



8 Things You Need To Know
About Boarding Your Dog
At a Boarding Facility or Pet Resort

Author: Sam Brown

8 THINGS YOU MUST KNOW BEFORE BOARDING YOUR DOG

Foreward

This book was written by Sam Brown, Founder and CEO of the Sunshine Coast Pet Resort on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. It comes from years of experience of working with pets and their owners.

She understands the stress of leaving your dog and feels the same way when she leaves her 2 dogs, Martha and Bijan, in anyone else's care. This is why she wrote the book. After years of talking to many customers about their concerns the idea for the eBook was born. This eBook is designed to give you a detailed understanding of what's involved in boarding your pet.

If you have any further questions, feel free to email her at sam@1300catdog.com

1. How can you trust anyone to care for your dog?
2. Will my dog be safe and secure?
3. Is the environment clean and hygienic?
4. What will my dog do all day? Will they be happy?
5. Why are there so many rules and regulations at a Boarding Facility?
6. What quality standards does the Boarding Facility have? Is it accredited?
7. What will my dog eat?
8. What about stress and health issues?

HOW CAN YOU TRUST ANYONE TO CARE FOR YOUR DOG?



It is a huge responsibility to hand over the care of your precious pet to another person. You may be one of the lucky people who have accommodating friends and family - people you can trust to take good care of your pet, but there are many times and situations where you simply may not have this option.

What about Pet Sitting?

Pet Sitting is when the pet carer comes to your house and takes care of your pet when you are not home. The pet carer will normally spend 30 minutes to an hour with your pet each day.

Pet Sitting is another option for pet care, but seriously, how can anyone advocate having their pet stay HOME ALONE for 24 hours per day? Pet sitting should only ever be considered in extreme situations when all other options have been exhausted.

Boarding Your Dog

Things to consider when using a Boarding Facility:

- Do the team members at the facility love pets - are they obvious dog lovers?
- Ask your family, friends and trusted networks who they use. Word of mouth is the best source of referral.
- Does the facility have PetCams so you can view your pet online?
- Can your family and friends visit your dog during its stay to see how they are going?

- What is “the vibe” - what does your intuition tell you?
- Do they have *recent* testimonials from their customers?
- Are the pets happy to come and go from the facility?

What you need to look for...

Here are 6 traits of a Boarding Facility that indicate whether or not you can trust them:

1. Inspection Times

They let you inspect their facility any time during their opening hours and you are not limited to a particular viewing time.

Boarding Facilities are great places for dogs and once you have a great Boarding Facility that you can trust, it is liberating and freeing. Many people have reported that their lives have changed incredibly because of the extra freedom they now have due to the Boarding Facility they use.

2. Visits and Outings

While your pet is staying at the Boarding Facility your family and friends can visit the dog or take them out for the day.

As the owner, this will give you peace of mind knowing that your pet is happy. Please consider however that this may be stressful for the pet so you really need to make sure you're doing this for the right reasons – check in with yourself and ask ‘What really is best for my pet?’

3. Checking Out the Accommodation

The Boarding Facility lets you have a really CLOSE look behind closed doors and is very open and honest.

The first indicator of trust is how OPEN is the Boarding Facility? How much of the facility are they willing to show you? Can you walk up to the rooms or cages?

Don't expect to be let into all areas and depths of the buildings. There can be lots of dogs and it can be overwhelmingly noisy with all the barking. What you need to see is a **typical room (or accommodation)** and you should be able to get a good look and, most importantly, a good smell! If viewing their typical pet accommodation is not possible - then don't go there. If they are not willing to show you the accommodation, then that's suspicious.

4. **Pet Cams to view your pet**

Are there Pet Cams for you to view your pet at a pre-arranged time? Pet Cams are not designed for you to sit there all day watching your pet - that's silly. If, however, you can arrange a time to see your pet for up to 15 minutes, that's a great service!

5. **Testimonials on their website**

If the facility has many testimonials from happy customers on their website, it indicates that people have been so impressed they have taken the time to write these – this provides a great sense of confidence for you. Check to see that recent ones are included.

6. **Your dog is ALWAYS happy to come and go from the facility.**

You know when your dog is happy. Are they excited when they check-in AND come home? Remember though, your dog might put on a 'show' just for you, so this could be an issue. This is a bit like the children heading off to school and crying while you are there – but as soon as you leave them...they play with all their friends.

“Mrs Jones had a 12 year old Maltese, appropriately named Princess. Princess had never been away from her mother. The entire family was going on the trip of a life time: a cruise.

Her daughter had done the research and had found a facility that was really nice on the phone, BUT 24 hours before the cruise was due to depart, the reality was that Mrs Jones hated the Boarding Facility her daughter had found. It was

dark and cold and there was NO WAY she was leaving Princess there. Her holiday was OVER.

Her daughter begged her to try another facility. The daughter called her friend and asked for any ideas. Her friend recommended a lovely place. She rang the facility and found that the team members were happy and helpful. They referred her to photos on the internet and they even let her view the Pet Cam so she could be assured that she could arrange to ‘see’ Princess while she was away on the cruise.

