



Home Exchange 101

*A Guide through the Home Exchange Process
from
Choosing a Club
to
Arriving at Your Destination
(and everything in between)*

What is Home Exchange?

Home exchange, also known as home swap, is the ideal way to save money while traveling. Using the database of a home exchange organization, travelers find a partner for a mutual exchange of homes for an agreed period of time. This idea has been around since the 1950s; evolving from a catalogue based system to an almost exclusively web based one. Home exchanges are not just limited to houses; apartments, boats and even mobile homes are swappable.

There are many varieties on the home exchange theme. Most swaps are done simultaneously, where exchange partners stay in each other's home at the same time. Some are non-simultaneous, which are most likely to occur when exchangers have a second or vacation home. Home exchanges are often arranged for vacations, which are usually long weekends or up to two or three weeks (month for Europeans). However, exchanges can take place for a myriad of reasons: wedding, visiting sick person in hospital, thinking of moving to an area etc.

Some other options are: [hospitality exchange](#), in which travelers stay in the home of another person or house-sitting. Most of the time the arrangements are made by the traders, though some of the sites assist in arranging a trade.

A growing trend in the home exchange industry is the Luxury Exchange. These exchanges specialize in high end homes, charge a higher fee, and often offer additional services.

The home exchange industry has been steadily growing since the advent of the internet, but it has experienced exponential expansion in the past year.

[Find out more about choosing a home exchange club.](#)

Choosing a Home Exchange Club

Choosing a home exchange club can be a daunting task. There are more than 50 clubs each with unique features. KYT has looked at all the clubs and researched all those features to help you make an informed decision. The features noted on KYT:

- **Cost:** Clubs range from free to over \$1000 (for a specialty club). Most are under \$100.
- **Year founded:** The oldest clubs started in 1953 and new ones have started almost yearly since the 1980's. If a club has been around a long time, it usually has built up a fairly large membership and a good reputation. Newer clubs may have innovative features that the older ones do not offer.
- **Country of origin:** Although all clubs are based in a specific country, most offer worldwide listings. There are a few specialty sites that are specific to the country of origin. Sometimes the club has more listings in the country of origin and is written in the language of the country. Many sites also offer translation services.
- **Communication:** Blogs, forums and emails are all methods of communication offered on some of the club sites. It is especially helpful when clubs offer email updates when new listing are added in "wish list" countries. KYT tells you which clubs communicate.
- **Updated:** Home exchange clubs vary in how easy it is to find out if listings are current. While most of the larger clubs are careful about removing older listings, some clubs date last updates or date of enrollment. That makes it foolproof.
- **Open/Closed:** There are several different methods of contact for home exchange clubs. If a club is deemed open, visitors are free to browse listings and contact members. Membership is required in order to post a listing. The advantage of open clubs is that they offer a wider range of potential swappers. Closed clubs require membership in order to contact other members. Their advantage is additional privacy and security.
- **Reverse Search:** Reverse Search allows an exchanger to look for other exchangers who are interested in coming to their location. Some clubs offer reverse search options to country only, others are more specific.
- **Second Home:** Many home exchangers have second homes. KYT lets you know if there is an additional charge for listing another home.

- **Number of members:** KYT has estimated membership size. This is as up to date as possible, though of course, these fluctuate daily.
- **Advanced Search Options:** Some sites offer many search options, which makes it easier to find a trade is you have specific needs. For example, if you travel with a pet, you may want to search only for pet friendly homes. KYT tells you which sites offer options and what the options are.
- **Visible contact:** Some people prefer complete privacy on their listings. KYT lets you know which sites have what degree of privacy.
- **Helps:** Some home exchange clubs have loads of information for the exchanger, which can be used in addition to the resources on KYT.
- **Guarantees:** Some home exchange clubs offer guarantees if an exchange is not made during membership.

Arranging Your Home Exchange

Now that you have decided which club is best for you, it is time to consider how to get the most use from your home exchange club membership.

Setting up your listing:

Photos: Almost all home exchange clubs recommend adding as many pictures as possible to your listing. Make sure that your photos include interior shots, showing the master bedroom, living area and kitchen, at a minimum. Depending on the home exchange site, some will only take a very small file (a huge variable in different exchange clubs) so be sure to set your camera at a low resolution. Because uploading digital photos are still a mystery to some folks, several of the home exchange clubs offer alternative methods such as emailing or sending the photo in by mail. An excellent series on taking pictures for home exchange listings is available on the Home Base Holidays blog, *Travel the Home Exchange Way*.

Written Description: Think of your listing as an advertisement, where you are trying to “sell” others on your home. The more descriptive you are about the tourist and community interests in your area, your home and family, the more interest you will generate. If you live in a non-touristy area, play up all the small, fun things to do in your area, or areas close enough for day trips. Things that may seem mundane to you may be exciting to another. Perhaps a visit to a near-by farm might be fun for a city dweller. Maybe the library has readings of activities for kids.

