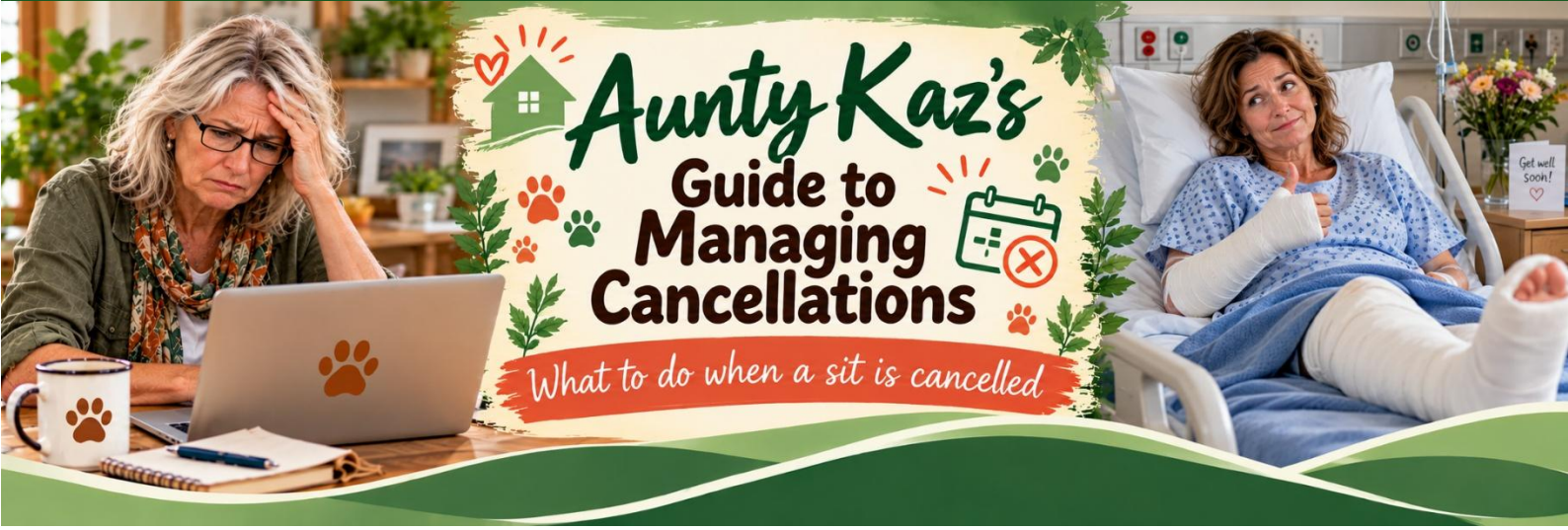


House-sitting plans don't always go according to plan. Homeowners change their travel arrangements, emergencies happen, and sometimes circumstances force a sitter to cancel.

It's frustrating, especially when you've organised your life around a sit. But a cancellation doesn't have to turn into a disaster.

The key is to stay calm, communicate clearly and know what to do next.

# CANCELLATIONS BEFORE A SIT STARTS

## What to do if a homeowner cancels a sit

### First, don't panic

It's perfectly reasonable to feel disappointed, frustrated, or even angry – particularly if you've turned down other sits, arranged transport, or planned your accommodation around the booking.

Give yourself a moment to process the news before responding. You can be professional without pretending you're happy about it.

### Find out what's happening

Ask the homeowner to clarify the situation.

- Is the cancellation definite, or might their plans change again?
- Do they need help finding an alternative sitter?
- When do they need you to confirm your next steps?

You don't need to interrogate them, but you do need enough information to make sensible decisions about your own plans.

**AUNTY KAZ TELLS YOU WHAT NOT TO DO**

I've seen some horrific examples of what **not** to do from entitled sitters having a rant in Facebook groups. This was the worst example. "*OMG – this bloody homeowner just cancelled a one-month sit after one week. Her husband died on holiday and she's coming home early and bringing the body back and is chucking me out of the house. Should I demand that they pay for a hotel for me? They've completely ruined my holiday, the selfish pricks*."

Yeah – don't be like that. It's very rare that a homeowner cancels a sit "on a whim" – it's usually due to overwhelmingly awful circumstances. A little compassion goes a long way.


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## Check your arrangements

Review the original agreement and the house sitting platform's cancellation policies. Some platforms (such as Trusted Housesitters) offer Insurance Plans in their higher priced memberships – but threads in house sitting groups on Facebook indicate it can be quite a struggle to get a payout from them and may not happen.

Consider:

- **Transport:** Can you change or cancel any bookings?
- **Accommodation:** Do you need somewhere else to stay?
- **Other sits:** Have you turned down other opportunities that might still be available?
- **Money:** Have you paid non-refundable deposits or incurred other expenses?
- **Timing:** How much notice do you have to make alternative arrangements?

