



Pets At Play While You're Away

Worry free options for what to do with your pet when you go away

By Michelle Heald



I love taking my pets on holiday with me. Generally we drive somewhere within easy reach and take over a holiday house. It's a great time to spend out with my dogs and they thrive in new environments—especially the country.

When I can't take them with me—like overseas or interstate travel—I have a live-in minder. It's an excellent option for my dogs as they maintain their regular routine and remain in their home environment. It works well for my dogs and me plus my live-in minder gets all the Foxtel he can devour.

But what do you do when your live-in minder isn't available when you need him? This is exactly what happened to me recently. I had a sudden, unexpected trip across the Tasman and couldn't arrange my normal carer. I had to make arrangements quickly and struggled to find the right option that would ensure that I was satisfied and, more importantly, what would best suit my dogs.

Thankfully, there are a number of options and services for 'left behind' pets.

The 'leave 'em at home and they'll come to you' pet care option

There are a bunch of dedicated pet care professionals who have 'at home' services. This type of service generally involves a once or twice daily visit to your home to attend to the needs of your pet/s. These sorts of services mean that your pets' routine is less likely to be disturbed.

Dogs are walked, the food you normally feed them is dished up, water is changed and medication is administered if needed. Other add-ons include collecting mail, specialist aquarium care, watering plants, poo pick-ups, lights turned on and off and rubbish put out. Customers that have this service are less likely to be targets of opportunistic burglars.

If your cat stresses when travelling or doesn't like new environments, then this is the perfect 'stay at home' solution. They can comfortably remain in the safety of their own home, while getting some well deserved, individual attention.

Home Alone Pet Care is a pet minding and dog walking service that caters to the fussy needs of its Inner West and Eastern Suburbs clientele. The company started in 1992 out of its founder's desire to have this very kind of service available. Before they take on a new client, they make an appointment to visit and discuss needs. They ask a series of questions and create a file for you and your pet.



Calabash Kennels

They'll also assess the compatibility of your dog to determine whether it can be walked with some of their other clients. They only walk a maximum of four, four-legged clients. Michael from Home Alone believes that at all times safety and care are of paramount importance to their pet clients. "Our trained staff adhere to a strict code of rules to ensure that we are delivering the best possible care. We have a large base of regular clients and it's because of our reliability and care that they keep returning. Our biggest problem is when people don't plan ahead and expect a service like ours to fit them in at short notice."

Your Critter Sitter is an in-home service that operates mainly in the Eastern suburbs. It was started by Rick Evans who has a finicky Conure. "Birds require special attention and I saw a need in the market for individualised service", says Rick. Other services he can provide include a full mobile grooming service and specialist aquarium care. Most of his clients opt for longer one-on-one dog walking.

Taking the 'Boredom' out of Boarding

Boarding facilities have evolved into much better options for pet lovers. These days, most are sparkling, state-of-the-art facilities that are more like holiday camps for cats and canines. A number of years ago, customers would be charged extra dollars for 'playtime'. It was a sad reflection on an industry that needed to take stock of how their 'guests' were being treated. 'Playtime' was a period of the day where the dog was allowed into a large area to interact with other dogs and its human carers. If you didn't pay the extra bucks, your dog was left in his/her run.

"You wouldn't lock up your pet 24 hours a day and nor do we," explains Calabash Kennel and Cattery owner and manager, Linda Meumann. Playtime is built into the cost of your boarding fee as management and staff believe that a happy dog is one that has expended much of their energy. Dogs are assessed and supervised play is with similar minded dogs. Geriatric or 'special-needs' dogs are also catered for and are given attention away from the young, playful ones.

Unlike some boarding establishments, Calabash doesn't charge extra for administering medication or catering to special dietary needs. "We feel that this is an important part of the service and there shouldn't be a need for extra fees", Linda says. "Our service and standards are really important to us. We've grown over the last few years and this has come from the referrals we receive."

