

What to look for when choosing Accommodation



When choosing a facility or carer for your dog there are lots of options. Like many things in life, we don't always know all the things to look for when we start out choosing a new service or purchasing a new item. We have created this checklist to help you look out for what is important when selecting a care provider for your much loved dog. We hope this helps you find the facility that meets both you and your dog's needs.

SECURITY – IS THE ENVIRONMENT SECURE?

When taking your dog into a new environment you want to be assured that everything has been done to ensure that your dog is there when you return. So checking the security of the facility or carer that your dog will be staying with is paramount. In Victoria all dogs should be housed in an area with what is termed "two gates to escape". What this means is that the dog would have to get through two open gates or climb two very high (1.8mt plus) fences before it would be outside the perimeter of the facility or carers home. So you can check this by inspecting the property, if at a facility you can confirm with the attendants that they have passed their annual council check in accordance with the Victorian Boarding Code of Practice. If boarding in someone's home then check all the fences for holes or places that your dog could jump or climb over. Home boarding (pet sitters in their own homes) should also have been inspected by their local council in accordance with the Victorian Boarding Code of Practice. There should also be a process whereby your dog can't be accidentally let out of the house or yard by a visiting guest or child. The other consideration is possible theft of your dog from the carer's yard or home.

If you don't feel an environment is secure then keep looking until you find one you are comfortable with. Remember you want to know your dog is where you left it when you return from your holiday.

CARERS – WHO WILL BE CARING FOR YOUR DOG?

Lots of people love dogs. Why wouldn't you love a dog, they provide unconditional love and they are so cute. But loving dogs and being able to care for dogs when they are away from their home, in an unfamiliar environment, are two very different things. Experience in this areas counts for a lot! And not just "I have owned dogs all my life". The boarding environment is very different to the home environment and having experienced and professional carers looking after your beloved dog is really important.

You also need to consider what happens to your dog if something happens to the carer. If you choose a facility with a team of carers, that have documented systems for recording information on your dog, then it doesn't matter if a team member calls in sick or has a family emergency. There will always be another team member there to provide continuous care. If you do choose a carer or facility where there is only one or two people then you need to ask the question "Who looks after my dog if they get sick or have a family emergency?". This question will help you to get a better understanding of the protocols for when unexpected things happen.

INSPECTIONS – IS THE ENVIRONMENT INSPECTED ANNUALLY BY THE LOCAL COUNCIL TO ENSURE IT MEETS THE DOMESTIC ANIMALS ACT AND THE VICTORIAN CODE OF PRACTICE FOR ANIMAL BOARDING?

In Victoria we have the strictest legislation and boarding code to protect our dogs (and cats) when they are being cared for in boarding and doggy day care environments. The Domestic Animals Act and the Victorian Code of Boarding are the two documents that lay out what professional care providers must do (as a minimum) to care for someone else's dog or cat. This legislation and code apply not just to pet resorts but also to pet sitters – anyone who accepts money for the care of cats and dogs in the state of Victoria.

These regulations are enforceable by the local council in which the carer is located. On top of this the council will also require the carer to have a business permit with respect to having a domestic animal business. For a boarding facility they will have a permit that outlines the number of animals they care for. For a pet sitter they will also have a limitation on how many dogs they can care for (including their own dogs) in their home.

So what questions should you be asking of a care provider?

The first thing is "Are you registered with your local council as a domestic animal business?". If the answer is yes then your next question should

be “Do you have an annual inspection from your local council rangers or compliance officers?” If the answer is no (or maybe a hesitant yes) then you may want to rethink using that carer or facility. The importance of this inspection cannot be understated. When the council does their inspection they are looking to make sure the facility or home meets the basic minimum standards as set out in the Act and the Code. The code covers the environment your dog will stay in (including space, equipment used, safety and security aspects), the people caring for your dog (and their qualifications to do so), and the processes for your dog in the case of an emergency (if your dog is sick or if the environment becomes uninhabitable). If the facility or home has been inspected by the council then you can be confident that they have met the minimum standards – you may want more than the minimum from your care provider but this is the first and most important step on your decision making process.

AVAILABILITY – WHAT IS THE AVAILABILITY OF THE CARER OR FACILITY?

This is a really important thing to understand when you are selecting a care provider. You understand how you organise your holidays or needs for care. You might be a planner and you have your holiday's planned a year in advance. You may go away at the exact time each year, across Christmas and New Year, maybe the Melbourne Cup Weekend or never in the school holidays. But you also need to understand what happens if you have a last minute need? What if you become unwell and have to go to hospital suddenly? Or you might have a last minute business trip or a family emergency that requires you to drop everything and go. Or what if an opportunity comes up to take a great holiday but with only a couple of days' notice?

