

The house exchange: keeping holiday costs down and having fun



My place for yours

Sie wollen für drei Wochen nach London? Tauschen Sie doch einfach Ihr Heim mit dem einer Londoner Familie. Auf diese Weise sehen Sie Land, Leute und London mit anderen Augen — und es ist unschlagbar günstig. PATTI McCracken hat für Sie recherchiert. **medium US www.**

Rasmus the dog can't talk, but if he could, he'd tell stories of the road. He'd come for a scratch behind the ear and then tell tales of his passport life. He'd talk about traveling all around Germany, seeing the countryside fly by from the back seat of the family car. He'd talk about hiking in the Austrian mountains and discovering little holiday cottages that his owner, Armin Hupka, found so charming as to be almost magical. In fact, Hupka liked the cottages so much, he

started putting leaflets on the front doors, inviting home owners to swap houses with him from time to time. "We started to exchange houses by leaving the leaflets," says Hupka, a 53-year-old property manager from Frankfurt. "But about eight years ago, we answered an advertisement on an internet home-exchange bulletin board, and it worked out all right. We've been doing it that way ever since." Hupka with his wife, Silke — and Rasmus, of course — have traveled throughout western Europe by swapping their

House-swapping dos and don'ts

Do...

- ...communicate early and often with the person with whom you're swapping houses or apartments.
- ...have a friend or trusted neighbor visit your "guests" to make sure everything is in order.
- ...leave a list of helpful tips and information for guests. A washing machine in Australia might work differently from one in Germany. And guests will need to know what the local emergency telephone number is, as well as the location of the nearest hospital (and pub!).

Don't...

- ...leave a mess, either in your own house or in theirs.
- ...leave anything of great value lying around or easily accessible. Accidents do happen, as do misunderstandings.
- ...disappoint the other person by deciding not to swap close to the holiday date.

second home in Spain for other people's houses — instead of staying in hotels or pensions.

The couple is registered with Home Base Holidays, a house-exchange agency in England. The company was set up more than 20 years ago and is a member of the First Home Exchange Alliance (FHEA), which provides members with access to worldwide exchanges.

Nancy Burch, from Florida, and her British husband, Derek, started house-swapping about six years ago. "The driving factor was that it let us travel while someone else took care of our cats," they say.

A lot of people like the idea that their houses and sometimes pets are being cared for while they're away. Others want to visit a foreign place and see it through the eyes of locals.

"I think it gives you an insight into how other people live their lives, which you wouldn't get in other ways," says Ann Watson, who manages a doctor's office in England. "It has made me think twice about categorizing people. I've done three swaps to different places in the United States and met some lovely people who didn't fit my stereotype of Americans at all."

In general, people swap for two or three weeks at a time, although some have been known to swap for several months or even a year while on sabbatical.

Hupka prefers to swap only his holiday home in Spain, not his main house in Germany; and unlike Burch, who leaves his pets at home, the Hupkas take Rasmus with them wherever they go.

"That limits us, but since we are also swapping with people who have second homes to offer, we don't have to synchronize our visits, which is a plus."

Other than the basic yearly fee that some agencies require (usually around €35), no deposits are necessary. House-swapping is not for the nervous, though, since it is a system that relies largely on trust. But like other internet-based exchanges — including such sites as eBay and Craigslist — it evidently works.

"It's easier to hand the key over to a swapper than a renter," says Hupka, "because the swapper wants you to treat his home the same way he treats yours. The people who rent think they've bought the right to treat it any way they want."

Before a house exchange, swappers sometimes spend several months writing e-mail, sending photos, and talking on the phone. All the vetting between the two sides of the exchange happens in that "getting to know you" phase.

"I've said 'no' for various reasons, including my gut feeling from e-mail contact," says Watson.

Additional home-owners' insurance is not necessary, but if the use of cars is included in the swap, insurance coverage does vary from country to country. In Britain, the process of adding someone to your insurance can be complicated. In the United States, on the other hand, most insurance already includes an additional driver, so no extra steps are necessary. The swap is not always a success story, either. Sometimes things can go a bit wrong.

"We had one exchange where the home was beside the railroad tracks, which we found out about less than a week before we arrived. The house was dark, and these great big winged ants were flying and crawling around the bedroom," says Hupka. "At the same time, the other couple was apparently hunting down every single dog hair in our house because they were allergic."

Burch tells of a home owner who had put paper down throughout the house because she was worried about swappers' shoes damaging the floor.

House-swapping can work only on trust

access ['æksɪs]	hier: Möglichkeit
accessible [ək'sesəbəl]	zugänglich
apparent [ə'pærəntli]	anscheinend
bulletin board ['bʊlətɪn ,bɔ:rd]	Aushang; hier: Börse
coverage ['kʌvərɪdʒ]	Schutz, Deckung
crawl [krɔ:l]	kriechen
deposit [dɪ'pɔ:zɪt]	Kaution
driving ['draɪvɪŋ]	entscheidend
emergency [ɪ'mɜ:dʒənsi]	für Notfälle
exchange sth. [ɪks'tʃeɪndʒ]	etw. tauschen
fee [fi:]	Gebühr
gut feeling [ˌgʌt 'fi:əlɪŋ]	Gefühl (aus dem Bauch heraus)
hunt sth. down [ˌhʌnt 'daʊn]	Jagd auf etw. machen
insurance [ɪn'fʊərəns]	Versicherung
leaflet ['li:fli:t]	Handzettel
mess [mes]	Chaos, Durcheinander
passport life [ˌpæspɔ:rt 'laɪf] US	Leben als Globetrotter
pet [pet]	Haustier
property manager ['prɔ:pərti ,mænɪdʒər]	Immobilienverwalter(in)
sabbatical [sə'bætɪkəl]	Freistellung, Forschungsurlaub
stereotype [ˌsteriətaɪp]	Klischee
swap sth. [swɑ:p]	etw. tauschen
synchronize sth. ['sɪŋkrənaɪz]	etw. zeitgleich ablaufen lassen
vetting ['vetɪŋ]	genaue Überprüfung
winged ant [wɪŋd 'ænt]	gefügelte Ameise
work out [ˌwɜ:k 'aʊt]	funktionieren