Part of this growth comes from the cattery that also boasts spacious housing for their feline guests and an enrichment play area for the more outgoing, adventurous types. The play area for cats is secure with overhead mesh, climbing apparatus and scratching poles. The landscaped area even has a trickling fountain for curious cats. Cats can spend time outside in the fresh air in a secure and safe environment.

Linda also is careful to point out that boarding isn't for everyone and their breed. There are certain breeds and temperaments that don't cope well in a boarding situation. "That's where we would advise on placing your pet with a 'Nanny-type' pet professional. I have several that I routinely recommend. The pet gets to live with the carer in their home and gets specialised one-on-one treatment."

Michael Szlazko runs a cattery called Puss'n'Boots that caters to all kinds of cats. All cats have comfortable living areas and have two options—a more open and generous 'Verandah Bungalow' or the standard 'Apartment'. "We only put cats from the same family together and never 'group' unfamiliar cats with each other. A lot of people like the idea of the open 'Verandah' option, however you have to keep in mind that some cats don't enjoy 'exposed' housing. The more reticent and shy ones prefer our cosier quarters. Others may require more attention and our staff are experienced in cat care, taking into consideration cats' emotional well-being."

Other services that boarding facilities can have as add-ons include grooming, pet taxi or transport services and training for dogs. Any professional boarding facility should ask that current vaccination certificates be presented. Flea and tick prevention should also be mandatory.

Stay tuned for a newcomer to the boarding arena that its creator says will be up-and-running by the end of the year. Pitched as being a 'holistic retreat' for pampered pets, PawPaws will cater to a high-end clientele. What's the term? Oh yes—furry little rich kids. The idea was pitched in the Seven TV series, 'The Dragons' Den', and was given the thumbs up for investment. No news on its location or services as yet but we can report that this upmarket 'Golden Door for Golden Dogs' will be a goldmine for its investors should a gilt edge clientele bite for their spa services.

After a week in New Zealand I arrive back home to two very happy, healthy hounds. They've both been bathed, smell delicious and look remarkably fit and well. Any feeling of guilt and possible abandonment issues are put to rest. My two, although happy to see me, seem no worse for wear and in fact appear really content. They've had a very active week cavorting with a new social set and are now content to lay around the house.

The other added bonus is that the beer I left in the fridge is still there, my chocolate box hasn't been raided, the pantry is still well stocked and my Foxtel channel hasn't been switched to some weird, extreme sports program.

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Questions you should ask your potential carer

Questions To Ask Boarding Facilities

- In case of a medical emergency, where is the local vet and do you have 24-hour access to veterinary care?
- What kind of housing will my dog/cat stay in?
- Will there be another animal with my dog/cat in the cage/run?
- Do you have separate areas for small dogs and big dogs?
- Can I bring my dog's food, toys, bed and blanket?
- How often do you take the dogs out? For how long?
Where do you take them out?
- Do you provide additional walks or play time for an additional fee?
- How often do you feed the dogs/cats? Where is access to water?
- Is there a staff member who will stay overnight on site?
How about on the weekends?
- Can I inspect the premises without an appointment?
- Do you have references?

Questions To Ask Dog Walkers and Pet Sitters

- Are you insured?
- Who will have access to my house (keys and security code)?
- Have you experienced any incidents with any of your clients, such as stolen items, breakages or damage to property?
- Can I meet the dog walker/sitter? Is there a fee for interviewing the pet sitter?
- Is there a set time when the dog walker/sitter will visit?
- How long will you spend with my pet/s?
Do you provide additional walks or play time for an extra fee?
- Who will take care of my pet if the sitter is not available?
- Will there be other dogs or animals with the walker/sitter?
- Do you have references?

ety, vet visits, travel...

Will not dull your pet

100% organic, no flavours, colouring or preservatives

Animals find it easy to drink as their main source of water

Generally results will be gentle and gradual

Safe to use under all conditions