

Vacations are for people and dogs both, but handing your dog over to a boarding facility brings choices that affect behavior, stress, and long-term welfare. I've worked with kennels and pet parents long enough to see what goes right and what goes wrong: calm dogs come from consistency, thoughtful gear, and a facility that communicates clearly. Nervous dogs come from rushed departures, unfamiliar routines, and mismatched expectations about care. This guide walks through practical planning, sensible packing, how to pick the right place, and what to expect during short and long term boarding stays.

### Why the plan matters

A dog's day is built from small rhythms—meals, potty breaks, play, and sleep. Break those rhythms abruptly and even stoic dogs show stress in appetite loss, pacing, or withdrawn behavior. For dogs with separation anxiety or medical needs, a bad boarding experience can create lasting fear. The goal here is not perfection, it is predictability. When you align your dog's board schedule, gear, and facility choice with their temperament, you reduce fight-or-flight responses and make the stay restorative rather than disruptive.

### Timing and the boarding schedule

Holiday peaks matter. Booking early avoids the scramble that leads people to accept whatever's available. Many facilities near urban centers fill weeks in advance for major holidays. If your dates are flexible, shifting a day or two before or after a holiday can mean the difference between a single-run daycare room and a quieter suite with staff who know your dog.

A practical boarding schedule you can use: drop-off late morning, a midday walk and feeding schedule that mirrors home, afternoon rest, evening exercise, and a calm pre-bed routine. Ask the facility whether they can mirror your dog's normal meal times and walk cadence. Even small mismatches, like switching a food from morning to late afternoon, can cause digestive upset.

### Short stays versus long term boarding

Short holiday stays and long term boarding carry different trade-offs. Short stays—under a week—tend to be fine for most healthy dogs if the facility is competent and communicative. Long term boarding, which I define here as two weeks or more, requires extra planning.

Long term boarding considerations include:

- Medical oversight, especially if medications must be administered.
- Opportunities for enrichment to prevent boredom and stereotype behaviors.
- Bedding and comfort that maintain scent familiarity.
- Cost structure, since many facilities offer different pricing bands for extended stays.

Expect to invest more time selecting the right facility for long term boarding. Dogs boarded for several weeks do better in environments with a mix of group play and quiet, one-on-one attention, rather than a high-turnover kennel where staff-to-dog ratios are low.

### Preparing your dog before departure

Start acclimating your dog to the boarding experience at least two weeks ahead. If they have never been to a kennel, visit once or twice for a short stay or a trial daycare session. That reduces novelty shock on the actual drop-off day and lets staff note baseline behavior.

Practice steps that the facility uses. If they use a crate for bedtime, leave the crate door open at home with high-value treats and short sessions inside. If dogs are walked on a particular harness type at the facility, try that harness at home so it is not a new sensation. If your dog is reactive to other dogs, invest in training sessions to work on impulse control; many boarding problems are rooted in unmanaged reactivity.

### Vaccinations, records, and medication

Most facilities require up-to-date vaccinations and a recent fecal test. For dogs that take daily medication, bring prescription bottles with clear labels and dosing instructions. Be explicit about medication timing: a one-hour difference can feel minor to a human but may matter for blood-pressure medication or thyroid supplements.

If your dog has a chronic condition, bring a brief medical summary from your veterinarian. Include baseline behavior observations, triggers to avoid, and what a normal day looks like. This both speeds intake and clarifies expectations between you and staff.

### Packing: the boarding packing guide

A calm, scent-familiar set of items can reduce stress. Pack items that smell like home and support routine, but limit quantity so staff can manage washing and storage. Use labeled, resealable bags for small items and a single travel crate label.

#### Essential items to pack:

1. A small blanket or towel with your scent, clearly labeled and washable.
2. Meals portioned in labeled bags or containers with feeding instructions and preferred brand/metric.
3. A favorite toy, ideally a durable plush or chew that your dog does not destroy quickly.
4. Leash and collar with current ID tags, plus a spare collar in case of loss.
5. Any medication in original packaging with dosing schedule and administration notes.

A few packing tips from experience: do not send your nicest heirloom toy if it is irreplaceable. Many facilities recommend not sending valuable items that could be damaged. If your dog tends to gulp food, include a slow-feeder bowl or instructions for paced feeding. For dogs prone to separation anxiety, a worn T-shirt of yours, packed inside the blanket, often has calming effects.

### Selecting a facility: what matters most

Facility selection is decisive. Two facilities side by side can offer very different experiences depending on staff training, cleanliness, and culture. When you tour, watch beyond glossy flyers. Observe interactions between staff and dogs. Are staff calm and deliberate, or rushed and distracted? Do dogs appear relaxed or hypervigilant? Are play sessions supervised closely, with staff intervening calmly if play escalates?

#### Essential questions to ask the facility

1. What is your staff-to-dog ratio during the day and at night?
2. How do you handle medical emergencies and what is your on-call veterinary arrangement?
3. Describe your enrichment and exercise program for dogs of different energy levels.
4. Can you match my dog's feeding and medication schedule, and how do you document administration?
5. What is your policy for reactivity, resource guarding, and separation anxiety?

