

Home Exchange

Home-swapping websites:

[Love Home Swap](#)
[Knok](#)
[CasaHop](#)
[HomeLink](#)
[HomeExchange](#)
[Intervac](#)

The decades-old method of vacationing in someone else's abode while they stay in yours is nothing new.

Home swapping is economical, practical and fun.

Home swaps are more common than you think. There are no contacts or documents to sign. It is simply an agreement between two families to swap homes for a period of time. The basic home swap is between two families who stay in each other's homes over the same dates. This period of time can be a weekend, week, month, year or any time period you both agree to. Home swaps can occur between families in two different countries, two states, two cities or even in the same city. Typically all arrangements about the swap are made a few months in advance between the two families.

A home swap provides for a cheaper travel experience since money is not spent on lodging. Travel expenses are further reduced because meals can be prepared and eaten in your new home from food you buy in the local area.

There is the convenience of laundry facilities in your home as well as creature comforts like a living room, TV, computer access, maybe kids toys and possibly even a pool or bicycles.

In addition, your swap family can direct you to the best, local, greatest places in the area where you are staying. They can leave you a list of sites,

restaurants and activities in their area that your family may enjoy. They may leave contact information to their friend or neighbor who can be your local contact for any questions about the area. And, of course, you can call your exchange family who is living in your home with questions anytime. You will live like a local the day you arrive in your new home.

There's more than one way to do a home swap.

The three main types of home exchanges are:

- You stay in your exchange-partner's home while they stay in yours (a "simultaneous exchange").
- You stay at a home-swapper's second home or vacation home (a "non-simultaneous exchange") while they stay in your home.
- You can stay as a guest in a swapper's abode while they remain in their house (a "hospitality exchange").

Home Exchange Websites.

Initial contact between two families for a home swap starts with a home exchange website. The basic setup involves joining the website, filling out on-line information describing your home and it's location then uploading some photos of your home and area. Then the fun begins. You can search locales all over the world for possible home exchange partners. Once you have identified areas you would like to visit you then send an email message offering to exchange. Some home exchange websites offer over 50,000 home listings all over the world!

In my experience, the most important aspect of a home exchange is openness and honesty with the other family. Do not oversell your home or locale. If your home isn't a mansion it is not a problem. The majority of home exchangers want to see your whole city or state and don't really care if your home is not Hearst Castle. Most traveling families are looking for a safe area where they can rest and relax after a day of exploring your area and are delighted to just be in your neighborhood because it feels authentic to them. If you have pets that will stay in your home during the exchange and will require care and feeding mention it in your initial email to prospective exchange families. Most people love to take care of other people's pets but some have pet allergies.

The biggest hurdle to a home exchange are the dates of the exchange. The more flexible you can be regarding your dates of travel the more likely you

will find a home exchange. Europeans typically travel in July and August. If you wish to exchange with a European family your availability to travel during July or August will result in many more offers. Likewise, Australians frequently travel during December. If you wish to visit Australia or New Zealand your chances of finding a home exchange down under rises dramatically if you can travel in December.

Some home-exchange sites are free; most aren't. The majority of home-exchange programs—especially the more reputable ones—charge users a membership fee to list and search for homes and get in contact with members. [International Vacation Home Exchange \(IVHE\)](#), for example, charges an annual membership fee that starts at \$159. A [HomeLink membership](#) starts at \$39 for U.S. exchanges only. (This being one of the cheaper options, it's a good way to get your feet wet if you're just starting out.) And [Intervac](#) offers a monthly membership plan, with rates starting at \$8.33 a month. [HomeExchange](#) charges \$150 annually. Each company has various pricing structures and membership options, so spend a little time doing research to find the one that fits you best.

Various home-exchange sites cater to different types of exchanges. IVHE, for example, focuses on vacation or second-home swapping. So consider which kind of swap you're most interested in before buying a membership with a particular home-exchange company.

Home swapping is not right for everyone.

How do you feel about allowing folks you've never met in person into your home? Arranging a swap through a reputable home-exchange program is safe but it is important to assess your own comfort level before you jump into the situation headfirst.

How do you know if you'll be OK with a home swap? Ask yourself if you can bear to have a (very nice) stranger sleeping in your bed, eating in your kitchen? If a dish or door is broken will it be the end of the world for you? It boils down to allowing a new friend to live in your home. To minimize your concerns, remember that prior to the exchange there should be extensive discussions of the swap.

