahead of time. You can help to make the experience a positive one by:<sup>3</sup>

- Making reservations early
- Leaving clear and detailed instructions regarding feeding, medications, emergency contact information (including your veterinarian's contact information and the closest 24-hour emergency vet), and other important information
- Leaving pet supplies in one easy-to-access location, and purchasing more than enough to last for the duration of your trip (in addition to food and treats, other supplies you should leave handy include extra litter if your pet is a cat, brushes, toys, a leash, and a carrier)
- Leaving an extra key with a neighbor or family member, and giving them your pet sitter's contact information (and vice versa) in case of emergency
- Showing your pet sitter how to use your home's security system, circuit breaker and any other important features

One of the best things about using a pet sitter is once you find one you trust and establish a working relationship, your pets should feel comfortable in her care and you'll be able to leave home without worry.

## Should You Take Your Pet with You on the Road?

Perhaps you've considered taking your pet along with you on your travels. The success of this strategy depends largely on where you'll be going and your pet's personality. There are always exceptions, but most cats find travel stressful and prefer to be on their own turf.

Some dogs love to travel, and will certainly enjoy being with you, but if you'll be travelling by air it's probably best to leave your pet at home. Unless your dog or cat is a seasoned air traveler (which is very rare), putting your pet on a plane, especially in the cargo hold, should be an option of last resort.

If you're traveling by car to a pet-friendly destination, and your dog is the type that loves an adventure (and whose health is up for it), then by all means go and have fun! Keep in mind that if you'll be leaving your pet alone in a hotel room while you vacation (or tend to business), he's probably better off left at home with a pet sitter.

But if you want to involve your pet in your vacation and are looking for some ideas, check out National Geographic's The Dog Lover's Guide to Travel, which bills itself as the "ultimate resource for traveling with your furry friend" and features hundreds of dog-friendly locations — even canine cruises. There are some safety factors to consider when travelling by car, including the following from the ASPCA.<sup>4</sup>

- **Put your dog in a crate or carrier every time you hit the road** — You can choose a wire mesh, hard plastic or soft-sided carrier. Just make sure it's a good size — big enough for your dog to stand up in, turn around, and lie down. Get your pup used to his carrier at home before you attempt to use it for travel.
- **Keep your dog restrained in the backseat or rear of the vehicle whenever it is moving** — If you don't use a crate or want to give him time out of the crate, make sure he's secured with a harness attached to a seatbelt buckle.
- **If your dog isn't used to riding in the car, take her for short rides at first, then gradually increase the length of time she's in the car** — Make sure her carrier is secure so it doesn't slide around or become a missile if you need to brake suddenly. If you decide to train your pup to a seatbelt harness, do so as soon as possible (8 weeks old, if you can), and take short, frequent car rides several times a week to condition your pup to this lifestyle.
- **It's best not to feed your dog while you're on the road, unless he's a real road warrior who doesn't ever suffer from motion sickness** — Most dogs do better with a light meal a few hours before traveling, and then a second meal when you're back home or have reached your destination for the day.
- **Never leave your precious pup alone in a parked vehicle** — On hot days, your car can become an incinerator in minutes, and your pet can suffer heatstroke. Cold weather can turn your vehicle into a freezer.
- **If you're planning a long trip, put together a travel kit for your dog** — Include food, special treats, food and water bowls, water from home (either bottled or filtered and stored in a travel container) leash, poop bags, brush or comb, medication and/or supplements, a pet first-aid kit, and a favorite toy.
- **Make sure your dog is wearing a collar with a current ID tag** — It's also a good idea to carry a recent picture of your dog with you for identification purposes.

## Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [Harris Poll September 13, 2012](#)

<sup>2, 3</sup> [Paw Nation September 26, 2014 \(Archived\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [ASPCA Car Travel Tips](#)

---