



Pet Care For Travelers

TEN WAYS TO FIND A GOOD PET SITTER

Austin, Texas Edition

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INTRODUCTION

This is a guide for those who want to find great care for their pets while they go away on vacation. Nobody likes to leave their pets behind, but as much as we'd like to frolic with our pups on the beach in Tahiti, it is just not realistic for most of us. This is a guide to give you options for great pet care while you enjoy your vacation.

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No matter where you find your pet sitter, no matter if they have tons of experience or two days, always trust your instincts. If it doesn't feel right, find someone else.

-Yvonne M. Feltman (former pet owner, pet sitter 15+ years)

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GOT OPTIONS?

If you are like most pet owners you've probably been using a friend, neighbor or family member for your pet's care while you're away. Of course this is the go-to option, the easy quick fix and low cost solution. It has probably been working for you for years. If you are lucky this could work for you for many more years too, but there will come a day that your go-to might move out of state. They might suddenly get pets of their own. Perhaps they'll have a baby or be away traveling the same time as you. My point is, sometime in the future you'll be forced to explore other options.

By other options, I mean you need a plan A, B, and C when it comes to pet care. Having back-up options is a great way to ensure you'll never be scrambling for a pet sitter at the last minute which can be one of the most stressful things pet owners have to deal with. Travel planning is intensive enough without having to scramble to find a competent, trustworthy & reliable pet sitter in the weeks, or heaven forbid, mere days leading up to your vacation.

Like choosing a babysitter for your toddlers, the task of finding good pet sitters is also important. There is nothing worse than being thousands of miles from home trying to enjoy your vacation all while fretting about the "responsible" neighborhood kid caring for Fido & Whiskers. Choose your pet's caregiver carefully!

Explore Resources!

In the following list you'll discover ten ways to find great pet care for your pet while you are away. Many of these options I have personally used myself or know about from other sitters or clients.

AUSTIN PET SITTERS ORGANIZATION

AustinPetsitters.org

Whether you are hiring someone for overnight stays in your house or for stop-bys, this should be your first search. The Austin Pet Sitters Organization is a database of pet sitters local to Austin, Texas. Pet sitters listed on this site have to pay over \$120 to be listed here which means you get free access to professionals who are very serious about pet sitting! The sitters on this website are not just side-hustling, for many this is their main profession! Most of these sitters are bonded and insured.

ROVER

Rover.com

Rover is part of the "YouEconomy", which means it is people helping other people. Rover is typically a less-pricey option when finding someone for overnight stays in your house or for stop-bys. Think of it like an Airbnb for your pets - your pets can hang at someone else's house while you're away or you can have a "traveling" sitter come stay at your place with your pets. Either option beats a crazy kennel by far! You may have to sort through many profiles but this is a good option if you need personalized, one-on-one service. For added peace of mind, most sitters are covered by the pet sitter's insurance that Rover offers.

DOG VACAY

DogVacay.com

Like Rover, DogVacay is also part of the “YouEconomy”. DogVacay is still one of the less expensive options for pet care. If you need stop-bys, this should be part of your search effort. Everyone has got to start somewhere and this option is a great starting point for service providers and pet owners alike. Don’t underestimate these options, if you take a little time to search you can find decent care amongst other pet owners/caregivers listed on this site!

Tip: Pet owners are inclined to book those sitters with the most reviews. Try contacting those with less (yet good) reviews, you can find some motivated & great sitters this way.

CARE

Care.com

Though you have to create a quick profile first, Care.com can be another option in finding pet care. Care.com initially centered on babysitting but they are currently offering senior care, pet care and housekeepers. Users can post pet sitting jobs and caregivers can provide you quotes. This takes out some of the extra footwork out of seeking pet sitters from a basic online search. You are able to reach many caregivers at once by posting a need for services. For security, your address/specific information is not disclosed until you approve of your caregiver.

THUMB TACK

Thumbtack.com

Much like Care.com, Thumbtack is also a quote based system connecting you with pet sitters. You can enter your specific needs for pet care, your vacation dates and what level of care you need (multiple stops, overnights, etc.) and in return you can receive texts or email quotes from available pet sitters. This limits you to five quotes initially. You can then pick and choose whom you'd like to meet with for the job. This takes out a lot of the footwork of doing your own online search.