- If you plan to join more than one home exchange, create your listing on a word processing document and just copy and paste.
- Many sites have check lists to allow for detailed listings.

Arranging an exchange:

Exchanges can occur in two ways. Either a potential exchanger contacts you or you contact the swapper.

Contacts from others: Sometimes contacts come from unexpected places that you never thought of visiting. This may be the chance to visit one of those places.

It is always polite to respond to contacts from others, even if the exchange is not possible.

Contacting others:

Making a connection that works takes time and effort. The more swappers that you contact, the better your chances of arranging an exchange. *Allow plenty of time* to find a match, realizing that lead time is important for vacation planning. Most home exchange clubs suggest four to six months. It is important to know that all home exchange members may not be interested in your location or home for one reason or another. Some will respond; some will not. It often takes many tries to get the right match (hmmm...this is starting to sound like a dating service!)

- Make a list of all the places that you are interested in visiting, possible dates and length of stay. It is important to remain flexible until you see what is available. OR
- Take advantage of **reverse search**. Sometimes it is fun, if you do not have a destination in mind, to use the reverse search feature. This allows you to find exchangers from around the world who are interested in coming to your area. It might lead to some exciting vacation possibilities. Also, it does enhance the possibility of finding a match sooner, as there is already an interest in your location.
- If you are interested in a prime destination during peak travel times, **make your offer stand out**. If your home exchange club has a contact form, change the heading from the generic one to something specific and enticing. Add your name to the signature. Tell a little about yourself and your accommodations in the message as well as your interests for the exchange. Keep it simple and friendly.
- This correspondence may involve several emails. Rarely do both parties agree immediately.
- Some exchange sites recommend references, ideally other exchange partners if the trader has swapped in the past. However, we have never asked for references and have never had a problem in more than twenty exchanges.
- Be prepared for some rejection. Expect no more than 15-20% response to your emails at best. One potential home exchanger contacted us while we were just getting our listing up – we had not posted photos yet. They were interested in an exchange until they looked at the photos and then wrote back to say that they were backing out because it was “not an even exchange.” Ugh.

Last Minute Exchanges: Sometimes circumstances dictate a last minute exchange. Or perhaps (gasp!) you are a procrastinator. Several exchange clubs offer opportunities for last minute swaps or have forums to post those kinds of trades.

Deciding on an exchange type:

- Many exchangers have second or vacation homes. In those cases, a non-simultaneous exchange may be possible, where exchanges take place at different times.
- Hospitality exchanges work for some who might like to have the security of staying with another family, perhaps in another country.

Exchange arranged, now what?

The scary part: Maybe it’s just me, but that period after the exchange is arranged and the tickets are purchased (if it’s an exchange that requires air travel) is nail biting time. With non-refundable tickets, it is a leap of faith to buy the ticket before your partner does. I like the deal signed, sealed and delivered with both partners having tickets. When that happens, I let out a BIG sigh of relief. (As an aside, a back out has never occurred for us, but it’s still scary).

Commitment: Home exchange is all about honesty, trust and commitment. It is very important to always be honest about your home, so that there are no surprises. Backing out of an exchange after arrangements have been made is not an option. Always be aware that there is another swapper involved!

Preparing Your Home

Preparing your home takes time and effort, but it is worth it. It is understandably disconcerting to enter a home with the owner not there. So anything that you can do to make the experience more comfortable is always greatly appreciated. We have culled tips from several home exchange clubs ([Geenee](#), [Digsville](#), [Homebase Holidays](#), [Home Exchange](#)), blogs (especially “[Preparing Your Home Exchange](#)”) and added some of our own. [Geenee.com](#) offers an excellent printable House Book and check list to simplify all of this.

Trader’s Home Companion: We suggest buying a binder (your Trader’s Home Companion) with plastic sleeves, ideally with tabs. Pages can be added and subtracted easily and instructions will then be available each time you arrange a swap. Include:

- Instructions or manuals for all appliances and electronic equipment (try running a washing machine in Paris without instructions...)
- A page that states that the exchangers are your guests and authorized to be in your house.
- Emergency list:
 - o Phone number of emergency local contact person (neighbor or property manager)
 - o Nearby hospital
 - o Numbers for police and fire department or 911
 - o Car insurance information
 - o Car repair shop
 - o Alarm code

Be a Concierge: In “Trader’s Home Companion”, create a section for local attractions. Include area maps, brochures, local restaurant menus, and any other suggestions you may have to help your exchange partner enjoy the visit.

Space: Many of us have homes that are filled to the brim. Some temporary modifications need to be done in order to make your home exchange partner comfortable.

- Provide at least 12 inches of closet space for adult guests. Sometimes people use pre-exchange preparation as a good time to go through closets and get rid of things. Often people box things up temporarily or rearrange. Be sure to leave plenty of hangers.
- Provide a drawer or two for each guest.
- Provide room in your bathroom for the exchange partner’s toiletries.

