

Open your own pet hotel!

FabJob Guide to  
**Become a  
Pet Hotel  
Owner**



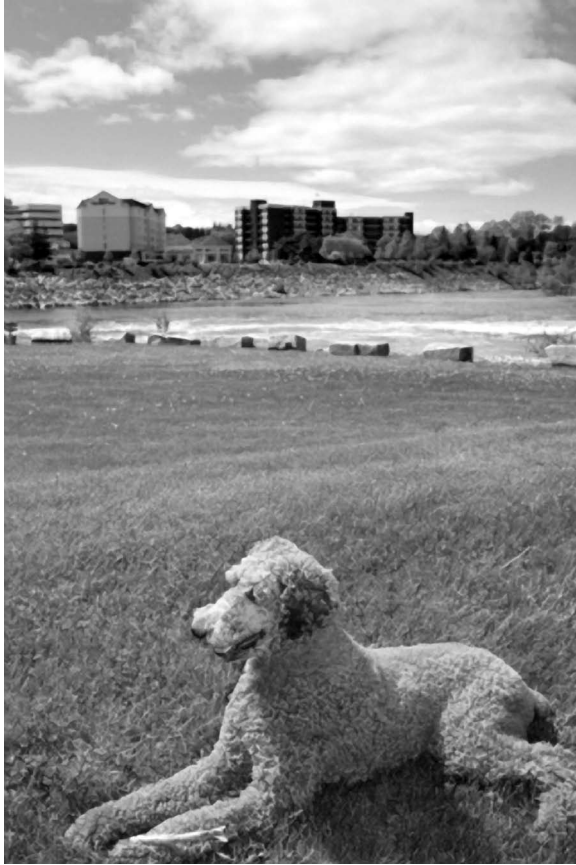
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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Why Open a Pet Hotel?

Are you an energetic and caring “pet person”? When you visit friends or family, are their pets drawn to you when they sense your love for all creatures great and small? Perhaps you already share your home with a few animals, or have one special someone in your life — a noble, beautiful purebred, a four-legged bundle of fur and kisses, or maybe a silky, purring lap companion.

If you love pets and interacting with them, and are looking for a fun and profitable way to make a career out of working with animals, becoming a pet hotel owner is a fabulous way to make your dreams a reality.

## 1.1.1 What Pet Hotels Are All About

Pet hotels are facilities that provide day and overnight care for dogs, cats and other pets while their owners are away from home. Typical cage kenneling may be offered by a local vet or groomer, but today's discerning pet owners are usually looking for something better for their precious pet. Enter the pet hotel, a concept quickly gaining in popularity across North America.

In the past, pet owners going away on vacation who had no one to check in on their pets at home had to bring them to a kennel where cages were small and cramped, nervous cats had to sit right next to big barking dogs, and human interaction ended for the night when the staff went home.

But what used to be known simply as kennels have come a long way in recent years. Today's pet hotels offer pets and their owners a completely different experience, with the chance to enjoy their "vacation" while the owners enjoy theirs.

A pet hotel strives to create an environment for the pet that is as much like its home as possible. Instead of a cage or crate, pet hotel guests typically enjoy a private suite that offers play space, a bed, and a place to eat.

In pet hotels, cats rest in spacious "kitty condos," which feature places to climb to, a bed, toys, and ideally even some sunbeams to lounge in. Dogs enjoy large private runs or suites, as well as daily social time in a play group with other dogs. For these luxury services, the pet hotel rates are usually higher than a typical boarding kennel would charge, but most owners would agree the cost is worth the peace of mind.

The hotel itself can range from a big room full of suites for animals of all kinds, to a "stay-away camp" or "pet resort" on a few acres of land, which offers daily activities and group play. Pet hotel owners typically spend their day:

- Checking guests in and out of the hotel
- Supervising and scheduling staff
- Visiting, checking in on, and entertaining your pet guests

- Taking reservations and assigning suites
- Helping staff with feeding and nap/bedtime routines
- Supervising groups of dogs playing together
- Taking dogs for a walk or to a nearby green space
- Keeping up with trends in the industry
- Marketing your pet hotel to new and existing clients

PetSmart, the pet supply and pet store chain, has made the concept of luxury pet boarding widely available under their trade name of Pet-sHotel, which you can check out at the link below. But rest assured that there is still plenty of room on the market for independently run pet hotels and resorts.

- *PetSmart PetsHotel*  
<http://petshotel.petsmart.com/index.shtml>

Linda Zago, whose pet hotel, Muzo, opened in July of 2007, suggests that the traditional model of kennelling has seen its day. “A common misconception is that kennels are prisons, and that they are all the same. The biggest mistake I see others in this business make is not wanting to change the traditional way of conducting operations. People are becoming more and more emotionally involved with their pets, making them very demanding.”

**TIP:** Pet hotels combine very well with dog daycares if you want to make full use of your space day and night. This book will provide guidelines for starting a pet hotel, but be aware that you can start a business that offers both these services under one roof. Section 2.3.1 has information about adding dog daycare services to your pet hotel.