Mrs Jones took a huge leap of faith because she felt she could TRUST this place and she happily went on holidays. Princess had a great holiday and so did Mrs Jones. The day after Princess went home, they popped back to the Pet Resort to collect a favourite toy that had been left behind.

Mrs Jones was thrilled when Princess was excited to be back at the Pet Resort, even when it was only for a short visit”

Finding someone you can trust with your pet is very much like finding someone you can trust with your child. Whether your child has special needs or not, you still want to ensure that they are safe and happy and not compromised. It's also like finding the perfect dentist or hairdresser for yourself.

It is really important for you to have a relationship with the Boarding Facility and if it doesn't work out, it doesn't necessarily mean boarding is not for you. You could try another facility and maybe you will connect with them better.

WILL MY DOG BE SAFE AND SECURE?



Your dog will be stressed simply because you are not with them. That's stress enough for most dogs...packing them off to their favourite Aunt won't make them feel any less stressed. They will just miss **you**.

Safety and security are **the most important** attributes you should seek in a Boarding Facility.

Before you choose a Boarding Facility, you need to make sure your dog will be safe and contained. It's not just wanting to know that they won't escape; it's much more than that.

Some safety concerns you may have include:

Will my dog be protected from other dogs?

Will another dog attack my dog?

Can my dog scale or climb any fencing at the facility?

When considering a facility, ask yourself these important safety and security questions:

- *Will my pet be safe?*
- *Can they jump or dig out of the exercise yards?*
- *How secure are the buildings and facilities?*

- *Are the rooms or accommodation safe and secure?*
- *What is the policy on sharing or doubling with my pet?*

Here are 3 questions you need to ask a Boarding Facility to help you make your decision and to ease your mind:

1. *Do the runs/pens have lids to prevent dogs climbing in or out?*

Any quality facility will follow guidelines that ensure that climbing-type dogs will be housed in accommodation that has a roof or a lid. This prevents dogs escaping.

2. *What is the height of the fencing in the exercise yard? Can my dog jump over the fencing or dig its way out?*

This is really about common sense. If your dog is the type of dog that scales any fencing for any reason (for example, due to thunder storms or because they are bored) then **you must tell the facility**.

There is not a facility in the world that can contain a dog that is not afraid to scale a 2 metre fence. The same goes for diggers. If your dog can dig a rabbit hole to China, then you need to tell them. The facility can then make sure that your pet is safely contained.

3. *What is the sharing policy? Will my dog share with another dog?*

Having your dog share with another dog is a great idea. Dogs are pack animals and most dogs love to share. Upon check-in, you should be asked if you are ok with your dog sharing.

Sharing dogs and knowing how to put dogs 'together' is an art, but simply, you only put 'like dogs' together. For

example, white fluffies with white fluffies, Labradors with Labradors, and then boys with girls. It's very simple and Pet Resort personnel are highly trained in this area.

If you don't want your dog to share with another dog, you need to tell the facility when you are making your inquiry. If the Boarding Facility will not allow your dog to have separate accommodation, then **DO NOT USE THEM. This is very important.**

Your dog should NOT be forced into sharing with another dog if either you, or your dog, is uncomfortable with this. Your dog may hate other dogs or be very fearful of them. It is YOUR choice. Some facilities may charge you more if your dog won't share – this is their choice.

“Oscar is a red cattle dog with a habit of climbing 6 foot fences. When the owners checked Oscar into the Boarding Facility they neglected to tell the team member at the front desk about this trait. Oscar was put into an enclosure without a roof, so he climbed his way out of his room AND 3 exercise yards. When the owners were called, they weren't surprised at all.

Thankfully, Oscar was found that day and he was then able to go into another pen where he could be secured. The fact that he was a climber was then recorded on his file and future visits to the Boarding Facility meant that his safety was ensured”

It's really important for the Facility to know unique things about your pet

You wouldn't send your child off to school camp without mentioning that they have specific needs (eg. are allergic to nuts or need Ventolin regularly). The same type of logic applies to your pet.

If your pet has specific needs, such as:

- allergies;
- fears of storms;
- hates and loves;
- feeding requirements;
- chewing or destroying habits;
- anything – TELL THEM.

No matter how seemingly silly it sound, tell the facility **everything** you can about your pet.

IS THE ENVIRONMENT CLEAN AND HYGIENIC?



You wouldn't check yourself into a smelly filthy hotel...so why would you do it to your dog?

The saying goes "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" and it is so. Boarding Facilities can be messy because dogs poo in their bedrooms. It's that simple. When they are at home dogs go into their back yard and do their business there - but in a Boarding Facility environment, one half of the accommodation is for sleeping and the other for pooing and weeing. So boarding facilities smell! That's a fact!

There is not a Boarding Facility in the world that has a dedicated service to instantly pick up your dog's poo or hose your dog's wee the instant it happens. If this IS your expectation, then DON'T use a Boarding Facility.

The Boarding Facility should perform a 'poo pick up run' **every day**. Wherever possible, they may do another 'poo pick up run' in the afternoon.

Boarding Facilities should be cleaned to a high standard with appropriate disinfectants. You will generally smell this by viewing the accommodation when you visit it (prior to making any commitment to a booking). Boarding facilities should not smell foul. Yes there will be a doggy/poo/wee smell, but nothing foul.