Be clear about your expectations

One of the best ways to alleviate first-time home-swapping jitters is to get to know your exchange partners really well. Likewise, before you make the

swap, consider all the necessary details that may arise during the process and talk your exchange family by telephone or video chat in advance multiple times. Will you leave food for your guests? Will you hire a cleaning service when you leave or clean the home yourself? Do you expect your host to use a professional cleaning service? How will you to exchange house keys? Iron out details of everything before the swap. The key to a successful exchange is frequent and meaningful communication between the two families prior to the exchange. I always find that the more I communicate with the swap family prior to our exchange the more I learn about their area and culture and the more fun it becomes when we are in their home.

When looking for an exchange many first timers prioritize the size and amenities of the home in the area that they desire to travel. This is a mistake. It is more important to find a home that is near the area you would like to see or has direct transportation from the home to your area of interest. Ask your exchange partners about particulars of the public transportation or access to your areas of interest. Of course, it is fun to live in a fancy home for a week or two but, in reality, you will be spending the majority of your time seeing the sights and returning to the home at night to eat and sleep. Location is much more important than amenities.

After you and the other family have agreed upon all the details of your home exchange it is time to make travel arrangements. Most of the time this means buying airfare for your trip. Most families tell the other family that they are committed to the exchange and will be purchasing airfare. Once airfare is purchased you are committed to the home exchange.

It's not just for homeowners

Renters can participate in home exchanges too. And various forms of ownership, like co-ops or condos, work also, as long as you've cleared the exchange with the necessary parties. Check with your landlord or co-op board, or read your lease to see if you're permitted to rent your place out to strangers, which in most cases constitutes a temporary sublet.

Start your search early

Naturally, a first-time home exchange isn't the most suitable option for a last-second getaway. Start planning swaps three to six months prior to the exchange for international travel, sometimes even up to nine months in advance. If there's a major event going on, you definitely want to start

planning well in advance. In my experience coordinating exchange dates between two parties is the most difficult aspect of arranging an exchange. Everyone is busy with work and family. The earlier you start the process the more time you will have to coordinate your vacation dates.

You can swap cars, too

It is very common to swap cars. Whatever suits the exchange partners. However, some people who live in major cities with extensive public transportation may not even have a car. But swapping cars, which provides cost savings to those who would otherwise need to rent a vehicle, is common in the home-exchange community. Most American insurance companies accept that you will allow someone else to drive your car and will maintain insurance coverage. However, in other countries (e.g. Ireland) an additional policy “rider” is required for coverage of additional drivers. Every driver (you and them) will need an International Driver’s License. International Driver’s License can be obtained easily at Auto Clubs.

You'll need to do some footwork

Different home-exchange sites have different vetting processes. Some use social media as a screening process: Love Home Swap, for example, offers a Facebook app that swappers can use to check out possible exchange partners on the social-networking site. Many others, like IVHE and HomeLink, rely on good ol'-fashioned references.

Some sites do not vet exchangers (Home Exchange.com). Ultimately the best method is to speak to the other family by telephone or video chat multiple times prior to you buying airfare. Once all particulars are agreed upon both parties should purchase airfare. After the airfare is purchased it is improper to back out of an exchange.

Home swapping is safe

Home swapping is by and large a safe way to arrange a stay. Homeexchange.com and HomeLink are celebrating their 60th anniversaries. In all of the years I’ve been exchanging (15 home exchanges) I have never had a single problem. Every time we return our home is cleaner than when we left it. My family and I have become fast friends with many of the families that we have exchanged with. We correspond with them and visit them if we are back in their area.

In the end, they're staying in your home and you're staying in theirs, so mutual trust is fundamental. When you return to your home after your

vacation expect that dishes, towels, silverware and bedding will be in different places because the other family will not remember where you like to put things. You can easily put it all back into their original places when you are home after your lovely home swap holiday.

If our are worried about valuables or special items put them away in a closet or attic or ask a neighbor to keep them for you while you are away. Personally, I find it easiest to simply ask your exchange partners to not touch the particular items and they never do.

“Travel broadens our perspectives personally, culturally, and politically. Suddenly, the palette with which we paint the story of our lives has more colors.”

---Rick Steves

Myself and Home Exchange Families:



Paris



Zagreb



Dublin



Rome



London