

BASICS

Overview

- \$ In the past, when a pet owner went on vacation, he or she left his or her animal(s) in a boarding facility. These were usually small rooms in the back of the local vet hospital where the major confinement option was a cage.
- \$ In recent years, however, the attitude towards pets has shifted: instead of casual house pets, they are now family members. Owners are looking for nicer and larger boarding options, such as runs or rooms, and “extras”, which might include special handling times, hiking, day care, pamper time, and loads of other goodies.
- \$ There are many ways to improve a boarding facility. Some of the ways this can be accomplished include changing appearances, providing unusual services, and offering more extensive boarding choices.
- \$ Fancier boarding facilities, or pet spas, provide even more luxurious options, such as massages or more intense personal time.
- \$ Day care and pet sitting services are other businesses that have grown from the changed attitude towards animals. Both of these are possible services for a boarding facility or pet spa.
- \$ The major problem facing boarding facilities is the lack of a regulatory body. Anyone can call their facility whatever they choose, which can mislead clients. The ABKA is the only organization that represents boarding facilities; however, this organization has no real authority.
- \$ As the demand for improved pet care options has grown, many small towns and communities have created spaces, known as pet parks, where animal owners can take their pets to walk, run, and play without worrying about others who dislike animals. Some have relaxed leash laws, and there are even private pet parks and pet country clubs.

Terms Defined

- \$ Day care. A place where pets can be left for different hours during the daytime. Usually the pets will be kept in small, communal groups.
- \$ Luxury Suite. This can be anything nicer than the routine boarding facility option, and since there are no rules about names, it all depends on the business’s labeling. One might be a fully-furnished room, complete with bed, couch, TV, VCR or DVD player, radio, and heated floor. In another facility, it could just be a larger run. Some have converted small houses into multiple luxury suites. Often, just like hostels or bed and breakfasts, these suites have themes: Sports, Animals, USA, Woods, Beach, et cetera.
- \$ Pet Park. An area designed for pet walking, running, and playing. It can be publically or privately owned.
- \$ Pet Spa. A high-level kennel offering many different boarding options and unusual

services that pet owners may choose from for their animal(s).

- \$ Runs. Areas larger than most cages. The smallest are usually three by six feet, but due to modular design almost any dimensions are possible. Unlike a cage, they allow animals to move freely.

OPTIONS AND ISSUES

Appearance

- \$ In most boarding facilities, cages are still the most common form of confinement. When compared with runs, cages are less expensive to buy, less expensive to install, and simpler to clean. Also, a facility can hold more cages than runs in the same area.
- \$ Due to increased demand, however, cages are routinely being replaced with runs. Indoor/outdoor runs and luxury suites are becoming more and more popular.
- \$ As buyers are now seeking better accommodations for their animals, it is important that the confinement areas do not look small, dirty, or prison-like.
- \$ Cleanliness is vital. The entire place should be thoroughly cleaned throughout the day. Staff should constantly watch for and dispose of feces, urine, and vomit.
- \$ Many facilities are using full or partial glass doors instead of chain link, due to the prison associations of the latter. In the past, many runs were made of chain link fencing or masonry walls. These are being replaced with wood or multi-colored plastic laminates that can be painted or decorated.
- \$ In the same vein, color schemes have become essential. The place should be kept looking bright and happy, either with primaries or pastels. Avoid dark colors, especially grey.
- \$ Lighting is another way to make a facility more cheerful: skylights and windows provide a sense of space and brighter rooms.
- \$ Landscaping has also grown in importance, as businesses attempt to capture a hotel or country club atmosphere. Ponds, bird baths, and other decorations are both pleasing to the eye for the human beings and entertaining for the animals.

Services

- \$ Most boarding facilities now offer additional animal services. Examples include swimming, hiking, playtime, pamper time, grooming, training, pet transportation (to and from the business and residence or airport), microchipping, tasty treats, and so on.
- \$ An exciting new service is 24-hour pet visibility via webcams. If the business installs webcams in individual suites, a pet owner can access a streaming video of his or her pet regardless of the distance or the time change.
- \$ Birthday parties, with pet-friendly cakes and cookies, are also growing in popularity.
- \$ Many of the fancier facilities are combining pet bakeries with their business.
- \$ Retail services selling pet related products, such as shampoos, clothing, and leashes, are a related profit center that merges nicely with boarding facilities.
- \$ Almost all facilities will offer one or more lines of pet foods.