Your dog should always smell clean and

fresh on its departure. Always request a hydro-bath on your dog's departure. When boarding, there is always a risk that your dog may have urine on it because the urine has been trampled in through the kennel and onto the bedding.

Never begrudge a facility owner for charging you for to hydro-bath your dog before its departure. After all, these days a mobile doggy wash service costs around \$25 and most facilities charge about \$10. What a bargain!

A quick note: if you collect your dog and you are INSTANTLY unhappy with the smell of your dog, ask the facility to re-bath the dog. It will save you a lot of grief and you won't have to put up with a smelly dog in the car and, most importantly, you won't have to deal with it when you get home. Any facility can only address your concerns if they know about them.

Things to consider when using a Boarding Facility:

- All runs should be cleaned **every day**, followed by disinfectant also being applied **daily**;
- Veterinary or animal hospital grade disinfectant (such as F10) should be used;
- Your dog should be clean and spotless on its departure;
- The reception should be clean and nice smelling. If they don't care about their reception, they certainly won't care about the other buildings or your dog - it's just common sense.

What are the 3 obvious signs that the Boarding Facility has high standards of hygiene and cleanliness?

1. When inspecting the dog accommodation or runs, there is no foul smelling **odour**. If you get pleasant, deodorised smells and the occasional doggy/poopy smell, then that's ok. If you are a dog owner, YOU KNOW what we mean.
2. The team members are very clear about the **cleaning routines** of the facility and they don't seem apprehensive or embarrassed about showing you around or explaining their cleaning routines.
3. The **reception area** is spotless and free of dog hair and odours. This building is the gateway to the business so it should look and feel professional. It's on show and you should be impressed. It should not resemble a teenager's bedroom with junk everywhere.

“Georgia is a long-haired Golden Retriever who stayed at a Boarding Facility for 2 weeks. Her owners sent blankets and bedding for her to sleep on. Upon her check-in, it was explained that the facility couldn't take responsibility for the condition of the blankets as they didn't have laundry facilities. The owners also insisted that they didn't want her bathed.

When Georgia returned home, she smelt terrible and the blankets stunk of dog wee. She had been sharing with a very energetic Labrador called Sam. Sam and Georgia were very active and played and wrestled all day. Because the dogs toileted in their

kennel, they trampled things in on the bedding so it meant that the dogs and the bedding were smelly.

Once this was explained to the owners, they understood and were ok about it. The facility bathed Georgia and the blankets were thrown away. The owners were happy that Georgia was happy.”

Imagine you are on holiday and about to stay in a hotel. After a long drive, you arrive at this grubby hotel with a messy reception area and an unshaven owner. The room smells of mould and/or cigarette smoke. When you turn down the bed, you clearly see evidence that someone else has slept in the bed. You wouldn't stay there, would you? You would leave and demand a refund. Well, treat boarding facilities the same way. They have a Duty of Care to provide and maintain a clean environment, and a clean dog.

WHAT WILL MY DOG DO ALL DAY? WILL THEY BE HAPPY?



If you imagine your dog being locked up all day in a 1 metre x 1 metre enclosure with no access to the outside world, then the picture is grim and you would never go away on holidays. The reality is that most Boarding Facilities are not like this. They offer roomy runs and extensive play and exercise programs.

Most facility owners are animal lovers and invest a lot into their businesses and, as a result, they pride themselves on the level of their wonderful facilities. There is no incentive for the facility owner to cage a dog all day. It doesn't make sense.

Always select a Boarding Facility with a playtime option, and/or exercise programs where you can mix and match interactive play sessions for your dog (for example, swims, walks, time in the office with team members etc).

Most boarding facilities offer additional exercise programs for their guests. If they don't, then you need to ask as you don't want to have your dog confined to their room all day. Generally, Boarding Facilities either have an all-inclusive daily rate (i.e. exercise included) or you may pay for exercise/activities separately.

Find a facility that actively encourages additional fun services such as play times, walking or swimming. Be prepared to pay

for this. It costs the facility to provide the team members to do the exercises, but makes a big difference to the quality of stay for your dog.

Why should I bother paying for extra exercise or play sessions?

Imagine for a minute that you organised a family holiday at Club Med. Your whole family was going and the children were excited. When you arrived at Club Med there was an immediate cyclone warning and the whole family (including 2 very hyped up boys) were confined to 1 room for 7 days (ok it was a big cyclone).

You could **not leave your room** for any reason. How do you think you would feel?

Get the picture?

Things to consider about your dog's exercise programs:

- Dogs don't need a lot of extra exercise; they mainly sleep all day anyway. If they are sharing with another dog, then they don't need much extra exercise as they will play together, but they should be out of their rooms for a **minimum** of 20 minutes each day.
- Your dog may come home exhausted from its boarding experience. This is because they sleep less in a boarding environment and they are more active than being HOME ALONE all day. Boarding Facilities are very active places - lots of dogs and lots of barking.

Your level of guilt will decrease if you ‘top-up’ the facility’s included exercise programs. For example, they may provide one free play per day, and then you pay for your dog to be walked **every other** day. Your dog does deserve it.

