



# And they called it *puppy love*

More and more pet lovers in Surrey are ditching the dog house and choosing live-in pet sitters, says **Louise Root**

It's that time of the year. And we're asking ourselves that all important question. Not where are we going, but what are we going to do with the dog? When we say dog, we mean the baby. The littlest member of the family. Our newest addition. Our boxer puppy. Absolutely adorable and only eight months old. We all agree on one thing: our little princess isn't spending a fortnight in kennels. It would be like sending her to borstal.

## Home from home

So what's the alternative? Well, it seems that professional pet sitting services are the way to go. Louise Root, owner of Very Important Pets, explains. "One of our sitters will come to your house for the whole time you're away and follow your pets' routines to the letter, including meal times and walking times. And of course your pets are happy being in familiar surroundings."

But what if I don't want someone staying in my home? "That's no problem," she says. "Your pet can board with a sitter while you're away. It's like they have their own holiday."

How about odd dietary requirements? Or

strange requests? Is there anything Very Important Pets won't do?

"No, there's not", laughs Louise. "Some of our clients give us very detailed documents on how their pet should be looked after. And, to be honest, we're happy to oblige. One of our clients likes us to clean her cat's teeth every day.

"Another asks that we let her dog choose his own toys when we visit the pet shop. One of our favourite pets is Clive the goldfish, who lives in Knightsbridge. Whenever his owner is away on business, we visit each day to give him his fish food and to have a 'play' with him.

"Some of the pets we look after have especially prepared home-cooked food. And quite a few require medical treatment. Our sitters are often qualified veterinary nurses, and diabetes, high blood pressure, and fractured limbs are just some of the problems we deal with," says Louise, herself a qualified veterinary nurse.

So what questions should you ask a potential pet sitter? Louise insists: "This person is going to be looking after a member of your family. So it's vital you find out what qualifications and experience they have. Are they a qualified veterinary nurse?

Have they looked after an iguana or horse or gerbil before?

## Do your homework

"Make sure your sitter will stick to your pets' routines, whether that's a grooming regime, meal requirements or walkies times. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Your sitter will also need to have had all the appropriate police checks. And be fully insured.

"The easiest way to get a great pet sitter, of course, is to go via a reputable pet sitting service."

So that's decided then. The dog will stay at home this summer in the luxury of her own home, being pampered, preened, and spoiled by one of Louise's dedicated sitters. Chances are the dog will have a better time than we will. ●

## essence info

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