

Home Exchange Guide



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by L Klimczyk
from International Vacation Home Exchange
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Why Home Exchange?

Do you love to travel?

Do you have a sense of adventure, yet like the comforts of home?

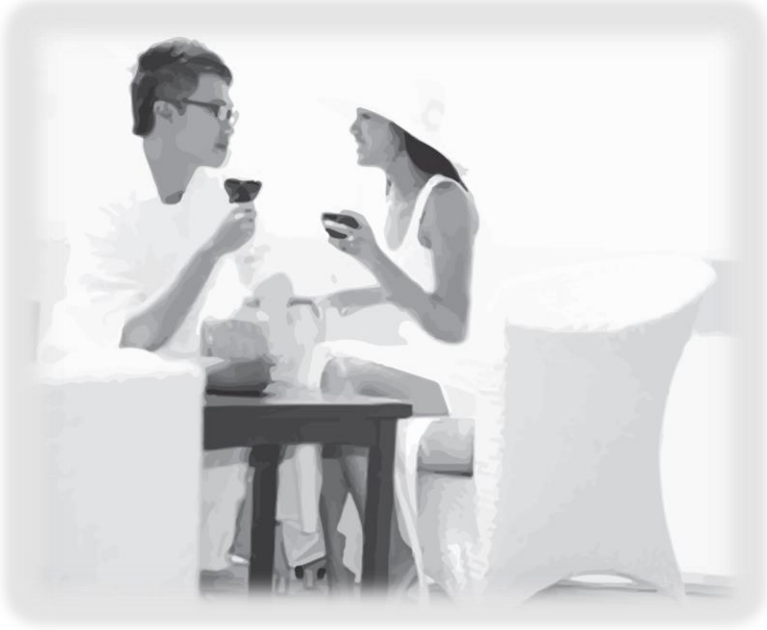
Does saving money appeal to you?

If you answered 'yes' to any or all of the above, Home Exchange is for you. It is a fabulous way to become immersed in other cultures and explore new corners of the world while avoiding expensive accommodation and restaurant bills - turning what seems unaffordable into a dream vacation. In this guide we aim to share with you some of our experiences over the last decade and certainly entice you to try an exchange on your next vacation.

Let's revisit the questions that we opened up with: *do you love to travel?* There are opportunities around the world, from major cities like New York, Paris, London and Sydney to remote locations such as Alabama, Goa, Iceland, Isle of Arran, Malawi, Nova Scotia and Patagonia. As you will come to discover, there is a good chance, no matter where you might want to venture, there is an opportunity for you to experience home exchange.

Do you have a sense of adventure, yet like the comforts of home? Adventure can mean a location and also activities or environments. As you can imagine, a location in a major city is most likely going to be an apartment or maybe a home. When traveling around the globe, you might also have the opportunity to stay on a ranch, in a ski chalet, beach house, game lodges, or even a country estate.

The world of options certainly grows as you search for your next location. No matter what location or type of



accommodation you choose, with home exchange, you also get the added benefit of staying where other people live or vacation. This is having the *creature comforts* of home. Especially when traveling to a new location, it is so nice to relax in a bit more space instead of coming back to a cramped and often expensive hotel room.

Our last question above is; *does saving money appeal to you?* Imagine being able to enjoy fantastic destinations around the globe, while having the conveniences of staying in a home and spending only a small fraction of ordinary accommodation costs. With home exchange you not only avoid most of the accommodation costs, you also have the

space and amenities so you can also choose to cook and eat what and when you want, saving money on excess restaurant bills. The need for dining out for every meal is simply gone, of course you are on vacation, so we would recommend getting out a few times to enjoy! The most important fact is that you have the choice.

Home exchanging is a great way to save lots of money while stepping into someone else's world to experience different cultures and environments.

Are all Home Exchanges the same?

Why don't you stay at my home while I stay at yours? For us, this is the most straightforward description of home exchange. You might be saying to yourself, really? How am I going to find someone at one of those interesting destinations that wants to come visit my home?

Popular theory is that home exchanging started in Europe back in the 1950's between teachers looking to experience something new and different during their long summer breaks. Good news is that today, we can still enjoy home exchanging for adventure and a lot more but we also have a much easier way of finding others to exchange with, the internet. Today it is not just teachers benefiting from home exchange, but people from all walks of life. Before looking at how to choose an exchange that is right for you, let's take a look at differing types of exchanges.



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The three most popular types of exchanging are Direct, Non-Simultaneous, and Hospitality exchanges. Let's explore each of them as you might find one or more perfect for you. Depending on where you are in the world you might call an exchange a swap or a trade. We will intermingle these terms as they essentially mean the same.

Direct Exchanges - the most commonly known, this is when two parties agree to swap locations for the same period of time.

