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Travel Trend: Home Exchange

(ARA) - The word is getting around among travelers: Hotels are out, staying in villas, private houses and apartments is in. Breakfast at a hotel restaurant is ordinary, coffee and fresh croissants at a charming local bakery is memorable. Hotel rooms are expensive, staying at a friend's loft in Manhattan, a friend's ski condo in Aspen, or a friend's beach house in Australia is certainly more appealing, more comfortable and less costly. Need to make some new friends?



Fortunately, new friends with great places may already be looking for you at a Web site called HomeExchange.com. Whether you are seeking a place for a family vacation in Los Angeles or a romantic weekend getaway for two, you can connect with like-minded people who are interested in trading their place for yours for a fantastic vacation. Once the exclusive territory of teachers on summer vacation, home exchange is becoming mainstream with upscale and middle class home owners looking to swap homes (or second homes) for vacations.

"Our home is our biggest asset," says Terry Hamilton, a long-time home exchanger. "It's a beautiful place, close to the beach in Southern California. Home exchange lets us leverage

this investment to travel. We've gone everywhere from a weekend in Palm Springs to three weeks in Ireland by exchanging our home. We can afford to eat at terrific restaurants and golf great courses because we're saving \$200 to \$500 a day by not paying for a hotel room. We leave a list of favorite restaurants and nearby golf courses for our exchange partner, and in turn get their recommendations for when we're staying at their home.

Courtney Balen looks for home exchanges using different criteria. "We have kids and we need a child-friendly house near attractions like Disneyland or Six Flags. Exchanging with other families with kids means they already have high chairs, strollers and toys, so we don't have to take those things with us, plus they have reliable baby sitters. I can use theirs while they use mine. We also like to have a kitchen when we travel. Home exchange is great, everyone gets their own room. Hotel rooms for a family with kids are cramped and expensive".

In over 90 countries and throughout the United States, HomeExchange.com helps members arrange house swaps for vacations. "Once people experience a home exchange, they're hooked," says company founder Ed Kushins. "Our Web site has over 9,000 listings all around the world, and members can easily find home exchange opportunities that fit their travel plans. Extensive descriptions of the homes, neighborhoods and people, plus unlimited photos helps put people at ease about exchanging." Kushins adds. "You don't need to join to browse but most people do join when they see the possibilities".

For those who are looking for a quick getaway, Kushins notes that regional or long-weekend exchanges are becoming more popular and that many members do more than 3-4 exchanges per year. The cost to join is only \$49.95 per year with no extra per-day or per-exchange charges. Learn more at HomeExchange.com.

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