



Although the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) is now fully operational, allowing limited movement of pets through some countries and the UK, many pet owners still prefer to leave their pets behind when they go away.

Will my dog be happy being left behind?

Dogs are very much part of the family and usually like to spend time with their owners. However, travelling can be a stressful experience for some animals and many pets are unsettled in a new environment. Dogs are creatures of habit and feel secure with their routines and familiar surroundings.

When you travel on holiday you are often distracted by the new things to do and may not have enough time to spend with your pet. Many owners choose to make arrangements for someone else to care for their pets while they are away.

Who will look after my dog if I'm away?

There are 3 choices for pet care while you are absent:

- Place your dog in a boarding kennel
- Ask a friend or neighbour to take your dog into their home
- Find a 'pet-sitter' to come to your home to care for your dog

The best solution for a dog is to leave them with a friend or have someone come and live in your house to care for them while you are away. If you cannot do this then there are plenty of boarding kennels that will care for your pet while you are away. If you have more than one dog then they will usually be able to stay together in a kennel, providing company for each other.

How do I choose a boarding kennel?

It is always a worry having to leave your dog in the hands of strangers, especially in strange surroundings. Leaving your dog in boarding kennels doesn't have to be stressful if you follow some of our tips when choosing a boarding kennel for your faithful friend.

- Firstly, and probably most importantly, ask your friends and family for any recommendations for a suitable boarding kennel, if they have had a good experience then hopefully so will you and your dog. If this isn't possible, then make plenty of enquiries and visit two or three boarding kennels before you make a decision.
- When you visit each boarding kennel, find out their opening hours and visit unannounced and ask to be shown around - this shouldn't be a problem for them and they should be happy to take you around and show you all their facilities. Take particular notice of the quality and cleanliness of the individual kennels: are they clean, dry and draught-free; are the water bowls full and clean; is there access to a run and covered area; are they secure?
- Take particular note of the other dogs in the kennels, do they look happy and content?
- You should also make a note of how clean and well-stocked the kitchen area is and if there is a chart for each dog's dietary requirements.
- Are the staff happy to answer all your questions and do they ask you questions? This is important if they are going to enable your dog to settle in and be happy for the duration of the stay.

What questions should I ask?

Ask lots of questions.

- How often are the dogs exercised? They should be let out for a run at least twice a day to stretch their legs and play.
- What are the dogs fed? The kennels should be prepared to feed the food you supply; your dog will feel more at home and will be less likely to get an upset stomach if his diet remains unchanged.
- Is a bed and bedding provided? You may want to ask if your dog can have its own basket/bedding to help them feel more at home.
- Are the dogs allowed to have their own toys? Again, this will make your dog feel more at home.
- Can the living quarters be heated? This will be especially important if your dog is going to be kennelled in the wintertime.
- How many kennel staff are there, and are they fully qualified? This will make a difference to the

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amount of time spent with each dog.

- Are all dogs required to have up to date vaccinations including kennel cough? This is essential; no dog should be allowed into kennels unless it is fully vaccinated.

What will the kennels ask me?

The kennel staff should also ask you questions so they can get to know your dog, if they don't then be wary. Things they should ask you.

- If your dog's vaccinations are up-to-date and ask to see it's vaccination record, plus a medical history.
- Information about your dog, for example, name, age, diet, special requirement, likes and dislikes.
- Details of your regular vet and contact details of any friends or family that they can get in touch with in an emergency.

When you have chosen your favourite boarding kennels, why not try your dog in the kennels for a short-stay period (maybe over a weekend) to see how they get on before committing to a longer stay. When you have made your final decision, make sure you book well in advance, a popular kennels will fill up quickly.

What do I do before leaving my dog?

There is an increased risk of dogs coming into contact with infectious diseases in kennels (because they are kept close to lots of other dogs). For this reason it is very important that your dog's routine vaccinations are up to date before they go to stay in kennels. Good kennels will ask to see a vaccination certificate signed by your vet to state that your dog is fully protected against parvovirus, distemper, leptospirosis, infectious hepatitis and usually also kennel cough.

Where can I find a pet-sitter?

If you would prefer not to leave your dog in a boarding kennel you could ask a friend or a member of your family to look after your dog while you go on holiday. If they have a dog, you could then offer to look after theirs when they go on holiday. This type of pet care/share scheme is the best way of avoiding your dog from becoming stressed and you'll be at ease knowing your dog is in the best hands while you are away. Some companies offering house-sitting services (where someone comes to live in your home while you are away) will also take on the care of your pets.

There are also companies that offer pet-sitting services for people when they go away on holiday. This involves someone coming to your house to feed, water and exercise your dog while you are away; good pet-sitting services will also take time out for playtime and cuddles! It can be less stressful for your dog than putting him into kennels, but the person looking after your dog will still be a stranger and you must ensure the company you choose is registered, has good references, is reliable and responsible. Most reputable pet-sitting services will only pet-sit a dog for a maximum of 3 days duration with at least 3 visits per day, as dogs do require more attention than cats or other small pets such as rabbits.

My pet needs medication; can I still ask someone else to look after them?

If your pet is in generally good health but requires routine medication (painkillers for arthritis or even insulin injections for diabetes) you need to take special care in choosing a carer. Many kennels and registered pet-sitters will still be happy to care for your pet and give treatment as required. You should always make sure that they know all about your pet's medical history and can contact your own vet if necessary when you are away.

If your pet has very special needs your vet may be able to advise on whether it is wise to leave them with someone else. Some vets also have boarding facilities and may be able to arrange to care for your pet themselves if they require a very high level of medical care.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your dog please contact Hampden Veterinary Hospital on 01296 423666 and we will be happy to advise you.