

## Trading Places:

## Your Home Away from Home?

lodging is often one of the major expenses of any vacation, especially if the hospitality of a good friend or family member isn't an option. Even a week's vacation at most popular destinations can easily run a thousand dollars or more for a nice hotel or B&B.

One way to travel less expensively — while also reducing your impact on the environment — is to consider doing a "home exchange."

Think about it: every year, *millions* of people go on vacation for weeks at a time, leaving their homes — perfectly empty! What a waste of space! Think, too, about all the resorts, hotels and motels that are built in scenic and environmentally sensitive areas around the world (including right here in the Pacific Northwest!) to accommodate this demand.

Home exchanges can help alleviate those development pressures by enabling travelers to, quite literally, trade places. Simply put, they exchange their homes, condominiums or apartments at a time that is convenient to both parties. Most home exchangers are people taking weeks-long international vacations, but some folks do exchanges within the Pacific Northwest.

If the thought of a home exchange brings mental images of traveling a long way only to be stuck in someone else's dirty and depressing digs, think again! Most home exchangers are affluent, well-educated professionals or retirees. Their well-appointed homes are often part of the attraction of doing a home exchange.

Consider just a few recent home listings from a place all of us are familiar with: right here in Oregon.

- A 3,200 square-foot completely restored turn-of-the-century farmhouse with a wrap-around porch on two acres in Lake Oswego
- A custom Craftsman home with an "abundance of slate, granite, travertine, copper finishes" located on five acres just outside of Ashland
- A 3,600 square-foot new river-front home on the Deschutes River a block away from Drake Park in downtown Bend

If you live in more ordinary digs, don't despair. Many modest homes can also be found on exchange. In some



This impressive home in England could be your vacation destination — for free — if you take part in a "home exchange" — a great way to save money, while minimizing the impact of your travel on the environment.

cases, the home is a secondary aspect anyway. Some home exchangers are just looking for a decent place to be near a family member or friend, or for use on a business trip.

Often, home exchangers will include their automobiles as part of the package, too. (One home exchanger in Ashland advertises that she has a Toyota Prius, a fuel-efficient "hybrid" gas-electric vehicle.) And don't worry that your home has to be an immaculate work of art. Many home exchanges have pets and/or kids and are clearly lived in, not just admired from afar.

## How to Do a Home Exchange

Home exchanges have been done by catalog for decades, but the rise of the Internet has made the process much easier. You can now view thousands of listings from around the world instantly just by clicking on a link on a web site (see, e.g., [www.homeexchange.com](http://www.homeexchange.com), or just use Google to search on "home exchanges" for additional home exchange web sites).

While some home exchangers have specific dates and destinations in mind, many are open to temptation;

i.e., they like to travel and can be persuaded that your neck of the woods is their next destination.

You can start an email exchange of information with the owner. That can develop into phone chats and other communication that help you both get to know each other better and negotiate details.

If you want to increase the odds of striking just the right deal, you may want to have your home listed too, so that others interested in traveling to the Northwest can find you. Various Internet sites provide this service.

A final negotiated agreement should always be in writing, of course, but the home exchange process is ultimately built on trust that's developed over a period of weeks or even months of advance communication. And, remember: while (relative) strangers may be staying in *your* house, you'll also be staying in *theirs* so they have a clearly vested interest at stake!

According to one source, some 250,000 home exchanges take place every year, with few, if any, problems. In many cases, home exchangers even become friends!

Trading places may not be for everyone, but if it's right for you, it's an option that can save you a bundle, while helping to save the environment.