- The more active and social your dog is during their stay, the more fun they will have.
- Always check on the ‘doubling’ or sharing policy of the facility. Generally, dogs love to share - but you need to feel comfortable that your dog will be safe and happy.

4 Questions for you to ask your local Boarding Facility

1. *Does the daily rate include any exercise?*

Most Boarding Facilities include some sort of exercise with their daily rate however it's really up to them how they set their pricing.

2. *What extra interactions or social activities are available and what do they cost?*

Get a menu or list of activities. Plan your pet’s day around what activities are on offer.

3. *Will my dog share? If so, what sort of dog will they share with?*

This is really important for you to know. In Australia, ‘doubling’ or sharing in Boarding Facilities is standard practice. After all, dogs love it, and most kennels have very big runs so it's not an issue (see section on Safety and Security).

If you request NOT to have your dog share with another dog and the facility cannot

meet your request – then don’t use that facility. Your requests should be heard and respected. You know what is best for your dog.

4. *Can I bundle my dog’s exercise to save money?*

Just ask the Facility if this is possible and you may save money.

As the owner of the Sunshine Coast Pet Resort, here’s a great example of how we have found ‘bundling exercises’ can work.

“Penny is a British Bulldog with a passion for chewing and destroying things. She absolutely hates other dogs. She was booked in at the local Pet Resort, which prides itself on its Play Program. Penny never learned to walk on a lead properly and was quite a handful.

The Pet Resort bundled together an exercise program that involved Penny having daily treat-filled Kongs, 2 plays in a big yard with a ball and a weekly swim. The owner paid only an extra \$70 for the whole week for the extra activities and Penny loved it”

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY RULES AND REGULATIONS AT A BOARDING FACILITY?



In Australia, boarding facilities are highly regulated. There are many organisations to which Boarding Facilities are accountable. When selecting the perfect facility for you, what you need to decide is whether or not you can live with certain rules. The industry is free to determine their mode of operation and it's really up to you to decide whether or not you are happy to comply. Some rules are bestowed upon Boarding Facilities and some are chosen by the Boarding Facilities themselves.

The licensing body for Boarding Facilities in Australia is the Local Council. It is very difficult to open a Boarding Facility in Australia. Most Councils accept that communities need such facilities and that life without them would be difficult, BUT they don't make the process of building or running a Boarding Facility very easy. The main issues Councils are concerned with have nothing to do with the pet's welfare, but relate more to issues such as zoning (most Boarding Facilities are in rural areas), traffic, noise, waste disposal and car parking.

The Department of Natural Resources and the Environment is the other governing body and there's one of these for each state! They are more concerned with facility issues such as pet safety and

containment, pen size and height, water, noise, temperature, airflow and waste management.

The RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) has a policy document that defines many requirements centred around the well-being of the pets, including pen sizes, staff and owner qualifications, exercise requirements and pet welfare. They have the power to insist that providers comply with these requirements.

Industry Associations keep organisations accountable and keep them informed of the latest issues. There are also industry groups where, after paying a small annual fee, Boarding Facilities are invited to participate in industry forums and discussions.

If you were sending your child to day care, wouldn't you be interested in those centres that belonged to Industry Associations and were **committed** to providing a **high quality service**?

Wouldn't you want the same commitment to high quality care for your pet?

You would also need to choose a day care centre that suited your **budget and time frame**. If you chose poorly, the relationship would be strained from the start wouldn't it?

It's important to think about these issues when deciding where to board your dog.

So what are the some of the rules a Boarding Facility may have?

1. Restricted opening hours

This may be for two reasons. Firstly, the council requires them to be closed during certain hours to help minimise noise to the surrounding properties. Dogs coming and going from the Boarding Facility disrupts all the other dogs and the noise can be overwhelming.

Secondly, the Boarding Facility has limited resources and they need to do all the feeding and cleaning during the reception's closing hours. Some may also be closed on certain days of the week because they need time off for themselves.

If the hours of a facility don't suit you, then you can either ask them to be flexible OR find another provider – simple.

2. Payment by the DAY and not by the night

Some customers have asked the question: “Hotels don't charge by the day so why do dog boarding facilities?”

Each facility has their own charging policy and they have a right to do this. Most Boarding Facilities do, however, charge by the calendar day.

The big difference is, you can't check into a hotel until 2pm and you have to check out of most hotels by 10am. At a Boarding Facility most of our customers require care for the entire day.

If it really bothers you and you feel you have a good case for not paying for the extra day (for example you are picking up at 7am in the morning), just ask them. They can always say No.

3. Blankets and possessions

Each Boarding Facility may have different rules about allowing you to bring possessions with your dog when they stay. Whatever the policy is, it is really important for you to remember to only bring things that have **no value**, as they may be lost or destroyed.

Blankets and bedding can get soiled very quickly and most Boarding Facilities do not have the staff **or** the laundry facilities to cope with maintaining blankets and bedding.

Their purpose is to take care of your dog, not do the laundry. Resources are much better directed to pet care rather than housekeeping.