Advantage:	Straight forward, with no accommodation costs this saves the most money.
Disadvantage:	Two parties have to like each other's properties and locations as well as agree the exact same time for swapping.

Non-Simultaneous Exchanges - when the two parties schedule their vacations at different times. This is most popular when using second or vacation homes, though it is possible to use the primary home if the owners are traveling.







Advantage:	When using a property that is not the main residence, there is a lot more flexibility of when the exchanges can occur. When using an exchange network with many second homes, a credit system can be established to account for differing values of properties, and time of visits.
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Disadvantage:	Anxiety of not trading at the same time. Overcome by using an established network with an equitable credit system.
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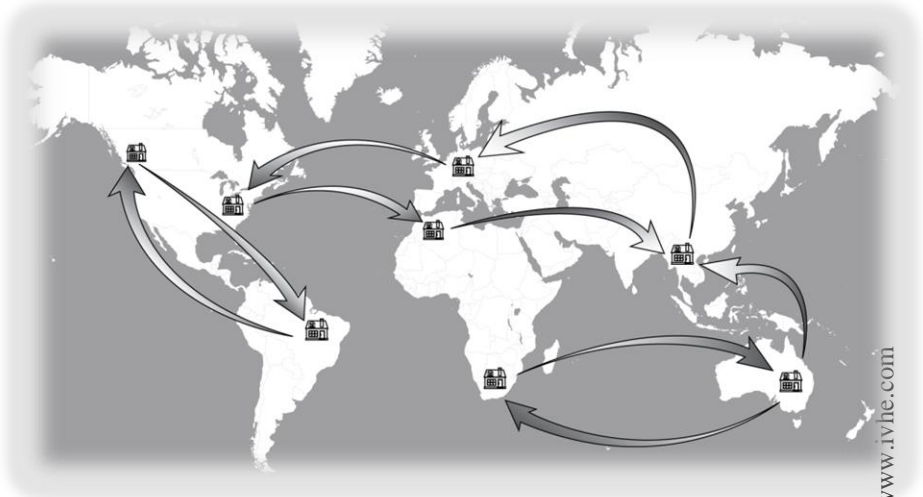
Hospitality Exchange - when one party hosts another in their home while they are there too. The gesture is then reciprocated at a later time.

Advantage:	Not only do you get to visit a location, but you might also get a <i>personal guide</i> while making new friends.
Disadvantage:	Not everyone wants to spend vacation time with another family that they have never met. Though when the return trip is made, the parties should know each other pretty well.

As you can see above, one or more might be perfect for you. There are many benefits of home swapping; the following are most frequently quoted:

-  Great opportunity to immerse yourself in a destination culture, *live like a local*
-  Limited to no accommodation costs for your vacation
-  With a home, including a kitchen you have the option to save on restaurant costs
-  Security: your property will be occupied instead of being vacant
-  Make new friends: inevitably you will get to know your hosts / visitors
-  Potential of avoiding bike, car, boat, and sporting equipment rental costs

From our experience, the most important of all is **HAVING FUN**, enjoy!



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How to find the right exchange network for you?

What type of exchange (see last section) is best for you?

Is bigger better?

How easy is it to find the location, activities and type of accommodation that you enjoy for vacations?

We are going to take a leap forward here and now assume that you are interested in exploring the exciting world of home exchange – fantastic, welcome to the club. There are thousands of people just like you that are exchanging right now, glad to have you join. Before instantly signing up to a *club or network* you should consider what the most important criteria are for you. The questions above will begin to narrow your search.

If you are only interested in Direct Exchanges then your total options are vast, just remember that you will have to find a location and home that matches the same time you will want to swap. What if you want the option of a Non-Simultaneous exchange? In this case there are only a select number of networks or communities available. It is not an either or decision as some organisation offer their members both Direct and Non-Simultaneous Exchanges. In addition, maybe Hospitality is for you. Again when doing your research check to ensure you are getting what you want.

Bigger is not always better. You will see several organizations that claim to have the *world's largest* or *most listings*. We're sure that that one of them is the biggest, but why may this not matter? What really matters is that you can

find the right exchange for you – this means location, type of accommodation, type of exchange and time of exchange. We have found that in an effort to look big, there is what is called in the industry, a lot of *dead wood*. These are home listings that have been up on websites for years, but are no longer valid. It will be extremely frustrating trawling through hundreds of property listings, wasting a lot of time trying to find someone to respond to your enquiry. Be careful to select a home exchange organisation that manages their listings, keeping them current and up to date, and can offer you assistance when needed.

