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Some facilities have double gates with a buffer area between the dog area and the rest of the building; others may use portable gate panels to prevent escape.

But one engaging aspect of day care centres is that you can use your pet's time to make them a better dog—mentally, behaviourally and aesthetically. Most also offer training programs and special attention to behaviour modification, puppy pre-school classes which may be after hours, grooming services, paw-luxury spa services, individual walks and exercise regimes for the portly pups at their speed.

It may be due to an injury to yourself that you can't exercise your dog or socialise with others. So the idea of dropping your pup off, or having a pet taxi service pick them up and return them home after a day of romping in the day care centre, long walks, individual playtime and watching TV adventures of Lassie or dog movies might appeal. If you feel inept on properly socialising your dog, having a professional care for it in an environment of like-minded pups or older hounds of the same size and temperament is very attractive.



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Keeping pace with the times, some of the more upmarket facilities have VIP clubs or affinity plans—Frequent Fur Kid Klubs—where repeat customers get perks and discounts as well as having files kept on the preferences of their pooch's play and dietary requirements. And they have a variety of fees from all day care, half day, hourly rates, advanced coupon rates as well as their other services.

One of the newest inner city complexes is the Stix 'n Bonez Alexandria operation that has more of a rock 'n' roll feel to it than a new age spa. It's in an indoor/outdoor industrial building with a surprisingly large grassed in area that has its own mini-pool and even a digging pit. And it has both an indoor and outdoor webcam that you can access from the office to see if your pup is playing properly with the other cool kids. Definitely for the hip kool kids of the Inner West.

Head out to Rozelle and you'll find Tails R Wagging, which started out in 2007 as an upmarket Balmain pet shop and groomer in a crowded street. One of its features before moving suburbs was the unique dispensers of dog food that allowed customers to bag their own kibbles—just like grains and nuts in a health food store—with a refrigerator and freezer for fresh or frozen meal options.

With two competing pet supply stores nearby however and no day care facilities nearby, a new property in Rozelle was converted to daycare after grooming was first established there and then the high-rent Darling Street Balmain store was closed to shift operations to bigger and better premises. They also do cat boarding there and even have an online store.

One new trend is to have a space next to a vet where pets can be left off for exams or treatments and also taken care of during the day so their owners don't have to wait around and their dog can either play or rest. Or the vet may want to expand their services with a new profit centre.

### Choosing your Day Care Options

- What is the carer to dog ratio? There should be at least two people on hand at all times and never less than 1 person to ten dogs.
- Who does the assessment of the dogs for joining? Is it a certified dog trainer, an outside firm or one of the staff? What are the criteria?
- What type of training do staff members get? Check to see if they have had courses in dog training and what their background is.
- Does the facility have an emergency plan? Will your dog be taken to his own veterinarian or to a vet used by the facility?
- Are the staff trained in animal first aid, pet CPR and is there an emergency plan in place if power is cut or smoke, fire or flooding? Ask to see it.
- Also ask to see their standard plan of instructions should a pet escape. What they do immediately, this should be written.
- Ask if they have a policies and procedures manual and politely request to look it over. Ask to have a look at their animal first aid kit. If they are happy to do this, take it as a big plus. If not, a negative.
- Visit unannounced to get a feel for the place at least twice. First time would be at their peak drop off or pick up time and the second mid day during play time.
- Do staff members seem to enjoy the dogs? Show affection to them?
- What is the specific procedure for introducing new dogs?
- Do all staff members have access to and read the information provided about your dog?
- Does the facility seem overcrowded? Are the staff alert and caring and involved?
- Are the dogs merely supervised or do staff members intervene when play gets too rough? Are big dogs separated from small dogs?
- Is the dog required to follow basic obedience commands given by staff members?
- What are the provisions for time outs? Under what circumstances is a dog confined to the time-out area?
- Does the facility have a security fence around the outdoor area and sufficient protection inside so that dogs cannot reach the outside door? Some facilities have double gates with a buffer area between the dog area and the rest of the building; others may use portable gate panels to prevent escape.
- Will the staff feed dogs that get a midday meal? Give medications?
- Are there any kind of medical conditions they will not allow?
- Is there an outdoor play area? If not, do staff members walk the dogs on a leash?
- Is there a discount for two or more dogs?
- Is there a rebate plan for a free day after a number of days bought?
- Is there a discount for advance purchasing days which can be used as needed?
- Is there a penalty or fee for not showing up?



