

[courant.com/business/realestate/hc-hrehouseswap0826aug26,0,7180553.story](http://courant.com/business/realestate/hc-hrehouseswap0826aug26,0,7180553.story)

# Courant.com

## Trading Places

### Home Exchanges Can Make An Exotic Vacation Affordable

By ROBIN STANSBURY

Courant Staff Writer

August 26, 2007



Valerie Erde and Dan Goodman stand with their children Emma Goodman, 9, and William Goodman, 7, outside of their home in Greenwich. (YOON S. BYUN / August 17, 2007)

Some homeowners in Connecticut and thousands more across the country save thousands of dollars each year by house swapping.

In a practice also known as a home exchange, they are using their real estate - a home, apartment or vacation cottage - to swap for a similar property in another part of the country or the world.

The exchanges can be as brief as a weekend or as long as a year, but typically last one week to three weeks.

"It's as simple as `You stay in my house while I stay in yours,'" said Ed Kushins, the founder of a website that helps facilitate the trades, [www.homeexchange.com](http://www.homeexchange.com). "The site allows you to find one another, contact one another and make the exchange."

Valerie Erde and her family did just that.

About four years ago, she stumbled upon the idea and was intrigued by the thought of traveling across the globe to stay in a fully furnished home while someone else lived in her Greenwich house.

Since that time, the family has participated in weeklong house swaps in Ireland, Paris, California and Canada, and a weekend swap in Massachusetts - without any mishaps.

She said she had no worries about having strangers living in her house, a 1926 Dutch Colonial with four bedrooms and three baths. And reports of problems with house swaps have been rare.

"People ask me that all the time. But we're kind of adventuresome and you have to remember, we are staying in their house, too," she said. "It is a mutual respect."

So, here's how it works:

There are a handful of websites that help home swappers hook up. After paying a registration fee - usually \$50 to \$100 for a year's membership - you list your home as well as the places you'd like to travel, and when.

Those familiar with home exchanges say swapping houses from a place like the Hartford area is more work than it is if you live in a major city, such as New York or Los Angeles, or in a popular vacation area such as Orlando or seaside resorts. But it can be done.

"It is more difficult," Kushins said. "If you don't live in one of the highly recognized tourist areas, you may not get as many inquiries. People in Australia or Paris wouldn't think of going to Hartford because they've probably never heard of it.

"But our clients are responsive when they get inquiries from other people," he said.

"You just need to work a little harder to introduce them to the Hartford area, and sell them on the appeal and attractions. People do like to explore areas they haven't been before."

Nils Wessell is finding out how hard that can be.

Although he's never tried a house swap before, he listed his Mystic home for exchange for an entire semester, hoping to travel in Europe during an upcoming sabbatical. After three months on [www.sabbaticalhomes.com](http://www.sabbaticalhomes.com), he'd received no responses.

"It seemed like a natural for professors to swap houses," said Wessell, a government professor at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy.

"I'm still waiting to see if anything pops up."

If successful, homeowners stand to save thousands of dollars over the course of a two-week vacation, with no hotel bill, possibly no car rental bill (cars can be swapped as well), and a lower food bill because you eat some of your meals at home.

That was a large part of the appeal for the Erde-Goodman family.

"You not only save money, but it's nice to have a kitchen and laundry, and a place where everyone has their own rooms to sleep in," she said.

Among Erde's recommendations for making a swap work?

Start searching the websites in January for the upcoming summer, as most swaps are firmed up by March.

Put everything in writing (boilerplate forms are online).

"And make sure you both leave a good guide to your home, where things are located and how they work," she said.

Copyright © 2007, [The Hartford Courant](#)