NEXT DOOR

NextDoor.com

If you have Nextdoor.com in your neighborhood it is a great tool to use for many neighborly resources. Nextdoor is especially helpful when finding pet care. There are a couple of different ways you can get help. First, click on the "Recommendations" feature and select "Pet Sitters". It will generate a list of recommended pet sitters and the actual neighbors who used or recommended them. Another option is posting a pet sitter wanted ad on the website. The responses and recommendations should come rolling in. Neighbors will most likely give you great referrals for pet sitters they use or want to pet sit for you themselves. Lastly, you can do a simple search of "pet sitter" on the nextdoor.com site and it will bring up recent strings on this topic. You're likely to find a few good recommendations this way without having to actively post anything. Nextdoor.com is a good resource that should not be overlooked!

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

Other great neighborhood resources that may be available in your neighborhood is joining a homeowners association (HOA) or perhaps your neighborhood has their own website or listserv you can subscribe to. Several Austin neighborhoods even have their own neighborhood Facebook Page. You can search or post on these sites and find pet sitters in your neighborhood or get referrals. Fellow neighbors with pets are usually happy to share their good and bad experiences regarding the pet sitters they have used. This can be another valuable resource to explore to find good pet care in your area!

VETERINARIAN REFERRAL

Did you know that many veterinary office assistants and vet techs at your local veterinarian office often moonlight as pet sitters? Call your vet's office and ask for a pet sitter referral. Maybe call a handful of vet offices in your neighborhood and get a referral from them. Someone is bound to agree to pet sit for you or steer you in the right direction with a good recommendation. It is worth a try!

FRIENDS, FAMILY, NEIGHBORS, CO-WORKERS

Ideally, people you already know will be willing to help you out with your pet's care when you travel. If you are lucky, you have that perfect friend or family member that will do a good job every time. Remember, just because you know and love these people doesn't mean they are capable of being a responsible animal caregiver, especially if they haven't ever been a pet owner before. True your nephew might jump at the idea of spending a few nights in your house away from his own parents, but when Fido gets intense anxiety from the thunder will your nephew know what to do? Will he be too busy making out with his

girlfriend on your new couch? Saving a few bucks using family and friends is enticing, but will they really take the job seriously? And what would happen to your relationship with them if something bad happened to your house or to Fido? Using friends, family or other people you know to pet sit for you can have its drawbacks! This is an option but choose carefully!

WORD OF MOUTH

One of the best ways to find great goods and services is through word of mouth. Finding a pet sitter this way is no exception. I have found that people are always eager to give recommendations. You might try asking for recommendations on your personal Facebook page. Ask around at work or ask your neighbors who they use for pet care. Head to Tomlinson's or another great pet store and strike up a conversation with the staff or patrons to get recommendations. You might even post a bulletin there or at your church, or perhaps ask around at a Meetup or social group. People love to share their good and bad experiences. Word of mouth can definitely offer you some guidance in the right direction.

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When you book your plane tickets, also book your pet sitter. Both are equally important to a great vacation!

-Yvonne M. Feltman

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FINAL TIPS

I'm always amazed by how many people wait until the last week or two to book a pet sitter. Last December alone I had to turn down over 15 requests from potential clients because I was already booked up, and had been for weeks. A good rule of thumb is to book a sitter for your pets at least 6-12 weeks out. When you purchase your plane tickets, immediately book your pet sitter. Sometimes last minute requests can work out but most likely they don't, especially during major holidays.

Also, always trust your gut instincts, it doesn't matter if a sitter is bonded or insured, all the money in the world will not un-burn your house from the ground or bring your pets back to life if something awful happens while you are away. Anyone can look good on paper, have references and tons of insurance but if you meet them and something feels off, it probably is. Always do a casual meet and greet with a sitter first, ask questions, and observe how your pets interact with them. You may even use the new sitter for a weekend stay prior to a longer trip. That way you both can get an idea of how things will go before you are away on that longer trip later on.

If you take a couple of hours to explore the options above, I have no doubt you'll eventually find that perfect solution for you and your pets when you go out of town.

Now go and enjoy your travels worry-free, while your pets also enjoy your time away! You both deserve it!



Comfy and happy at home!