Now is a good time to talk about price. Some exchange networks offer a *free listing*. Two sayings come to mind *you get what you pay for* and *rarely is anything really free*. When home swapping sites offer free listings there will inevitably be properties on the site that are old or have owners that really are not interested in following up with you. This will waste your time and will diminish your pleasure for the whole home exchange experience. The other thing that often happens with a free listing is that the home owner can show their property, but they cannot respond or communicate to enquiries without joining or paying. This can cause delays in communication, another waste of your time. Remember that you are most likely going to save thousands of dollars, euros, pounds or yen on home swapping, so the small cost of joining a reputable home exchange community makes sense, saving you time, avoiding frustration and giving you a much better experience in home exchanging.

Even though you have embraced the idea of exploring a new location and enjoying a local home, if it is your first exchange you will most likely at some point have some anxiety. Will the home you are going to visit really be all it is promoted to be? Will the visitors to your home treat everything with the same care and respect you do? These questions and feelings are natural. Remember that anxiety can also come before a hotel based vacation; is it really like on the brochure or are the



pictures ten years old? How can you overcome this anxiety? Look to your home exchange network for assistance. The reputable organizations have established methods of verifying facts about its members. This could be identifying experienced traders and having a guestbook of comments for future traders to read about previous trades. There are also various methods of validation of identities and property features. While no system is foolproof, it is always good to

take steps toward ensuring that you will have best experience possible.

If you are an owner of a second / vacation property you might specifically be interested in a home exchange network that offers its members a credit or points based systems. Credits place a value on both the time of the exchange as well as the type of property. A good example is the notion of a high season. Having a beachside home in summer is worth more than during the winter, just like a ski in ski out chalet is more valuable during the ski season. A large five bedroom home might (not always) be more valuable than a studio apartment. I say might because the location is always a key factor. We all know of small apartments in cities like New York, London or Paris that are worth many times more than a large countryside home.

The internet is a perfect place to start your research on the various home exchange options. Remember to ask yourself the above questions and think about what type of exchange community is best for you. Finally, you might consider joining more than one to expand your options. For your convenience and use, in Appendix A we have included *Your Membership Checklist* of Home Exchange network features that you can consider when choosing the best network for you.



Interested in exclusive homes offering both Direct Exchanges and Non-Simultaneous Exchanges with a Validation and Credits system, all supported by trade coordinators to assist you? Please consider www.ivhe.com. As a thank you, please use promotional code *GUIDE50* for a 50% discount off the published membership rates.




How to get an Exchange


This is the fun part, like visiting a travel agent and looking at all the brochures, reading the travel section in a newspaper, flipping through a travel magazine and surfing travel websites. Once you choose a home exchange network online you should be able to do advanced searches by location, number of bedrooms, activities and other factors. You will then have to reach out to see if the other party is interested too (not many, but some exchange networks will assist you in this process).

But what will they be interested in? This is vital, you need to both promote your home as well as proactively communicate to prospective traders. The following are helpful hints in getting an exchange.

-  Pictures are worth a thousand words. Upload good quality pictures of your home. Think about what you would like to see when you visit a location. Living room / lounge, dining area, kitchen, bathroom / toilet and bedrooms are obviously great to start. Also feature any unique offerings you might have like a back yard / garden with outdoor furniture, a hot tub, a pool table or maybe the view from the deck. Investing in a quality camera, maybe with a wide angle lens, or having a few professional photographs taken will pay out dividends for you and gain interest in your property listing.
-  Promote all the activities that are available around your area. Depending on where you are, an easy way might be to go to *Trip Advisor* and search for all the

activities and things to do in your city or region. Giving your potential guests information on all the benefits of visiting your location is a great way to entice them to trade with you. Some home exchange websites assist you by having a map of your location where you can add or highlight the local attractions on this map.

 Clearly communicate dates, type of accommodation, activities, location and how many people can visit. Keep your language simple and direct; remember that your exchange party may not have the same first language as you. Honesty is extremely important as the whole exchange world is based on trust. If you are interested, let them know. If you are not interested, let them know too. A timely and honest answer is what we believe you would like, do the same for others.

 Be flexible and realistic in both your expectations and timing. The more you open your mind to possibilities of locations the more options you will have. Take advantage of the opportunity of using home exchange to explore somewhere new and different. Of course the more flexible your time, again the more likely you will quickly find an excellent trade opportunity. Last minute opportunities are frequently presenting themselves, some exchange communities feature them. If your time is flexible, you can benefit by swapping sooner rather than later. Of course if you are trading non-simultaneously, you have added flexibility of not having to swap at the same time, which is great. Be realistic in your trade expectations.

Unless you are part of a Credits system (described earlier), you might not find a property that has the same space or amenities as your home, if it meets your needs then maybe you should still swap.



Share something about yourself with your potential trading party. As mentioned earlier, home swapping is based on trust. When you share some information about yourself, others will be more comfortable with you and your home. Some home exchange sites now offer a Personal Profile section in their property listing. This gives you the opportunity to show a



picture of yourself and share a little about your hobbies and or interests. People that add this information tend to get more trades. We would recommend only putting this personal information in

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