

HOW TO SELECT THE BEST BOARDING FACILITY

Does it seem like selecting a boarding kennel is like a trip down the yellow brick road? With all of the pet boarding kennels popping up all over the place one begins to think "there's no place like home, there's no place like home". The marketing messages from these new places "sound" pretty good. Many have attractive extras such as playgroups, pools, acupuncture, training and other extras. Regardless of the amenities, how does one really know what is behind the curtain? If you are reading this article, you are probably just like me. For people like us, our pets are like our children. We take the same care in evaluating pet care as we do childcare. When "no place like home" is not an option, how can we be sure that the pet care facility we select will be a good one? With knowledge of the business and a passion for quality pet care, I offer a few suggestions that may help you evaluate boarding kennels.

First, is what you see, what you get? Or - when you pull the curtain back, is there a surprise? Some facility managers are only willing to show customers a "few" representative samples of the boarding kennels that are viewable from the lobby. That is a big red flag. However, if you are fortunate enough to see the actual boarding area, check out the following:

- Does the kennel smell like "dog"? These days there are wonderful cleaning products on the market that are made to be safe for pets, the environment and the staff. If the facility smells, odds are it is not clean. Just like with people, cleanliness is critical to minimizing the spread of bacteria and disease.
- If the pet boarding areas are made of chain link fencing, is the fence in good condition. Or - has it been chewed up? Is it rusty? Are there mangled pieces of fencing sticking out that could be hazardous to you boarded pet?
- Are pets left alone for long periods of time? In some kennels dogs have access to the outdoors for potty breaks. If this is the case, how frequently are the outside areas cleaned and how are they cleaned? In our resorts, pets are not left unattended during potty breaks. Our staff is trained to monitor the amount and consistency of excrement. If staff notices that a pet is having digestive issues such as diarrhea or constipation, that pet is then monitored more closely. You see, a change in habits or output is the first indication of a problem. Ask about communication among the care givers, the staff and you if there is ever a problem.
- Moreover, are pets kept in cages? If so, there are much better alternatives out there. You should move down the road.

Second, are the policies such that the well-being of the pets is the primary focus of the facility? For example, does the facility allow toys and bedding from home? While the idea of bringing familiar items from home may seem like a great one, it is often hazardous. You see, some dogs actually experience separation anxiety while boarding and may even ingest his own familiar bedding and/or toys. If your dog is one of those (and you may not necessarily know it), then you and the kennel could be placing your pet into a potentially dangerous and perhaps fatal situation. Beware. (See related articles on the selection of safe toys.)

Third, does the staff love what they do? Do they seem to love and enjoy the dogs? Our policy is to hire pet lovers first. Staff can always train someone to perform basic kennel work, but one cannot train someone to love dogs. At the end of the day, the attitudes and knowledge of the staff will be your most important criteria. You may find good kennels with bad staff or bad kennels with good staff. Ideally, you want to find great kennels with great staff. Notice the differences. You wouldn't leave your child with someone who did not love children would you? Ask many questions about staff training and certification. Does the staff encourage you to call and check on your pet? Or better yet, are there "pet-cams" where you can access cameras over the web that will allow you to check on your pets well-being while you're away?

Last, take a pad of paper. Take notes on what you see, hear and smell. Create a rating scale with 5 being home in Kansas and 1 being under the house in Oz. If your kennel evaluations are 4 or above overall, then most likely, you have found what will prove to be the best boarding kennel for your pet. The only other thing to do is trust your gut. There is no better evaluator of your pets well-being than you. Not to worry though. Following the boarding experience, your pet will tell you how it really was. Best of luck.

Article Archive 1207001 Kathy Kresge www.allamericanpetresorts.com

Kathy Kresge, All American Pet Resorts LLC, <http://www.allamericanpetresorts.com>

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