Kitchen: [Digsville.com’s](#) Tips of the Trades offers the following suggestions:

- Be sure all the major appliances are in good working order. If you’ve been living with a blown-out refrigerator bulb for a while, now is the time to replace it.
- Stock up on kitchen staples such as oils, vinegars, flour, sugar, salt and basic seasonings. Most exchange partners will agree to use basic kitchen and household supplies.
- Supply adequate pots and pans.

- Sharpen your knives.
- Keep your cookbooks and favorite recipes within easy reach for the guest chef.

The Key: There are several solutions to exchanging keys:

- The best way is to make a copy of the key and mail it to the exchanger well in advance. That way there is no worry. Then the key can simply be left in the home if it is not needed to lock the door or it can be mailed back.
- A neighbor or family member can be given the key. The exchange partner should be provided with the telephone number of the key holder. This method usually works well, but sometimes can be a problem. For example, in our last exchange, the key holder got confused and did not appear at the appointed time. She ended up having to leave work to deliver the key that she thought she was supposed to bring the next day!
- The old “the key is under the doormat” scenario can also work if both parties feel comfortable.

Cleaning: The cleanliness of a home is of major concern to most home exchangers. However, there is great disagreement as the meaning of the word “clean”. One man’s clean house is another man’s pigpen. Also, clutter can make a universally accepted “clean” into an uncomfortable place. So, if you are as housekeeping challenged as I am, the best plan is to hire a cleaning service right before the exchange and to have some place to store excess clutter. It might be a chance to make lemonade out of lemons (again for us housekeeping challenged folks) to get rid of some of the stuff that’s been accumulating in your home.

What else?

- Provide plenty of clean towels and linen.
- Remove any valuables or place them in a locked area of your house.
- Any items that you do not feel comfortable with others using should be marked as such.
- Arrange with a neighbor or friend to be on call in case of problems.
- Stay in touch via email or phone.
- Home exchangers tend to welcome each other with a small welcome gift – flowers or a bottle of wine.
- Remember: The unexpected may happen. Treat it as an adventure!

[Arriving at Your Destination](#)



Exchange Partner "A"

Name of Primary Contact:		
Email Address:		Phone:
Current address:		
City:	State or Province:	Country
Zip or Country Code:	Proposed trade from (MM/DD/YY) to (MM/DD/YY)	
Number of Adults:		
Number of Children:	Ages:	
Pets:	Anticipated Arrival Time (Hour/AM _ PM):	

Exchange Partner "B"

Name of Primary Contact:		
Email Address:		Phone:
Current address:		
City:	State or Province:	Country
Zip or Country Code:	Proposed trade from (MM/DD/YY) to (MM/DD/YY)	
Number of Adults:		
Number of Children:	Ages:	
Pets:	Anticipated Arrival Time (Hour/AM _ PM):	

Key Pickup (if key not mailed) and/or Emergency Contact for Exchanger "A"

Name:			
Address:			
City:	Phone:	Cell:	Email:

Key Pickup (if key not mailed) and/or Emergency Contact for Exchanger "B"

Name:			
Address:			
City:	Phone:	Cell:	Email:

Terms and Conditions:

We agree to a Automobile Exchange: Yes No (circle one) If "Yes" see separate auto insurance and usage agreement.			
Exchanger "A" agrees to pay all phone charges accrued during exchange period?		Yes	No (circle one)
Exchanger "B" agrees to pay all phone charges accrued during exchange period?		Yes	No (circle one)
Exchanger "A" agrees to cover any repairs and/or damages to household equipment and/or articles:		Yes	No (circle one)
Exchanger "B" agrees to cover any repairs and/or damages to household equipment and/or articles:		Yes	No (circle one)
Exchanger "A" agrees that house cleaning after the exchange will be done by		<input type="checkbox"/> Exchanger	<input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning Service (check one)
Exchanger "B" agrees that house cleaning after the exchange will be done by		<input type="checkbox"/> Exchanger	<input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning Service (check one)

Agreement:

Name of Exchanger "A":	
Name of Exchanger "B":	
We agree to the above outlined terms and conditions of our proposed Home Exchange and will make every effort to insure the well being of the home entrusted to us.	
Signature of Exchanger "A":	Date:
Signature of Exchanger "B":	Date:



Automobile Exchange Agreement

Owner Information:		
Name:		
Address:		
City:	Zip or Postal Code:	State or Prov.:
Country:		

Automobile Information:		
Make:	Model:	Color:
VIN Number:	Registration Number:	
Year:	Insurance Company:	
Policy Number:		

I, _____, Owner of the afore described vehicle authorize _____, to operate said vehicle during the following period:

Duration of Agreement:	
From (DD/MM/YY):	
To (DD/MM/YY):	

Odometer Reading at Beginning:	Date:
Odometer Reading at End:	Date:

Owner's Signature:	Date:
Borrower's Signature:	Date:

Attention: This document is to be surrendered to any Law Enforcement Agency or Officer along with Operator's License, Vehicle Registration and Proof of Insurance upon inquiry or demand.