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Highlights: Kennels

When you're a pet owner, traveling requires another set of plans. As you research and book transportation, hotels, activities, and restaurants for yourself, remember to do some homework for your pet's accommodations and comfort. As *Bay Area Consumers' CHECKBOOK*, available at www.checkbook.org, reports, it is critical to choose a kennel carefully to ensure your pet's safety and happiness (and your peace of mind). Some highlights from CHECKBOOK's kennels article include—

- **Judging Quality**—Among the kennels CHECKBOOK evaluated, a few were rated “superior” for “overall quality” by almost all of their customers CHECKBOOK surveyed, but others received such favorable ratings from fewer than 65 percent. CHECKBOOK's quality ratings examine key factors such as cleanliness, spaciousness, affection toward dog, returning dog in good condition, and pick-up/drop-off arrangements.
- **Comparing Costs**—CHECKBOOK identified substantial price differences among area kennels. To board a medium-size dog for one week, for example, prices ranged from \$126 to \$525. That's just for the basic boarding. At some kennels, extra exercise for your furry friend can cost you an additional \$15 or more per day, and administering a needed pill might cost \$3 or more per day. Also, some have tight limits on when you must drop off and pick up your pet to avoid paying for an extra day. Fortunately, CHECKBOOK found you don't have to pay more to get the best care for your pet: Some of the lower-priced kennels provide top-quality service.

CHECKBOOK recommends thoroughly checking out any kennel you're considering. Here are some guidelines:

- Be wary of any kennel that won't let you inspect its facilities unannounced during regular operating hours.
- Check whether a dog will have an indoor and outdoor run—large enough and with protection from the elements.
- Make sure animals are protected from one another and that there is proper fencing to keep your pet in and other animals out.
- Be sure proper health protections are in place—that the kennel is clean and not excessively smelly, that all pets are required to have proof of proper vaccinations, and that pets are carefully examined for signs of disease or parasites at check-in.
- Size up the staff members—whether they answer your questions, show affection for the animals, and are available 24 hours per day.
- Determine when the kennel is open for drop-off and pick-up. A common complaint is that facilities don't have convenient hours, especially on weekends.

Kenneling your pet may not always be the best option. Taking your pet along, leaving your pet with a friend, having a neighbor pet-sit, or hiring a commercial pet sitter (CHECKBOOK's article includes advice and price information for those who wish to go this route) may be better choices. CHECKBOOK details the pros and cons of each option:

- **Taking Your Pet Along**—While you'll share the experience with the pet, spare your pet the stress of separation, and avoid the expense of a kennel and other inconveniences, there are potential risks with this option. Your pet may be terrified, even injured, if treated roughly by airline baggage handlers, left for long periods in handling areas, or even shipped to the wrong destination. Your pet may not travel

well by car. And there's the inconvenience of not being able to go out to restaurants or do other activities because you don't want to leave the pet unattended. That said, many owners prefer to bring their pets with them when traveling. CHECKBOOK provides a variety of advice to help ensure the best possible travel experience for pets and their owners, including tips for both airline and car travel.

- **In-Home Pet Care**—Having a friend, neighbor, or pet sitter care for your pet in your own home may be a good solution. Your pet can stay in familiar surroundings and continue familiar routines. A sitter can also provide other services such as watering plants, picking up mail, and giving your home a lived-in look. Using a sitter, however, has some disadvantages. Your pet may be alone for long stretches of time, and whether a sitter is a professional or a neighborhood kid, you can't be sure of the skill, knowledge, or concern brought to the job. And if you use a commercial pet-sitting service, you give a stranger access to your home. Professional pet-sitting services are generally more expensive than stays for a single pet at a kennel (professional pet sitters generally charge between \$75 and \$90 a day). However, if you have more than one pet, a pet-sitting service may cost less than a kennel, because many services charge per visit (regardless of number of pets), and others offer a discount for additional pets.
- **Sending Your Pet to Another Home**—By leaving your pet with a friend or neighbor, you can be reasonably sure of the kind of individual who will be caring for your pet. You will also save yourself inconvenience and money by avoiding the kennel. But you can't always be sure how skillfully or carefully your pet will be cared for. And there's always a chance that your pet will slip away to look for you or will cause damage in reaction to being left behind.

The following kennels received CHECKBOOK's highest rating for both quality and price:

- Bundocks Kennels, Sebastopol
- Livermore Ranch Kennels, Livermore
- Wunderbar's Pet Hotel, Walnut Creek

The media may cite selected examples of top-rated kennels, as shown in Bay Area Consumers' CHECKBOOK (and above), and CHECKBOOK's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.

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