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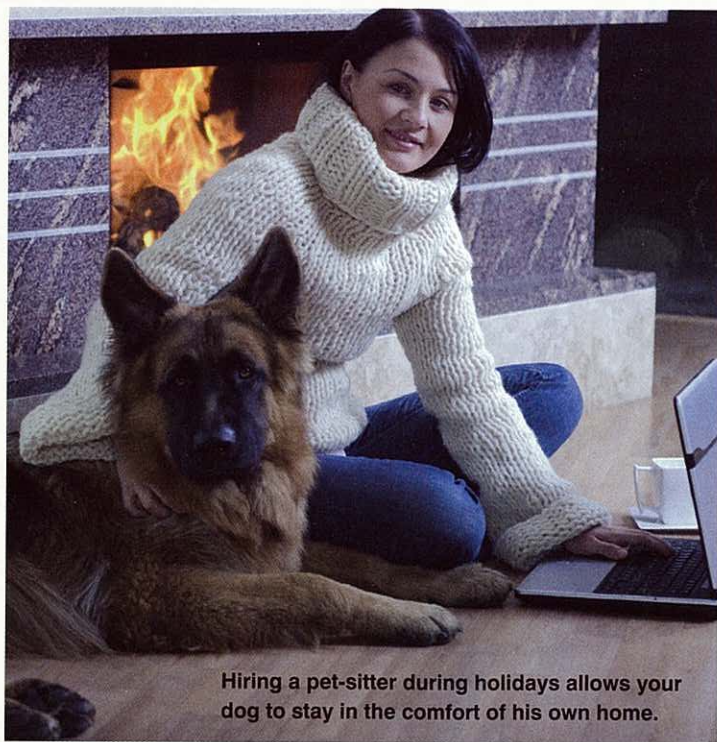
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Hiring a pet-sitter during holidays allows your dog to stay in the comfort of his own home.

But if you're looking for a dog walker what should you consider? And how would you start setting up a pet-sitting business?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Getting a dog walker in during the working day is ideal for many owners – it keeps your dog happy, prevents boredom and breaks up his day.

A pet-sitter can be great for dogs that don't get on well in kennels, as he can stay in his own environment. Bear in mind, though, that some dogs may not take kindly to a stranger living with them while you're away.

Colin Tennant of the Cambridge Institute of Dog Behaviour & Training (CIDBT) recommends that owners look out for pet-sitters with relevant qualifications and always ask what hands-on experience they have.

Says Colin: "It is always a good thing if someone can recommend a pet-sitter or dog walker based on their own experiences. Also, if their card is up in a veterinary surgery this is usually a good sign.

"Before using a pet-sitter you should always ask for a minimum of two references – and make sure you follow them up. Check whether they are a member of a bona fide organisation and ask what qualifications and experience

they have."

Robin Taylor, chairman of the National Association of Registered Petsitters (NARP), says: "Obviously when choosing a pet-sitter it is important to find someone who you get on with because normally the relationship will last a long time.

"When you meet each other you should ask questions about what they offer. Communication is vital; both parties must have a full understanding of what is required and be fully satisfied with the arrangement. You must feel comfortable with them and have total trust in them."

SERVICES & COSTS

Pet-sitters can take responsibility for many day-to-day tasks. One of the main jobs is dog walking, but they can also stay at your home and look after your dog, pop in during the day to spend time with you pet, feed and water him, and even look after your house while you're away. Some pet-sitters offer dog boarding instead (they take your dog into their home), which can be a great alternative to kennels.

Often pet-sitters provide other services too such as grooming, training, and taking your pet to the vet.

For pet-sitters offering home boarding, you should expect to pay £12-£15 per

Case study

"We wouldn't be without Hanne"

Sarah Bryars from Hertfordshire has used a local dog walker for the last two years and says that owning her Cocker Spaniel Darcey would not be possible without Hanne Grice's help.

Says Sarah: "I was looking for a dog walker a couple of years ago and came across Hanne's website www.walk-the-dog.net. The price was clearly set out, and Hanne is based locally, so I decided to meet her and find out more.

"Now, Hanne walks Darcey a couple of days a week when I'm out at work. This gives me peace of mind that Darcey is looked after and has something to look forward to which breaks up her day.

"Hanne looks after my other animals when I go on holiday. If we don't take Darcey on holiday, she stays at Hanne's home. Staying in kennels can sometimes be impersonal and daunting for a dog.

"I have never had any problems using a pet-sitter at all – Hanne is a great help to me and I couldn't own Darcey otherwise. I'm not sure whether I have just been really lucky but it has been great.

"As regards cost, I think what I pay is reasonable. An hour walk costs £14, which seems to be the going rate in the area.

"If anyone is looking to employ a dog walker or pet-sitter I would recommend you always meet the person first

Sarah ensures Darcey is well looked after during the working day.

at your home and see how they get on with your dog. Always check their credentials, such as police checks and references.

"Each day Hanne emails me a diary of what Darcey has done, and takes photos to show where Darcey has been to and that she is happy. It might be worth checking with your dog walker if that is included in the price as I find it very beneficial. At the end of the day you are employing someone and they are taking on a big responsibility. You need to make sure you trust them.

"There are so many dog walkers out there so look around and don't make a hasty decision. Look closely at what is best for you and your dog."



Free subscription

Dog owners who are looking for an approved pet-sitter can subscribe to NARP for a yearly fee of £9.95, or £19.95 for lifetime membership. For further details visit www.dogsit.com or tel. 0845 230 8544.

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