

## **Pet Boarding and Pet Sitters: Choosing the Best Option for your Cat**

Have you been delaying plans to travel because you don't think you can leave your cat? Your cat might be elderly, requiring medication, or perhaps your cat is too fearful of new people. You are not alone in this, but you can put a plan together and finally get out there.

### **Pet Boarding or Pet Sitters?**

This decision depends on your cat's likes and dislikes. In general, cats are not fond of change and prefer a sense of familiarity and safety, but each cat is an individual.

- Is your cat at ease going to your vet's office and being handled by new people?
  - You're fortunate and can most likely choose either option.
- Does your cat require daily medication, such as pills or insulin injections?
  - If she's a willing participant with her medication, then she could stay home with an experienced pet sitter or be boarded. There are vet techs who offer pet sitting and some cat-only boarding businesses have staff who are skilled giving injections and medication.
- Does your cat disappear when friends visit?
  - If this describes your cat, she'll do best at home, where she's already comfortable.

### **Pet Boarding**

Most cats will be much less stressed not hearing barking dogs while being boarded. Choosing a cat-only facility will prevent this added stress. Once you've selected a few cat-friendly boarding locations, get a tour and ask questions. If they flat out say no tours, cross them off your list. Being able to see where your cat will be staying is a reasonable request, turning this down raises suspicions. A tour should tell you:

- If the rooms/kennels and floors are clean. Are there any unappealing smells?
- Do the cats look relaxed, have fresh bedding and toys?
- Ask if the cats get daily playtime with staff. Knowing that she gets daily playtime will be a great comfort to you. And she'll reap the benefits.
- Make sure the business is licensed and insured and has a Kennel Permit. Ask to see these if there's any question.
- Bring your cat's food, so she remains on the same diet. She might like having her own bed there too.
- If your cat needs daily medication, ask about the skill level of the staff. Some people are more comfortable and skilled than others.
- Can you leave knowing that your cat is safe and will be comfortable and well cared for? Does the place you've chosen give you peace of mind?

### **Pet Sitters**

There are advantages to having a pet sitter in your home: your cat can stay in a familiar setting; the sitter may do other things such as water plants and bring in the mail and someone will be living in your home making it look unattractive to intruders. Some people don't want a stranger living in their home, if this is the case for you, you might be more comfortable boarding your cat.

It's becoming more common to see pet boarding businesses also offering in-home pet sitting, so keep an eye out for those. And don't forget that your friends are a great resource; feedback from friends about experiences they've had with pet sitters is likely to be the most honest and reliable source of information.

Most pet sitters either care for other pets during the day or have other employment that takes them elsewhere for part or all of the day. If this isn't going to work for your cat, regardless of the reason, be up front and honest about this. You want to find the pet sitter who will be the best match for you and your cat.

Keep your cat's routine as close to normal as possible. If you feed her three times a day but the sitter can't feed her midday, buy an auto-feeder for midday meals. Put lights on timers so the house won't be unusually dark for your cat if she's not used to that. If you always play with your cat twice a day, make sure to pass these details on. A professional and caring pet sitter will want to know these details!

Make an emergency go-kit for your cat, containing her dry food, water, bowls, toys, a few days' worth of medication, bedding, a Feliway calming collar, litter, litter box, plastic bags, and a crate. This is just in case. Tell your sitter where it is and supply all important contact information.

Talk with your sitter about a contingency plan in case you are delayed returning home by a day or two. Can your sitter stay if needed? This would be good to know before you leave.

The more prepared you are before you leave, the less you'll worry after you have left.

### **Associations and Organizations**

Pet Sitters International is an organization that provides educational resources for pet sitters and dog walkers. There is a way for pet owners to find pet sitters by zip code. Various levels of skill and education are listed next to each pet sitter's name, for example, pet first aid certified, bonded, proof of background check, and the list goes on.

<https://www.petsit.com/about>

National Association of Professional Pet Sitters is a non-profit organization providing continuing education opportunities, such as caring for aging pets and feline behavioral issues, for members. And, like Pet Sitters International, finding a pet sitter by zip code is available on their website. <https://petsitters.org/>

**Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.**