Keep receipts and records of any costs associated with the cancellation. Don't assume the homeowner is obliged to reimburse you – in fact, it's rare that they would be on a free-exchange sit. If you run a sitting business, you will likely have your own cancellation policies in place. Check your agreement and any applicable platform policies.

## Communicate professionally

Even if you're upset, keep your messages clear and courteous. Confirm the cancellation in writing and make sure both parties understand what happens next.

If the homeowner has already paid for something or you've incurred agreed expenses, discuss how these will be handled.

If the cancellation involves a platform booking, follow its procedures rather than relying solely on private messages.

## Start looking at your alternatives

If you've suddenly lost a planned sit, act quickly.

- Contact homeowners whose sits you previously considered.
- Check current listings for suitable alternatives.
- Let trusted contacts know you're available.
- Explore temporary accommodation if necessary.
- Review your upcoming schedule and adjust your travel plans.

Don't accept an unsuitable sit simply because you're under pressure. Your safety, finances, and wellbeing matter too.

### MY HOUSE SITTING JOURNEY

I've had several sits cancelled over the years by homeowners due to illness, accident, and – of course – Covid. Except for Covid (when no one went anywhere!), when my sits were cancelled, I immediately jumped onto Aussie or Kiwi House Sitters and posted in local house sitting groups on Facebook for the areas I was travelling to. In every situation, I always found a replacement sit – sometimes in as little time as it would have taken other sitters to go onto social media and have a rant about the "horrible homeowner".



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### Learn from the experience

Once the immediate problem is sorted, consider whether anything could help protect you in future.

Would a written agreement, clearer cancellation arrangements, or a larger financial buffer make a difference?

You can't prevent every cancellation. You can, however, prepare for the possibility.

**MY HOUSE SITTING JOURNEY**

A homeowner cancelling a sit doesn't mean you've done anything wrong. Sometimes life simply gets in the way. And no, those entitled sitters that rant on Facebook and finish with, "Next time I'm just going to book a hotel – they don't bloody cancel on you!" are not correct.

My Mum and I once drove two hours through a howling snowstorm (usually a 35 min drive) from Bangor (Maine) to Bar Harbor to arrive at midnight at Days Inn – where we had a paid in full booking. It was mid-November. I phoned the hotel from Bangor and said we were running late and they said no problem, we'll see you when we you get here.

When we arrived, we discovered the hotel was closed, and a sign on the front door said, "Thanks for a great season – see you when we open again in April".

Another time I arrived at my hotel in Ibiza to discover they didn't have a booking for me. Thankfully I had receipts, so after an hour they finally gave me keys to another room. I walked up 8 flights of stairs (no elevator), opened the door, and walked in on a couple in the midst of conjugal relations.

In a happier turn of events, I once arrived at my hotel in Hong Kong to find they'd double-booked, and very apologetically asked if I would mind swapping my single room on the ground floor for an Executive Suite on the 16th Floor for the same. Price. Not a problem!

## What to do if you have to cancel a sit

Sometimes the circumstances change for you. You might become ill, experience a family emergency, have a transport problem, or discover that you're no longer able to fulfil the commitment safely.

Cancelling a sit should never be your first choice simply because something more appealing comes along. But there are legitimate reasons why you may have to withdraw.

### Be honest with yourself

Start by asking whether you genuinely cannot complete the sit or whether you're dealing with a problem that might be resolved.

For example:

- Are you too unwell to care for the animals properly?
- Has an emergency made it impossible for you to travel?
- Is there a serious safety concern?
- Have circumstances changed in a way that makes fulfilling the agreement impractical?

If you can resolve the problem without compromising your responsibilities, that may be the best option.

But don't put yourself or the animals at risk just to avoid an uncomfortable conversation.



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## Tell the homeowner as soon as possible

**Don't wait and hope the problem will disappear.**

The earlier you notify the homeowner, the more time they have to make alternative arrangements.

Contact them directly, explain the situation honestly, and apologise for the disruption. You don't need to share every personal detail, but you should provide enough information for them to understand why you cannot proceed.

If the situation is urgent, use the quickest reliable method of communication, then follow up in writing.

## Take responsibility for the impact

Remember that the homeowner may have booked flights, organised travel, or made other commitments based on your agreement.

Acknowledge the inconvenience your cancellation causes. Avoid becoming defensive or making promises you cannot keep.

If appropriate and practical, you could offer to help them find another sitter. However, don't promise to find a replacement if you cannot realistically do so.

If you're already caring for their home or pets, explain how you will ensure their immediate needs are met while alternative arrangements are made.

**Never simply disappear or leave animals without appropriate care.**

## Follow the agreed cancellation process

Check your house sitting agreement and the platform's rules.

Notify the platform if required, and confirm the cancellation in writing. If you've made any specific commitments regarding expenses or alternative arrangements, discuss those with the homeowner.

Don't assume that explaining your circumstances automatically removes every obligation. Equally, don't assume you must accept an unsafe or impossible situation without seeking advice.

## Help where you reasonably can

If circumstances allow, consider what practical assistance you can offer.