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There are two daycare centres we know of attached to vets in the Eastern Suburbs. VetHQ, previously known as ArkVet in Double Bay has opened an internal facility while the Randwick Vet has an external operation called Head to Tail.

A new one is coming to the North Shore in St Leonards with day care, grooming and puppy preschool. Another in Hornsby operates a service that takes dogs out for the day en masse Tuesday to Thursday only. For Asian clientele, one has just opened on Harris Street near Chinatown which caters to the small dogs that inhabit the city apartments and student accommodation for a day away from the four walls.

You'll find that day care centres are also specialising in catered events such as birthday parties for the dogs with cakes and puppachinos (no chocolate, coffee or cocktails), fashion parades where pups are dressed up for the parents and speed dating opportunities for single owners and their pets.

You'll also see some services endorsed by TV personalities, including rent-a-vet celebrities and trainers, but that doesn't mean they actually own, use the service or are going to appear there for an autograph when you drop your furry one off. And in the end, you're paying for the fee that they were paid to appear in the ad through what you are charged. And with any business, the more the services, the greater the potential for more than basic bills.

Doggy daycare is an alternative to services that come to your home and play with your pup on your own premises or take them for walks or runs, with or without other dogs. But it's neither a replacement for your own personal care and exercise nor is it suited to those dogs who are shy, nervous, aggressive or lack the discipline to be in large packs of animals. For those, a more personalized service is the best option. But if you're going to 'warehouse' your dog for a day and it's up to the action, it's a way to enhance their socialization and activity as one part of an overall care package.

However, some dogs are best suited for stay-at-home care or under the one-on-one minding out of the home for walking and taking trips. Urban Animal's 18 month old dog Scooter for example, works and plays in our office environment all day after a hour dawn brisk walk play in the park by Lisa

while Lilly is content to stay at home and watch Oprah after her hour of park gymnastics. But on the weekend, Lisa employ's a dog walking service for Scootie to play with another girlfriend for an hour and a half in various parks around our area while Lisa concentrates her attention on Lilly's need for intensive one-on-one clicker training and other bonding exercises. It also exhausts Scooter so that when he returns, he's less rambunctious.

While we have not used day care centres for our dogs, because we're with them virtually all the time at work and home, we had a friend whose extremely active and ball-obsessed working breed dog had an unfortunate incident at his first time in a day care facility. Though he was assessed as being cool for school, the day he went in, he had diarrhea and the unfortunate over-exercise by staff throwing a ball against the wall caused his snout to abrade and bleed, while at the other end... well, we won't go into that! To compound matters, the hindquarter fur was badly groomed trying to compensate for the poo-damage, much to the horror of both dog and mum.

And if you are planning a holiday where you can't take your dog, some services offer a two week 'Pet Holiday' where a manageable group of dogs are transported with minders to a beach property where they can safely frolic under care as well as being walked on the sand and trained if requested.