If you are concerned about your dog being cold, you should be able to provide a jacket for your dog, and the Boarding Facility should be happy to put this on as necessary.

4. Deposits, prepaying and cancellation fees

Most Boarding Facilities have their own policy with respect to their financial requirements. Deposits and cancellation fees are an acceptable part of the process.

If they are asking for these it's because they are 'holding' a spot for you. Most facilities will let you carry over any deposits, or monies paid, toward future stays if you have to cancel.

It is a requirement of most facilities to prepay for Easter and Christmas, simply because these are the busiest holidays of the year and it is important for providers to make sure they are maximising their occupancy over these periods.

What are the top questions you should ask your Boarding Facility?

1. *What are your operating days and hours? What are your opening hours over Christmas and Easter? Do you have a holiday surcharge?*

This information will generally be available on the website, the Yellow Pages advert or in the reception area. Terms and Conditions for Easter/Christmas/School holidays including surcharges (most charge 15%) should also be clearly available for you. Be aware these may differ from the Terms and Conditions for other times during the year, so you may want to ask about these.

2. *Can I bring my pet's favourite toy?*

Most facilities should be fine with this, but don't hold them accountable if it gets lost or destroyed. Boarding Facilities will provide their own toys and activities to keep your dog entertained.

3. *Can I bring my dog's bed?*

Boarding Facilities will provide a bed for your dog and in climates where it is cold, they are also expected to provide heating.

If the facility allows you to bring bedding or beds, don't expect them to be responsible for their safe return. Possessions can, and will, get lost and damaged.

4. *Does the Boarding Facility belong to any industry or regulatory groups?*

The Pet Industry Association of Australia (PIAA) is a fantastic group that is set up to be the voice of the

industry. They have accreditation programs and act as a voice to our national government.

Currently, it costs only \$400 - \$500 per year to join. If a Boarding Facility is a member of the PIAA, it should give you peace of mind that you are dealing with a legitimate operator.

Each state also has its own group. In Queensland, it is the Association of Pet Boarding and Grooming (APBG).

Ask the Boarding Facility if they are members of any industry associations. If they are, again it should give you peace of mind that they are committed to working within the legislation, and are accepted by their industry peers.

As the owner of the Sunshine Coast Pet Resort, here's another successful example of finding a facility that meets your needs:

"The Jones family had just moved to the area and knew nobody. They had a 4 year old Cocker Spaniel called Wally. They used the Yellow Pages to get a list of the all the local Boarding Facilities. They also rang the Association of Pet Boarding and Grooming to get a list of the providers on the Sunshine Coast.

They found several and rang each of them in turn. They were leaving for their holiday on a Sunday and wanted to drop Wally off that day. They were able to establish which facilities suited this need and they visited them to help them make their choice. They chose the Sunshine Coast Pet Resort, largely based on the fact that it was open all day on Sunday"

WHAT QUALITY STANDARDS DOES THE BOARDING FACILITY HAVE? IS IT ACCREDITED



There are many Boarding Facilities that you can choose from. One of the things that you should be asking is whether the facility has any formal procedures, or more importantly, does it have accreditation with any professional bodies? This will give you peace of mind that all the team members at the facility will be well equipped to handle any scenario they are presented with.

Do your research and answer the following issues for yourself:

Can you see that the facility is actively involved in its industry and is accepted by the accrediting authority? Is there obvious signage in the reception area indicating this?

When you check-in your pet there should be standard questions asked about your dog and the facility must **always** ask about your dog's vaccination information; you should be presented with a Boarding Contract (or Service Agreement) which outlines your obligations and the facility's obligations. You should be asked to sign this Contract before you leave.

What is contained in the Boarding Contract or Service Agreement? Who will pay if something goes wrong and a vet is needed?

The top 5 questions you should be asking your Boarding Facility

1. *Are you a member of the PIAA (Pet Industry Association of Australia) and the appropriate body in their State? (In Queensland it is the Australian Pet Boarding and Grooming Group – APBG)*

Can you see their current membership certificate or sticker? Really, if the facility is not interested in being involved in their governing authority, then they are probably not that professional and should be avoided. Memberships to these groups are very reasonable and it really is worth it to stay on top of the latest issues and trends.

2. *In the Boarding Contract, if your pet gets sick or needs a vet, who is responsible for the bill?*

As a rule of thumb, you should expect to pay for anything specific to your dog - such as pre-existing conditions and general canine illnesses that your dog could get anywhere (such as canine cough, conjunctivitis, hot spots, cruciate ligament injuries, paralysis tick treatment, stomach bloat, or puncture wounds or bites from other family members).

The facility is responsible for the injury if, for example, it relates to an injury from their environment - such as a scratch from wire or a puncture wound from another guest.

Remember that things can happen to dogs while they are in someone else's care and you need to understand who will pay the vet bill if one is necessary.

3. *Do I need to show you my vaccination certificate?*

If the facility does not have a computer system, then you will be required to show the vaccination certificate every time you visit. In this day and age, there is no excuse for not keeping appropriate and complete records especially as computers and software are so reasonably priced now.

