

Home Exchange: Luxury Globetrotting With Free Accommodation Part 2 – How is it done?

By Ainslie Waldron

As I explained in Part 1, I spend many months of each year as a world globetrotter, staying in luxury accommodation for free. I cannot sing the praises of house exchanges loudly enough. I reckon it's one of the world's best kept secrets. As someone who regularly travelled the world for both work and pleasure during my working full time years I was feeling some trepidation as to how I would manage to travel so regularly and with relative luxury in my retirement. The price of hotels seems to be rising and rising and paying by the night means that long term such as three to six month (or 182 day) vacations are very expensive indeed. Now I have discovered how to gain the sought after long vacations without spending all of those hard earned retirement monies.

This is NOT Airbnb or Stayz or any type of scheme where money changes hands. Absolutely NO MONEY changes

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hands, all that happens is that I agree to swap houses with you, simple as that. Utility bills remain the responsibility of the home owners, not the guests. All that guests have to do is leave the home clean and tidy as they found it.

Homes are found through home exchange websites and many websites have the option of reviews of individual homes. I look for homes in the location and with the amenities I require. For example, WI-FI access is a must for me, I cannot compromise on that one.

I look at reviews given by others who have stayed in the home I choose on the website. I also email the owners and begin a conversation, initially, of course, to see if the home is available on the dates I would like it.

Subsequently, I will exchange a number of emails with the home owners to set everything up. I frequently also have a Skype call or two with them during which I may even ask if they can show me a part of the house, e.g. the kitchen. If, during any of these communications, anything seems not right, I will cancel my request and look for another. I must say that I have never had to do that. I did have one occasion where I did not undertake the diligence of communicating personally at length with the people I was going to swap with and it did end badly. Of the hundred or so swaps I have made, only

one ended badly, and it was in many ways my fault for not undertaking the appropriate early diligent communications.

Logistical details of how to meet or pick up keys are worked through. I meet less than half of those people I exchange with as most are already away when I arrive at their homes.

There are basically two general types of homes for exchange, your primary residence and your second or subsequent home. We have found little difference while staying in either a primary residence or a second home. The beauty of having a second home is that you can offer non simultaneous exchanges. Getting dates to fit in for a long trip if every home exchange is going to be simultaneous is not impossible but can be very tricky.

We offer our second home, our beach house, for home exchanges. Because we are offering non simultaneous exchanges we are far more flexible in our needs. We can visit homes which are either first or second homes and at times that suit both us and the hosts. We keep a diary just for house exchanges and a note of who intends to visit when.

If we are overseas on vacation when people are going to stay in our home we make quite specific and structured arrangements as to how the guests will pick up the car and the house keys and

we arrange for someone to show them round our house. It is best to try to arrange this although it is not always possible; it is very helpful and welcoming to be met by someone.

We have found that many people with second homes to offer bank exchange time for future use. That means we have had people staying in our home whose home we have yet to visit. We may visit their home in the future or we may never get round to visiting their home. We have also stayed in numerous homes where the hosts have not yet and may well never come to Australia and stay in our home. In fact, less than 30% of people we have swapped with have come to our house.

Some people ask me why this would occur. Well, after a while, home exchanges become a way of life. We are totally relaxed about people coming to stay in our home and do not worry about when or if we will reciprocate at their home. In fact, in common with many second home owners, we prefer if someone is living in the house to the house being empty. It is safer. It costs very little extra for someone to live in the house as most of the general bills have to be paid regularly for the home whether or not someone is actually living there.

Simultaneous home exchanges work well too. These work best for shorter vacations of a month or less. We have swapped with

many people who have only a primary residence to offer and there have been no issues at all, in fact all has gone very well indeed.

Sometimes people with only a primary residence go off camping while we stay in their home.

There are many home exchange websites available to choose from. To begin, I suggest that you use Google or your favourite search engine and type in Home Exchange websites and an array of sites will appear, have a browse around some of them, some are free, some have an annual fee and most allow you to browse before you sign up.

Location is often the prime factor in determining a house swap. It may be that you have a burning desire to visit London to see the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace or you have always wanted to see the Taj Mahal in India. House swaps are available all over the globe and most house swap internet sites allow you to search by country. Perhaps surprisingly a large number of people are open to any suggestions in terms of where they want to swap to. Not exclusively but particularly retirees tend to write comment such as “surprise us” or “open to all suggestions” in the section of the house swap site which informs you where they are willing to swap to. There are other considerations too that you may wish to make. Are

you more interested in living in the country or in a city? Do you prefer staying in an isolated or busy environment? Is your preference for inland or for beach? Are there particular places of interest that you wish to be within easy travelling distance of? All of these considerations and more are personal choices which you can make. ■