

## Now testing



# PET SITTER

If you love dogs, you'll want to start a pet sitting service like Shalaka Mundada. She tells **Upneet Pansare** about the world's best job

**A**fter spending almost eight years behind a desk, first in a bank and then at her family-owned IT firm, Shalaka Mundada, 34, was sure she wanted to do something different, and preferably with her first love—animals. Getting married into a dog-loving family helped. “I spent a lot of time in our vet Dr Milind Hatekar’s set-up, when our dog was ill,” she says. “I had so much fun there that after a point of time, I thought of giving up my job and volunteering with him.”

After spending almost a year there, Shalaka set up Pet Sitters in 2008 after realising that there was

a dearth of pet sitting services in Pune. She started with six kennels and did everything—feeding, bathing, grooming—singlehandedly, for almost a year. Today, Pet Sitters has 32 kennels and a staff of eight. She also boards dogs for a fee when their owners want to go on a holiday and are unable to take their pet along. Others have functions or illnesses in the family and don’t want their dog to be neglected. “When I started out, trust-building took some time,” she says. “When people leave their pets with me, it’s like temporarily parting with their child. But when they saw the facilities, they were convinced.”

### Pros

- “Working with dogs doesn’t qualify as work for me!” says Shalaka. Unconditional love is no small fee.
- The demand for pet sitters is increasing with an increase in the number of pet owners.
- Timings are flexible and you can choose how many pets to have.

### Cons

- It is a very labour-intensive profession. “And it is difficult to get skilled staff,” says Shalaka.
- You have to be ready to deal with all kinds of behaviour from the dogs.
- Abandonment of pets is not uncommon.

### Family recce

Before she takes in the dogs though, Shalaka visits the families. “We have had abandonments. I need very strong references to keep the pets with me. I’m very particular about visiting families and getting to know the owners.” After she’s happy with the dog’s family, she takes them in. For Shalaka, work starts at 7 am when the dogs are taken for walks. This is followed by mealtime, after which she keeps track of which pet is scheduled to leave or stay at Pet Sitters. Then the dogs are left to play in the open, running and swimming.

When Shalaka began pet sitting, she charged ₹250 per kennel per day. Today, the rates are according to the breed and size of the dog and range from ₹400 to ₹600. Life as a pet sitter goes beyond housing pets. “People come to me after a visit to the vet to discuss their dog’s behavioural problems. I deal with the pets at a very different level when compared to a vet. Sometimes, the time that I spend with the dogs allows me to get to know them even more than their owners or their vets do.”

### Bond with pets here

- There are plenty of courses to train in pet care. Shalaka recommends taking dog behaviourist John Rogerson’s courses that are conducted in India. Log on to [www.johnrogerson.com/india](http://www.johnrogerson.com/india).
- Dog behaviourist Shirin Merchant conducts workshops in Mumbai. Call + 91 9821054690. ●