Check with the Boarding Facility as to what vaccination level they need, but the minimum they should require is a C5. There are some Boarding Facilities that are lucky enough to have isolation areas for emergencies, but generally speaking, **NEVER** put your dog into a facility that has not asked for a copy of your pet's vaccination certificate.

4. *Does my dog need flea or tick prevention while in care?*

If you don't already routinely treat your dog for fleas and ticks, then a visit to a Boarding Facility should be a reason to do so. Where there are dogs, there are fleas and ticks, so make sure you treat your dog with an appropriate product.

If you are in a paralysis tick area (such as anywhere in most of South East Queensland) then you should be treating your dog anyway. Another tip is to treat your dog with a product such as a Capstar tablet when departing from the Boarding Facility as it will kill any fleas currently on the dog. Remember, the Boarding Facility is not responsible for paying for any vet costs as a result of paralysis tick, so it's better to be safe than sorry.

If you are worried about it, one thing that you may choose to do is to put both a collar **and** a topical product on your dog when they have their holiday. This will improve your pet's chances of being parasite free.

5. *What happens to my pet if it dies?*

Not a nice topic, but it is something you need to consider especially if your pet is elderly and frail. Some facilities charge extra for elderly pets and there is a good reason for this - they need more care! So, don't begrudge this fee if you are being asked to pay it.

When you check into the facility, you should be asked to provide ALL your emergency contact details, or WHO your representative is if you cannot be contacted.

If your pet dies there are generally three options available for your pet's remains:

- Firstly, the pet can be cremated. This generally costs from \$200 and is dependent on the size of the dog. Your pet's ashes are given back to you in a little urn.
- Secondly, you could ask the owners of the facility if they could bury the pet on their property. Most Boarding Facilities are on acreage and this **may** not be a problem, although you cannot assume it will be ok.
- Finally, the pet could be kept in the freezer until your return, so that you can organise your own arrangements when you get home.

“Sammy was a 13 year old Cocker Spaniel who had been visiting his Boarding Facility for 7 years. He loved it and enjoyed the company of the other dogs. His parents were in NZ on holiday and unfortunately Sammy died in his sleep. It appeared that he probably had twisted bowel or bloat, as when he was found his stomach was distended.”

Because the owners had left their NZ contact details, the facility owner could discuss the options with the owners. They were devastated but were grateful that he was in good hands. The owners decided to cremate Sammy so they could scatter his ashes across his favourite beach”

Engaging the services of a Boarding Facility is like engaging child care services for your child. You accept that the child may be sick because they are in contact with other children. They may get chicken pox, measles, head lice, conjunctivitis, and coughs and colds.

It is NOT the child care providers’ fault if something like this happens – it just happens, and the benefits of child care FAR outweigh the risks. The child care provider, on the other hand, is responsible for providing a safe environment for your child, and they should belong to groups and accrediting authorities for child care in their State.

Similarly, the benefits of placing your pet in a Boarding Facility FAR outweigh the risks. They are, however, still responsible for providing a safe and secure environment for your pet and should belong to appropriate industry groups and accrediting bodies.

WHAT WILL MY DOG EAT?



While your dog is in the facility's care, the food and nutrition it receives should be considered, as it is an important part of the care. It is not a case of 'throw the dog a bone'. It is an important part of deciding whether or not you should engage the services of a Boarding Facility.

Things to consider are:

- How different is the food being offered at the facility compared to home?
- What if my dog has a specialised diet?
- Is there a variety on offer? What if my pet doesn't like the food?
- What brands of food are used? Do they have preservatives?
- Can my dog have a bone or other treats?
- Can my dog continue the same food routine it has at home?

The 7 most important questions to ask the Boarding Facility about food:

1. *What do you feed the dogs?*

There is much discussion and disagreement on this topic within the industry. Many Boarding Facilities have their own methodology for the provision of food and this can be seen as a "selling point" for them.

Basically, there are three categories of dog food. Firstly, there are premium brands (such as Royal Canin, Nutro, Nutrience, Science Diet) – similar to what you purchase at the vet or high-quality pet shop.

Secondly, there are the cheaper supermarket brands, and finally, there's home cooking.

With dog dry food, there can sometimes be (up to) \$80 a bag difference in the price between the supermarket brand and the vet-prescribed brand (that's for a 15kg bag of course).

Pet food companies spend billions of dollars on pet food including research on palatability and disposal (i.e. what comes out the other end). So trust that if the main food being served is a premium, high-quality brand, then you should be happy with this.

If a Boarding Facility is feeding the dogs a \$30 bag of dog kibble that has the nutritional value of a cardboard box, then **be concerned**. Also, be wary of home-cooking as there could be quality and hygiene issues here.

The primary part of the meal should be a premium dry food with small amounts of 'wet' offerings, such as chicken mince or premium meat products.

Being practical, your dog's poo needs to be able to be picked up with a tissue. Soft bowel movements are a pain, particularly at the Boarding Facility.

One thing to be aware of is that any change of diet can cause loose movements. Dogs do have sensitive stomachs and you may notice that your dog's movements are loose when coming home from boarding. Normally, this will settle after a few days but remember to see your vet if you are worried.