When selecting a care provider you need to know how they can help you in all these situations. So how far in advance do you need to book for the school holidays, a public holiday weekend, the off peak period? If you do have a last minute emergency then how might they be able to support you?

This is where understanding how many dogs they can care for can help. If you choose to have your dog cared for in someone's home and they can only have 2 dogs at a time (and maybe they already have their dog, which means they can only care for one other dog) then a last minute trip or emergency might not be helpful to you. On the flip side if you choose a pet resort that has a policy of always having a room available even during their busy times for emergencies then this could better meet all your potential needs for your dogs care.

SAFETY – IS THE ENVIRONMENT SAFE?

Dogs have mouths and paws and play with their teeth and claws. They love to pick stuff up in their mouths, carry it around and, for some of them, ingestion is part of that fun game.

It is soooooo very important that you know where you leave your dog they are not going to be able to get into anything they shouldn't.

In a boarding facility the dogs should only have access to safe toys and bedding. If your dog does like to chew beds, inhale tennis balls or eat blankets, then let the Resort know this so that they can ensure your dog gets the hardiest equipment for their play times and the safest beds to sleep on.

If your dog is going into someone's home then you need to make sure that they can't access the toxic chemicals under the kitchen sink, in the laundry or in the garden shed. Also toys of young children, (Lego is a good one for dogs to ingest - NOT!) and anything in the garden e.g. watering fittings or hoses. The other important thing is not getting access to toxic food or plants. Chocolate can easily be left lying around in someone's home, especially when there are multiple family members or guests visiting. All of these things can range from being mildly harmful (a bad case of runs) to needing serious and expensive surgery. If you can think about these things at the start then this will help to give you some piece of mind while your dog is not with you.

ACCOMMODATIONS – WHAT SPACE WILL YOUR DOG HAVE ACCESS TO AND FOR WHAT AMOUNT OF TIME DURING EACH DAY?

No matter the size or activity level of your dog, their ability to move about and seek fresh air is so important for their physical and mental wellbeing.

When choosing a care provider you should be able to see the sleeping areas, the play areas and the other areas your dog may need to be in throughout their day. When looking at these areas you not only want to check for safety and security issues (as mentioned in this comprehensive check list) but you also want to see how your dog might use that space. If they are highly active can they run and move about? If they are an older dog that like to lounge in the sun is there space for that very important activity? Are they protected from the elements if they spend any length of time out there? Shade in the summer or shelter from rain and wind in the winter? And how long or how often do they have access to those areas?

At a professional facility you should be able to take a comprehensive tour of their facility and be able to ask all these questions. If you are uncertain about the answers then ask Why do they do it that way. Remember a boarding facility is a different set up to a home environment and there maybe very good reasons as to why your dog's day will be structured in

a particular way. Don't ever be afraid to ask questions and learn about professional boarding care.

If you are leaving your dog in someone else's home all these questions are just as important. If the carer goes to work how does your dog access these spaces? If there are other dogs in care at the same time then how does that impact your dog's access to the space? If the home has a resident dog, whose territory the home and yard is, then how does the carer ensure your dog access to the space without their dog having territory issues?

Again all these questions are important to understand how your dog will be able to relax and enjoy their holiday with whomever you choose to care for your dog.



PROFESSIONALISM – IS THE CARER OR FACILITY YOU ARE LOOKING INTO A MEMBER OF THE PIAA (PET INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA)?

The Pet Industry Association of Australia is the industry body that covers all businesses related to pets (excluding Vets) in Australia. With respect to boarding, day care and home care facilities they have high standards that all members must abide by. If you choose a carer that is a member of the PIAA then you can have an expectation for a high level of care for your dog. It also provides you with an avenue of redress should you be unhappy with the service that you receive. Members of this Association are also encouraged to continue further learning and development for their carers and their businesses. For more information on the PIAA and their member list please visit <https://paaa.net.au>



EMERGENCIES – DOES THE FACILITY HAVE PROCEDURES IN THE CASE OF AN EMERGENCY?

Things happen. In our country we have bushfires, floods, heat waves that knock out power etc. so it's always good to understand that the carer you are choosing has a plan in case of emergency. You don't necessarily need to know the plan step by step but understanding they have an evacuation plan in case of fire or a backup in case the power goes out can be pretty important. If your dog is going to be evacuated then where will your dog go and how will you be contacted to get updated. Assuming there is a comprehensive plan is not ideal for your peace of mind but asking this simple question when you take a tour of the facility or speak to the carer over the phone can help to put your mind at ease. You also can see the level of professionalism from their action in this area of their business.