

Which is Better: Cat Sitter or Cat Hotel?

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, discusses the benefits of cat hotels and cat sitters.

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Q: Our two 1-year-old cats, Oscar and Felix, are very bonded to us and cry if we are away from the house for more than a few hours. We are scheduled to take a two week vacation over Christmas and don't know if it would be better for the cats to be boarded at a high-end cat hotel or if we should have someone come to the house and care for them.

A: Hiring a cat-centric pet sitter to care for your cats in your home is preferable to sending the cats to a pet resort where they may be exposed to diseases and frightening situations. Finding a responsible cat-sitter who will spend her nights at the house is the ideal solution, but isn't always possible.

The next best option is hiring a pet sitter who can come to your house twice a day. In addition to feeding and scooping the litterboxes, the pet sitter needs to spend extra time each visit engaging the cats in activities they enjoy. Great cat sitters are a necessity in life. Ask your friends and your veterinarian for referrals. Some vet techs moonlight as cat sitters on the side, staying at their clients' homes while they travel.

Ease the stress of the temporary separation by leaving your scent and the sound of your voice with the cats while you are away. The night before your trip, wear night clothes to bed. The next morning place them on the cat's favorite sleeping locations.

You can either make recordings of special endearments to your cats for the sitter to periodically play, or you can record your voice in a talking treat ball. Treat balls are hollow plastic balls with holes where you can place food or treats. In order for your cats to access the treats they will have to knock them around. Each time the cats roll the treat balls they will hear you telling them how special they are.

Ideally, your cats should be cared for in their own home. If that isn't possible search for a cat hotel with a good reputation. Tour the facility beforehand and ask lots of questions pertaining to the care of the cats. Because safety is a priority, ensure that every cat must have proof of vaccinations before being admitted as a guest. Check out the areas the cats are confined in, making sure they are large enough for your cat and include objects to climb and places to hide, comfortable places to sleep and environmental enrichment. Interactive toys are important, but clients can bring in these toys. Visit the other guests, making note of litterbox and kitty condo cleanliness. Find out how much interaction the guests have with the staff and if they have chances to play.

Typically, it is preferable to hire a sitter to care for your cats at home, but depending on the circumstances, that is not always the best solution. Base your decision between in-home care or cat boarding on which situation provides the best care and safety for the cats.

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