Listen not just for the answers, but how they are delivered. Specifics matter. A staff member who says, "we try to follow feeding times," is different from one who gives precise windows and shows the paperwork they use. A

facility that documents every walk and medication dose and is willing to share that log with you instills more confidence.

### Pricing and transparency

Boarding pricing varies widely. Expect a base rate for overnight boarding, plus add-ons for medications, extra walks, or private suites. Pricing often increases during holiday periods. Ask for a full written estimate and the conditions that could trigger additional charges. Some facilities charge per day, others per night, and cancellation policies can be strict during peak seasons.

A practical pricing question: how do they prorate partial days for arrivals and departures? If you need to pick up late on the final day, clarify whether that counts as an extra day at holiday rates. Transparent facilities will lay this out upfront and provide written clarification.

Behavioral red flags to watch [Hip Hounds Dog Daycare](#) for

Even well-run kennels can struggle if a dog exhibits certain behaviors. Watch for these signals during your tour or in reviews: repeated escapes, frequent house-soiling, sustained avoidance of staff, and signs of overstimulation in group play such as prolonged chasing focused on one dog. These are not automatic deal-breakers, but they reflect the need for a facility with experience managing those behaviors.

If your dog is a chronic barker, ask how the facility manages noise. Some places use sound-dampening kennels and white noise; others rely on staffing and enrichment. If your dog reacts to kennel noise by feeding into it, a quieter boarding option or a private suite may be worth the extra cost.

### Drop-off day strategy

Plan for a calm, brief departure. Long goodbyes escalate stress. Keep the check-in positive and matter-of-fact. Bring a recent photo of your dog with you in case identification is needed. If your dog shows separation anxiety, consider a short, upbeat departure with a calming cue and a scheduled check-in from the facility the first day.

Notify the facility about any last-minute changes in behavior. A dog that was eating fine this morning but refuses meals may have an illness or stress spike that staff should expect. Accurate, timely communication prevents misinterpretations and unnecessary interventions.

### During the stay: what to expect and request

Ask about daily updates by text, email, or photos if that helps you relax. But be aware that some staff prefer not to interrupt duties to take frequent photos. Agree on a reasonable cadence, such as a single photo and short note on the first day and then every 48 hours for long term boarding, unless there's a problem.

If the facility uses a log or app to track feedings, walks, and medications, ask for access or a printed copy at pickup. This log is invaluable for spotting trends and for follow-up conversations with your vet if anything atypical arises.

### Returning home: re-entry plan

Re-entry after boarding needs deliberate pacing. Dogs can be overly excited, withdrawn, or clingy after a stay. Re-establish your usual routine immediately: same feeding times, same walk cadence, and consistent rules. If the dog had increased barking or reactivity at the facility, do not reward this behavior with extra attention. Instead, redirect to calm activities and restore clear leadership through predictable structure.

For dogs boarded long term, schedule a short check-in with your vet within a week if any changes in appetite, stool, or behavior occurred. Sometimes stress-related gastrointestinal issues appear only after the dog is back in a quiet environment.

## Edge cases and special circumstances

Senior dogs, puppies, and dogs with medical needs require special handling. Puppies need a socialization plan and controlled exposure to other dogs to prevent disease and poor learning. Senior dogs appreciate softer bedding, more frequent bathroom breaks, and monitoring for pain or stiffness. Dogs that take multiple daily medications should be boarded at places with trained staff who keep detailed medication logs and can recognize adverse reactions.

If your dog has a history of aggression, many facilities will refuse boarding for safety. In those cases, look for a behavior-focused facility with trained behaviorists and one-on-one housing options. The extra cost for a specialized facility often pays off in safety and lower stress for everyone.

## When boarding pricing is worth it

Pricing alone should not be the sole criterion. Cheaper is not better if it means crowded playgroups, inexperienced staff, or poor hygiene. Conversely, expensive facilities do not guarantee empathy or competence. Look for value: transparent pricing combined with documented protocols, trained staff, and positive references from trusted sources.

A short anecdote: a client once chose the cheapest option two towns away because their usual facility was full. Their dog came back with a urinary infection, ear issues, and heightened anxiety. The bargain saved money upfront but cost more in vet bills and behavioral regression. Investing a bit more in a reputable facility often reduces downstream costs and stress.

## Final considerations

Holiday boarding demands preparation, but it rewards planning. Start early, choose a facility that matches your dog's needs, pack thoughtfully, and establish a boarding schedule that mirrors home. With the right setup, most dogs return relaxed and ready for the next walk. If your dog struggles with boarding repeatedly, consider alternatives like a trusted pet sitter, in-home boarding with an experienced caregiver, or incremental exposure to the boarding environment until they build confidence.

Good holiday boarding is about predictability and partnership. When owners and facilities communicate clearly and set realistic expectations, dogs spend holidays in calm comfort rather than anxiety.

Hip Hounds 1912 Picadilly Drive Round Rock, TX 78664 512-989-6767