Pet Spas

§ Pet spas, or resorts, are top-notch boarding facilities that generally offer unusual services, such as massages by certified massage therapists, therapeutic soaks with conditioners, and chiropractic manipulation. Most will routinely offer all the other services found in nicer kennels, such as bathing and grooming.

§ The name “spa” or “resort” does not have a specific definition, which can create confusion for clients who expect certain services from such a place.

Day Care Centers

§ These businesses allow daily get-togethers between pets from different families in a safe environment.

§ Most require that pets are screened prior to admittance to avoid aggressive animals, minimize fighting, and to group them based on size and personality.

§ These centers are often associated with boarding kennels, pet spas, or training areas.

§ Most facilities will have forms that explain these dangers and agreements that release the businesses from liability in the event of a problem.

Pet Sitting Services

§ These can be run by single individuals or by larger companies, and are becoming more and more popular in cities.

§ Some of the larger boarding facilities have started to offer this service as an added service of their facility. An advantage to this is that there is already a relationship with the boarding facility, so clients won't worry about opening their home to strangers.

§ One of the biggest problems for a pet owner is the reliability and reputation of the pet-sitting service.

Problems

§ There are no federally mandated regulatory bodies that watch over boarding facilities. Therefore, there are tremendous differences that exist within the business. As there are no national definitions for these facilities, any boarding business can call itself whatever it wants: a luxury facility, pet spa, or resort.

§ It is the responsibility of the user to research each individual facility.

§ Some states have rules concerning boarding facilities to minimize noise pollution. It is not unusual for a community to have rules and regulations making outdoor runs or kennels difficult or even impossible to build. These restrictions are becoming the norm, rather than the exception.

The ABKA

§ The ABKA is an organization that assists pet owners find local boarding kennels.

§ It sends out a monthly magazine with boarding-related articles and offers seminars throughout the country.

§ They do not attempt to rate facilities. Their website has a kennel locator, which will mention which facilities are accredited by the ABKA (a voluntary program of the ABKA)

with specific standards).

\$ It also provides loads of information about starting a kennel, kennel-related business, and staff training.

Pet Parks

\$ Many cities have realized that pet-owning populations desire outdoor spaces where they can relax with their animals; thus, one of the newer trends is to set aside undeveloped areas with trails for walking, hiking, and jogging as pet parks.

\$ Larger cities may have multiple parks, while smaller municipalities may or may not have a single one.

\$ Leash laws are often relaxed or revoked in these areas

\$ The perimeter of these parks are usually fenced, allowing owners to relax with their pets and not have to worry about them running away. Many will have different sections so that owners will have a choice of which group of animals they will be most comfortable joining.

\$ Owners are expected to clean up after their pets.

\$ Fancier ones might have ponds, wading pools, or agility courses

\$ Most pet parks are developed by the local municipalities, often as the direct result of concerned volunteers who take it upon themselves to prod the local officials. Generally, a slight surcharge on pet licensing fees is all that is necessary to fund the construction of these parks.

\$ Rules are usually posted at the entrance. It is always the responsibility of the pet owners who use the facility to control their animals. The municipality takes no responsibility regarding dog fights that occur within the confines of the park.

\$ There are also private pet parks, or country clubs. These facilities will offer different memberships that can range from simple admission to use of the facilities for specialized training. The larger ones may have ponds for retriever training and/or multiple agility courses of different levels. Various amenities, such as swimming pools and hiking trails, are also often offered.

MISCELLANEOUS

Abbreviations

\$ ABKA: American Boarding Kennel Association.

Recommended Reading

\$ ABKA Homepage. Available at: www.abka.com Accessed June 2, 2004. This is the official site of boarding kennels. Information on starting a kennel, trade expositions, training kennel staff, and locating boarding facilities.

\$ The Dog Park. 1997. Available at www.thedogpark.com Accessed June 4, 2004. This provides information on how to start a pet park, locating a local one, and why these places are important for communities.

\$ The Pet Professor. Available at www.thepetprofessor.com Accessed June 7, 2004. This

offers variety of information regarding pets, including traveling and boarding.

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