2. *Can I bring in my own food?*

If your dog has medical reasons for a particular diet, then of course you **MUST** bring this food to the Boarding Facility. If your dog has a pretty standard diet then it's probably easier for everyone to have your dog eat what the Boarding Facility is offering. After all, you are paying for the food so you might as well let the facility feed them.

3. *What if my dog doesn't eat?*

A dog 'not eating' during the first couple of days is considered very normal. Once they have settled in, it is rare for dogs not to eat. To get a dog to eat, Boarding Facilities may have secret food treats - such as fresh or cooked chicken. Most dogs that won't eat dry food will eat a wet-based food.

If, after a few days, dogs don't eat there are also 'appetite enhancers' which can be given. It is highly unlikely that your dog will NOT EAT at all. If you think there is a risk, then bring your dog's favourite foods to the facility.

4. *Do you need bones?*

Bones are great for dogs and they love

them, but in a boarding environment, they can be a little problematic and can be the cause of dog fights.

If you want to give your dog his daily bone, it should be ok - just ask the operator and ask them to keep your dog separate whilst they are eating the bones to avoid any possibility of food-based aggression.

5. *Do you allow treats?*

Dog treats are very popular. As the owners may feel guilty about leaving their pet, they bring treats such as Smackos, pig's ears, liver treats, liquorice and even marshmallows.

Treats are ok but they, like bones, should only be given under supervision, especially if your dog is sharing accommodation. Food fights can happen with treats too.

6. *What do you do if my dog gets unwell from the food?*

If the dog has diarrhoea, then the best option is to fast the dog for 24 hours, then introduce a plain diet again (dry food is probably best). If the diarrhoea lasts for more than 24 hours, then a vet should be consulted as it is not normal for dogs to have this condition for more than 24 hours.

7. *How often do you feed the dogs?*

Most Boarding Facilities feed the dogs once per day and some feed twice. If you want to stick to your routine, let them know and they should accommodate this for you.

As the owner of the Sunshine Coast Pet Resort, here's an example of how specific food requirements can be accommodated:

"Max is a 3 year old cattle dog who frequents the local Pet Resort in his

town. He has a condition called pancreatitis and he cannot eat any food (other than his usual food) or he will get really sick very, very quickly.

Max is a super friendly dog and loves to come to the Pet Resort and play with all of his friends. He is a good sharer and is trustworthy. The owners pay extra to have him walked and swum every day. The Resort manages Max's diet well by giving him his 'own' food and simply separating him from his buddy when he eats. This means that Max is never at risk of eating food he should not be eating”

Managing your dog, if they have special dietary needs, is like managing any family member who has special needs. You need to communicate with the Boarding Facility and be responsible for ensuring that your pet's special needs are absolutely adhered to. The facility has an obligation to ensure that the pet is fed the correct food and that there is no risk of their health being compromised.

WHAT ABOUT STRESS AND HEALTH ISSUES?



There are a number of issues regarding health and stress which pet owners need to be aware of. Putting your dog into a Boarding Facility is very much like sending your 6 month old child to day care for the first time. The health risks are small, but it is important to understand what the facility is responsible for, and what you (as the owner) are responsible for.

Once you understand these issues, you can make an informed decision about whether or not you would feel comfortable about using the services of a Boarding Facility.

When considering a facility, some questions you may have are:

1. What is Canine Cough? What do I do if my dog gets it?
2. Why does my dog lose weight at the Boarding Facility?
3. What can happen with my dog's eyes?
4. What can happen to their nails and tails?
5. Why does my dog come home hoarse?

As the owner of the Sunshine Coast Pet Resort and having experienced many different dogs and situations, here are some answers that may help you:

1. *What is Canine Cough? What do I do if my dog gets it?*

Canine Cough is a very misunderstood condition. Canine Cough has been unfairly labelled 'Kennel Cough'. Dogs **do not** get Canine Cough from a Boarding Facility, they get it from **other dogs**.

So, whenever your dog is exposed to another dog at places such as beaches, leash-free parks, veterinary surgeries, grooming salons, training clubs, dog-show competitions, the neighbours and even in the street – they can be exposed to Canine Cough.

Unless you wrap them up in cotton wool and NEVER socialise them, at some time in its life your dog will get Canine Cough. Yes, dogs are vaccinated for some strains of Canine Cough (C4 covers a virus called Canine Parainfluenza and C5 covers bacteria called Bordetella) but vets and Boarding Facilities never really know what strain of the Cough your dog may have presently.

It is very much like the common cold for humans, and every year a new breed of influenza hits the streets. It is very much like Swine Flu in that it's highly contagious and some dogs may get very sick.

The purpose of this information is to **NOT** to provide veterinary advice. If you are at all concerned about Canine Cough **or** any other aspect of your dog's health, then you must speak to your vet. This information has been put together as a result of the author owning a Pet Resort for over 12 years. She has seen nearly every sort of dog ailment which relates to boarding a dog.

So why don't drug companies make new vaccines for dogs like they do for human issues like Swine Flu? It's really about money and research. Basically, it costs billions of dollars to produce and distribute vaccines and really, many pet owners are not going to pay for the extra expense when visiting the vet.