## 1.1.2 A Booming Industry

Lots of people share their lives with pets, and where there are pets, there is a need for pet hotels. According to the 2007-2008 National Pet Owners Survey, 63% of U.S. households own a pet, up from 56% 20 years ago. So in addition to revealing that 71.1 million homes in the

U.S. have pets in them, the survey also shows that pet ownership is on the rise.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics offers encouraging predictions for people who want to open pet hotels. They've identified animal care as a growth industry — in fact, they expect it to grow faster than the national average for all occupations through 2014. The BLS says:

“Pet owners — including a large number of baby boomers, whose disposable income is expected to increase as they age — are expected to increasingly take advantage of daily and overnight boarding services. As many pet owners increasingly consider their pet as part of the family, their demand for luxury animal services and willingness to spend greater amounts of money on their pet will continue to grow.”

In addition to more people owning pets, it turns out we're also spending more on them annually too. The American Pet Products Manufacturers Association estimated Americans' annual spending on their pets at \$40.8 billion as of 2007. This impressive figure has more than doubled since 1994, when annual spending was estimated at \$17 billion.

“I opened the first Dogtopia in 2002, and the growth has been stellar. We definitely found a niche in people who love their dogs and want the best for them,” explains founder Amy Nichols, whose pet business offers overnight as well as daytime care for dogs.

“The growth in the pet industry is unprecedented — I am still amazed by what people will spend on their pets! I truly feel that the sky is the limit, and we are only going to continue to see more growth in the coming years,” Nichols predicts.

“Business has been better than I ever dreamed when we opened,” confirms Bobbi Heimbaugh, owner of Paws Inn, a 5000-square-foot pet hotel in Iowa. “I knew when I was writing my business plan that there was a great need for it, but I had no idea how great that need actually was. We just celebrated our one-year anniversary, and now have over 600 doggy clients.”

## 1.1.3 Benefits of the Career

There are many great reasons why becoming a pet hotel owner is a dream career. Here's an overview of the benefits you'll enjoy in the day-and-night pet care industry.

### Work with Animals

The obvious reward of working with beautiful and lovable animals has to come first on this list. Pets are fun, entertaining, and interesting creatures to work with. While many animal lovers are drawn to veterinary work, not all can continue when they realize how sad it can be to work with sick or injured animals all day.

It's not that the work of a vet or vet tech isn't wonderful and needed, but it's not for everyone, particularly those who are very emotional or sensitive. Opening a pet hotel is an alternative career path that still offers daily interaction with people and their pets, in an environment that you create and control.

### Be Your Own Boss

When you start your pet hotel, you'll determine your own hours, and set your own policies. You'll also decide when you're going to take those well-deserved days off. "I was in telecommunications prior to my venture into entrepreneurship," explains Dogtopia's Amy Nichols. "I enjoyed the challenge, but ultimately when I got where I was looking to go, the grass was not all that green. It was lucrative but not very fulfilling. I wanted to be able to be more dynamic and have more decision-making abilities. Starting your own business gives you all that and then some — often too many decisions!" she says with a smile.

### Be Truly Appreciated

No more working for someone who doesn't value or reward you for your many talents. More than once in this career you'll hear clients tell you that they appreciate the services you offer. You will be trusted and appreciated by the pets you care for, and you will see firsthand the difference you make in their lives. Pet "parents" will be loyal and grateful when they find a pet hotel like yours.

## Unlimited Income Potential

As you read earlier, the market for luxury pet services is booming right now, and you've got unlimited potential to grow. You can add to your client base until your booking schedule is full, and then add employees and square footage to your facility and increase your earning potential. In time your pet hotel could open up more locations, or establish franchises across the country or around the world.

## You Can Start Right Now

No special training or experience is necessary to start a pet hotel. In this business you can start simply with a love of animals, and then build the pet care and entrepreneurial skills from there. From there it's only a matter of time before you find yourself where you want to be: in lucrative and rewarding career at the head of a successful pet hotel.

## 1.2 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Pet Hotel Owner* is designed to help you launch into your new career by providing industry information, how-to guidelines, helpful hints on finding clients, and general advice on starting your pet hotel. It will teach you how to take your interest in animals and your talent for earning their affection, and turn them into a profitable business.

Throughout the guide you will find handy samples of registration forms, budget planners, marketing materials and checklists you can adapt and use for your business, as well as encouragement and ideas from a number of pet hotel owners who have kindly shared their advice and experience with you. They are:

- Linda Zago, owner of Muzo, an urban luxury pet hotel, daycare and grooming salon that features flat-screen TVs for each pet, and an onsite pet health club ([www.muzohotel.com](http://www.muzohotel.com))
- Stevie® Award finalist Amy Nichols, founder and CEO of Dogtopia, a day-and-night dog care business whose overwhelming success and growth took it from start-up to franchise in just over three years ([www.dogdaycare.com](http://www.dogdaycare.com))

- Bobbi Heimbaugh, a Certified Advanced Pet Care Technician and owner of Paws Inn, a 5,000-square-foot pet hotel located on five acres, with everything from Tiffany lighting to dog nursery rhymes at night ([www.paws-inn.com](http://www.paws-inn.com))

The information, resources and advice on these pages will save you hundreds of hours of research, so that you can start earning money more quickly. You'll avoid the common pitfalls, and make business decisions like an expert. Armed with the inside knowledge this guide provides, you could be caring for your first four-legged client in just a short time from right now.