

CONSIDER THE PET SITTER

Are you reluctant to plan a vacation because of your pet?

Are you stopped by images of driving to a boarding kennel filled with unfamiliar animals and run by well-meaning strangers?

Consider, then, another possibility. Your pet, safe and snug at home, cared for by someone who's both qualified and experienced.

Meet the pet sitter.

Pet sitters are paid professionals who will come to your home and spend quality time with your pet. The best ones are those who not only feed and exercise your pet, but know if your pet needs veterinary attention, and hold certificates in First Aid and CPR.

Consider the benefits.

Your pet remains at home, with the same diet and daily routine, and receives both attention and exercise while you're away.

You can feel more secure knowing that, not only is your pet safe, but your home is too. Pet sitters can take in your newspapers and mail, water your plants and provide your apartment or house with that much needed, lived-in look.

To begin the process, ask your veterinarian, trainer or groomer for recommendations. Ask your friends and neighbors for the names of reliable pet sitters they themselves have used.

With several names in hand, interview each potential candidate over the phone and then in your home. Before making your choice, you must receive satisfactory answers to the following vital questions:

- * Can the pet sitter provide written proof that he/she is bonded and carries commercial liability insurance?
- * What formal training has the pet sitter received?
- * Is the pet sitter taking notes about your pet: likes and dislikes; fears and habits; routines; medical conditions and medications?
- * Is a contingency plan in place if an accident or emergency prevents the pet sitter from fulfilling his/her duties?
- * Will the pet sitter provide such extra services as grooming, playtime or dog walking?
- * Will the pet sitter give you a written contract listing both the services and the fees?
- * If the pet sitter provides live-in services, what are the specific times he/she agrees to be with your pet? And is all of this detailed in the contract?
- * Will the pet sitter give you the phone numbers of clients who have agreed to serve as references?

If you're satisfied with the person's answers and all of the references have checked out, it's imperative that your pet first meet and interact with prospective sitter. Monitor them closely. Does your pet seem comfortable with the person? Are they a good fit? Are there any issues that need addressing?

Once your decision has been made and you, yourself, are comfortable, you can begin to plan that long-delayed vacation: whether for a weekend, a week or longer.

And then:

- * Reserve your pet sitter early, especially during the holidays.
- * Walk the sitter through your home, pointing out all the essentials needed to make the agreed-upon routine run smoothly and well.
- * Leave a clearly displayed list of emergency contact information, including how to reach you and your veterinarian.
- * Leave pet food and supplies in one place. Buy extra supplies in case you're away longer than originally planned.

* Leave a key with a trustworthy neighbor and have the two of them exchange phone numbers.

* Show the pet sitter any important safety features, such as fuse boxes, circuit breakers and security systems.

With everything firmly in place, all you have to do now is leave.

Secure in the knowledge that your precious pet is in good hands and is, after all, a mere phone call away.