The best way to view Canine Cough is to see it for what it is – the common cold for your dog. If your dog develops symptoms that are flu-like, for example, coughing, sneezing, or it sounds like they are choking on a bone or it may sound like they are pulling on a choker lead...then it is probably Canine Cough.

If your dog is 'WELL and HEALTHY' in every other regard (i.e. they are eating and drinking normally) then most dogs will get through the Cough on their own. We are not sure of the statistics, but in most cases, dogs will self-heal Canine Cough.

If you choose to go to the vet, then most will prescribe antibiotics to assist with any secondary infections. A visit to the vet will cost anywhere from \$100 to \$260, depending on the vet or the time of the visit (for example, it is more expensive on the weekends).

If the term Canine Cough sends terror through your world, then **DO NOT USE** a Boarding Facility. If you use a Boarding Facility, or your dog plays with ANY other dog, at some point in their lifetime your dog will get this condition. The author of this document has had dogs her whole life and **all** of them have had Canine Cough. None of her dogs have had any serious implications from the condition.

On a final note, most dogs will recover from their symptoms and be completely well within 7 days of showing signs of Canine Cough. Some dogs will get sicker

and need antibiotics. It is NOT the responsibility of the Boarding Facility to pay vet bills associated with Canine Cough.

It is, however, the Boarding Facility's responsibility to use high-quality disinfectants and to isolate any affected dogs.

2. *Why does my dog lose weight at the Boarding Facility?*

Dogs are generally more active at Boarding Facilities than they are at home. They sleep less and, as a result, some dogs may lose weight. If you are concerned that your dog maybe susceptible to weight loss, ask the Boarding Facility to feed your dog twice a day. This will help.

Of course, most dogs are a few kilos overweight anyway so a trip to the Boarding Facility is a good thing. Some dogs can actually put weight on during their stay.

3. *What can happen with my dog's eyes?*

There are two common issues with dogs' eyes during boarding. Firstly, they could develop conjunctivitis. Conjunctivitis, by nature (as in humans), is highly contagious. If a Boarding Facility has a dog with this condition, of course they are going to isolate the dog. It would not make sense for them to NOT isolate the dog.

If your dog contracts conjunctivitis they will need to be treated by a vet and the bill is the responsibility of the owner. Expecting the Boarding Facility to assume responsibility is rather like asking the day care centre to pay for your child's doctor's bill if your child contracts conjunctivitis.

The other issue is general eye-hygiene. If

your dog has eyes that need daily attention (like wiping or cleaning) then make sure you tell the Boarding Facility. Breeds like Shitzus or Sharpais may need extra attention. If you don't tell the facility, your dog may (unnecessarily) develop an eye condition whilst they are there.

4. *What can happen to their nails and tails?*

Boarding Facilities are generally made of concrete. There are many modern Boarding Facilities that use materials rather like 'cool room panelling' but most are made from concrete. If your dog is active and jumps up and down whilst in its pen, then they make sustain injury to their nails. Concrete floors can be like a big emery board.

Generally, it's not a problem, but some dogs may wear their nails down to the flesh and this can be very painful. Most facilities will be aware of this because there will be blood in the pen. If the facility is aware, they can take actions such as moving the dog to a quieter area.

The same goes for a dog's tail. If your dog has a very waggy tail and hits everything with it, then they may lose the tip off the top of the tail as they hit the side (concrete) wall of the pen. The facility owner will notice this because there will be blood in the pen. The problem can be solved by the dog being moved to a non-concrete walled pen. If you have any questions about these issues, it is important that you talk to your Board Facility.

5. *Why does my dog come home hoarse?*

Boarding facilities are very active environments, rather like school camps or rock concerts. There are lots of dogs (even the smallest Boarding Facility can hold around 50 dogs on a quiet weekend) so

there are lots of dogs barking and being excited. Some dogs will lose their voices. Most voices will return after a couple of days' rest.

As the owner of the Sunshine Coast Pet Resort, here's how Canine Cough can be effectively handled.

"Lucy is a 3 year old Rhodesian Ridgeback who loves visiting the Pet Resort and has stayed about six times a year since she was a puppy. When she returned home after a recent visit, she started choking - much like she had a bone stuck in her throat.

The owners were concerned and rang the Pet Resort, who explained the situation – Lucy had Canine Cough. After 4 days, the coughing stopped and Lucy only coughed at nights or when she was excited. The coughing stopped completely after 10 days.

During the 10 day period, Lucy ate normally and was well in every other regard. Lucy's owners where comfortable with the situation because they had a great relationship with their Pet Resort, which was always open and honest with them about Canine Cough. In fact, they had been so honest they had advised Lucy's owners that they had a case of Canine Cough before Lucy checked-in, which is something the Pet Resort always does"

As a responsible pet owner, you need to weigh up the pros and cons of using a Boarding Facility. Most people, and their pets, love the freedom that comes with having a good relationship with a great Boarding Facility that is committed to high quality care of pets.

If you enjoy the experience, then your pet probably will too. Most dogs **LOVE** a trip to the Boarding Facility...it's a lot of fun. Don't let one incident of a smelly dog or Canine Cough distract you from what's really important... to have your pet cared for by a well trained, dedicated team in a loving, safe environment.