You might be able to:

- suggest another suitable sitter you know
- help the homeowner contact the platform
- provide useful information about the arrangements already made
- agree on a reasonable handover plan if the sit has already started.

Only offer help that is realistic. If you're dealing with illness or an emergency, your capacity may be limited.



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### Learn from the experience

Once things have settled, review what happened.

Could earlier communication have helped? Would better contingency planning have made a difference? Was there a warning sign you could recognise next time?

Sometimes the answer is simply that an unexpected event occurred and there was no practical way to prevent it.

You can take responsibility for communicating well without blaming yourself for circumstances beyond your control.

**Being a responsible sitter doesn't mean you can guarantee that nothing will ever go wrong. It means taking your commitments seriously and handling problems honestly when they arise.**

**MY HOUSE SITTING JOURNEY**

In early 2025 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. At that stage, I had my year pretty well booked solid with house-sits. I was given a surgery date of June 6, and was assured by the surgeon it would be "*Surgery, two weeks of recovery, a week of radiotherapy, two weeks of recovery, then you'll be good to go.*" It didn't work out like that.

Surgery went ahead on June 6, but I wasn't able to get into radiotherapy until the end of August, so I ended up having to cancel three months of sits. Thankfully, all my homeowners were very understanding. With one of them, we even laughed at the irony. I'd sat for them in 2023. She had to cancel a sit in 2024 when she was rushed to hospital three days before departure with suspected double-pneumonia, and now I had to cancel a sit. We're back on track with another confirmed sit for 2028!

# CANCELLATIONS AFTER A SIT STARTS

## What to do if a homeowner comes home early

First, establish when the homeowner will return and whether the sit is ending permanently or their plans might change again. I once had a homeowner come home overnight when their flight was delayed till the next day.

If they're returning because of an emergency, be understanding. As frustrating as it may be to lose your accommodation unexpectedly, remember that circumstances can change dramatically for homeowners, too.

Agree on a handover time and make sure you've returned keys, secured the propert,y and passed on any important information about the animals.

Then follow the same steps as for a pre-sit cancellation: check your agreement and platform policies, review your travel and accommodation arrangements, and start looking for alternatives.

**Don't forget the animals.** If the homeowner is returning early, confirm who will take over their care and when. If their return is delayed or they cannot immediately resume responsibility, agree on a safe arrangement for the animals.


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# What to do if you have to leave a sit early?

Illness, family emergencies, and other unexpected events could make it impossible to complete a sit.

Contact the homeowner as soon as possible, explain the situation, and apologise for the disruption. If you're already on the sit, do not simply pack your bags and leave.

**Your first priority is ensuring the animals are properly cared for.**

Contact the homeowner and agree on who will take over their care, when the handover will happen, and what needs to be communicated to the replacement carer. If the homeowner cannot return, work with them to arrange a suitable alternative.

Until responsibility has been safely transferred, make sure the animals' essential needs are being met. If the situation is urgent and you cannot reach the homeowner, contact the house sitting platform or an appropriate local emergency service for help.

Once the immediate situation is under control, follow the same principles as for a pre-sit cancellation: document the arrangements, notify the platform if required, and review any relevant agreements or expenses.

Leaving a sit early may be unavoidable. Leaving animals without appropriate care is not an acceptable solution.

### MAKE SURE YOU'RE ALWAYS IN TOUCH WITH SOMEONE

If you're a solo sitter, make sure someone knows where you are and is in regular contact with you – even if the homeowner only asks for updates once a week.

I sit alone, and I call my Mum every day. She, my Aunt and my sister always have my current address. If they didn't hear from me for a couple of days, they'd contact the nearest police station and request a welfare check.

Why? Because I'd hate to think I could be sitting in an apartment, drop dead of a heart attack, and leave the pets without food or care for two weeks before the homeowners returned.

## Your Cancellation Checklist

**Remember these essentials when a sit is cancelled.**

- [ ] Stay calm before responding.
- [ ] Communicate as soon as possible.
- [ ] Confirm the cancellation in writing.
- [ ] Check your agreement and platform policies.
- [ ] Review transport, accommodation, and other commitments.
- [ ] Keep records of relevant messages and expenses.
- [ ] Ensure the animals are taken care of and the property is secured.
- [ ] Agree on practical next steps.
- [ ] Review what you can learn from the experience.



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## Anything else?

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### ONE FINAL WORD FROM AUNTY KAZ

House-sitting involves real commitments, but it also involves real life. Plans can change, emergencies happen, and not every cancellation can be avoided.

What matters is how you handle it.

Be honest. Be considerate. Communicate clearly. And remember that looking after yourself is part of being able to look after someone else's home and pets.

### ALWAYS HAVE A PLAN B.

Whether that's having a separate Contingency Fund for cancelled sits (mine is $1,000) or only sitting in locations where you have friends and family who could provide emergency accommodation, or travelling in a campervan, always have a Plan B. And no, demanding that the homeowner pays for a hotel for you is not a Plan B.



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