

Putting up the Dog

Wise Buys: Tips and resources for buying goods and services

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Weekend getaways are all about fun, but when it comes to leaving your special canine friends at a kennel, it can be all about stress.

Finding the right kennel to board your dog can be daunting. What should you look for? How much should you pay? Will your pet's health be compromised? What about aggressive dogs? Supervised playtime? Diet? References?

I had lots of questions when I first had to find a kennel in Cincinnati. I have two dogs: one very large Doberman and one small mini-schnauzer. Since they had different needs, I wanted to make sure I found a place where they both would be happy.

When looking for a kennel, a good place to start is to ask friends, vets and other dog lovers for recommendations of kennels where they have had positive experiences.

I started a short list, noting only those facilities recommended by three sources. I eliminated locations that were geographically undesirable—too far from my home or the airport.

I was now ready to visit the kennels. But first I logged onto the American Boarding Kennels Association (www.abka.org) site to find out what I should be looking for and what questions I needed to ask to make sure my dogs would get the best care.

Contacting a kennel: Telephone first to make sure there's room. Peak times—holiday weekends, spring break—mean more boarders. Not all kennels handle puppies or pets on medication or giant breeds (like my 120-pound Dobie). Make an appointment to visit the kennel.

The visit: Of course, the kennel should look and smell neat and clean. You should be about to see the space where your dog will be staying. A kennel with a no visitor's policy should provide at least a viewing window. Check if there are indoor/outdoor runs or if house pets stay inside and visit another area to exercise.

Security: Be sure the kennel has sturdy, well-maintained fencing, gates and dividers between runs. If your dog, like my mini-Schnauzer, is an escape artist, tell the kennel operator.

Kennels should be free of sharp objects, harmful chemicals and objects your pet might swallow. There should be solid dividers between your pet's sleeping area and the areas of other dogs.

Exercise areas should include barriers between runs high enough to prevent male dogs from urinating into adjacent runs. Surfaces should offer good traction when wet. Fire extinguishers should be readily available.

Supervision: Pets should be checked frequently during the day by someone trained to recognize illness and distress. Evaluate the competence of kennel personnel. (ABKA members are required to meet over 200 standards of excellence, always a good sign.)

Sanitation: The kennel should be free of dirt, fecal accumulation, odors and parasite infestation (flies, fleas, ticks). There should be a strict schedule of disinfecting.

Veterinary services: Ask about the procedure for obtaining veterinary care, unless you prefer to use your pet's vet. Generally, you are responsible for all vet bills.

Immunization requirements: Dogs should be immunized against rabies, and other diseases.

Creature comforts: Check the temperature, ventilization and protection from the elements in outdoor runs. Lights should be kept at comfortable levels during the night.

The exercise area should have enough space for a dog to break into a run. Make sure the time spent and frequency of exercise periods are adequate for your dog.

Be medically prepared

Before boarding your dog, make sure they are medically and physically prepared:

Vaccinations: Need to be given far enough in advance to be effective.

Most kennels require proof of vaccinations, so make sure to take copies of the paperwork with you on your first visit.

Flea and tick prevention: Make sure your animals are protected or you will be sorry when they return home.

Heartworm prevention: If your dog is staying in an indoor-outdoor kennel, there is a chance he will be exposed to mosquitoes.

Food: Find out in advance if the kennel will feed a diet you provide. If allowed, bring your pet's favorite food.

He will already be stressed out by the change in his routine, now is not the time to change brands.

Changing your dog's food while he is off his regular potty schedule can cause diarrhea. (Source: www.petinfo.com)

What to ask

Animal husbandry

How are sensitive/problem pets dealt with?

How often are the quarters cleaned? How does the boarding facility smell?

What are they procedures for special food, medication, uncommon food?

What kind of food is usually fed?

Safety

Are pets kept in a secure environment? How many hours a day are people at the facility? 24/7?

Policies

What are the boarding facilities rules?

Will your pet have its own quarters?

Can your pet have its own toys or special blanket?

What is included in boarding?

What are the office hours?