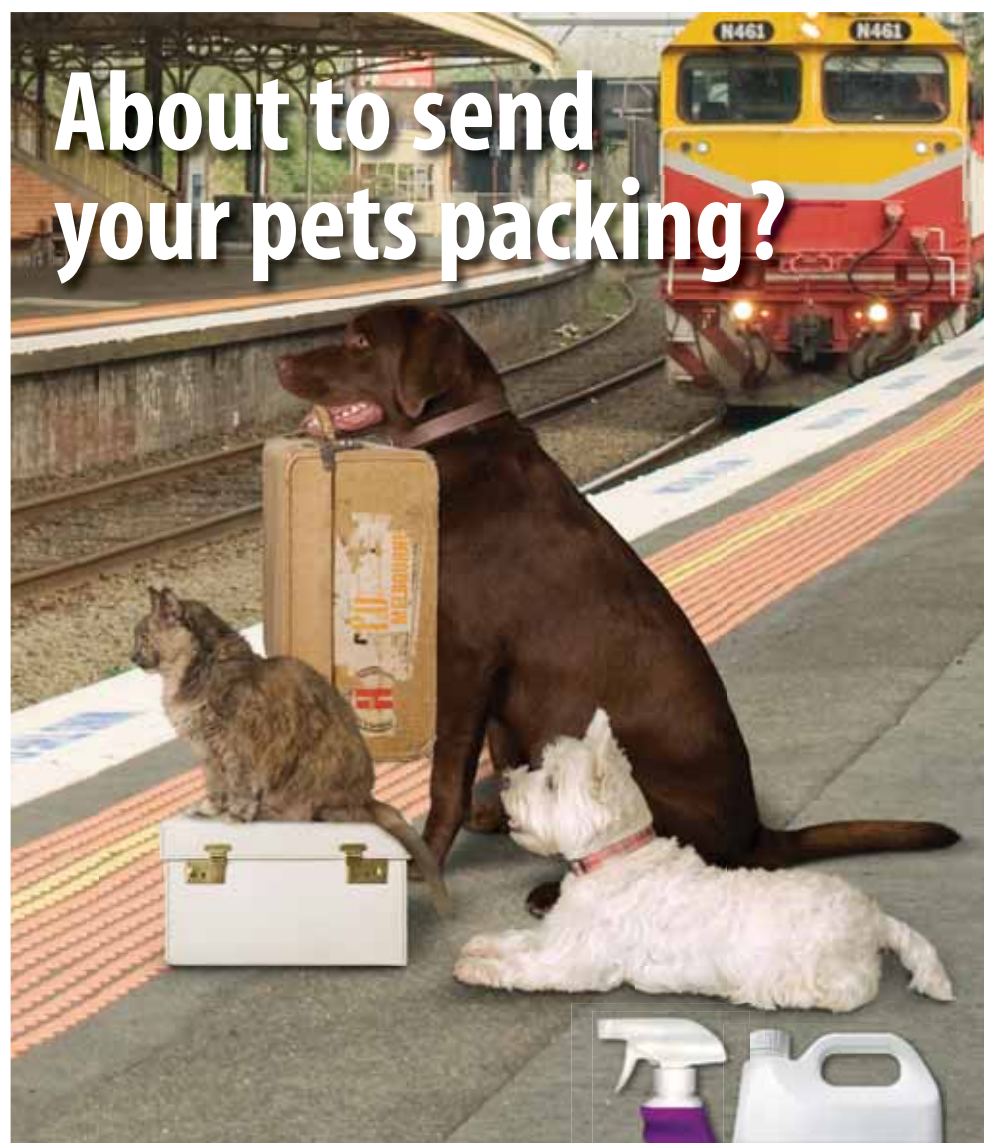
However for many of us who want to head off for some down-time without pups, there are an increasing number of pet resorts, retreats or upmarket facilities that put the old-school fenced kennel with concrete runs to shame. They offer a vast array of services beyond accommodation and the bedding in the dog and cat side can be plush, they may have TV and dietary preferences can be catered to beyond kibbles and rolls.

I must say that some of these are so luxurious or well located that we've almost wanted to stay there ourselves. There is something about having your pet at a wonderful locale and facility that is like sending your kid to summer camp!

They tend to be in outlying suburbs or country areas, some offer transport directly while pet taxi services can be booked to take your beloved pet without your having to take the trip

yourself. In our case, we arrange to have our pets picked up the day before we leave for overseas or interstate trips and have them delivered back, after bathing and grooming, the day we arrive back so they are waiting with eager anticipation at home knowing we'll be coming through the door, ready to launch themselves onto us with licks and wags.

We suggest, that as with Dog Day Care, that you inspect the boarding facility to make sure it meets your standards and also to see what extras are offered. It's good to have a relationship with the operators and know that you are both on the same page when it comes to policies, procedures and what to do if something goes wrong with your pet.



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