

Travel



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Row house in London — a great exchange!

By Mary Augusta Rodgers
special writer

IT'S AN APPEALING idea — working out a house exchange for a rent-free vacation — and one that leads immediately to wonderful daydreams. You've always wanted to spend some time in Mexico? Well, it's easy to see yourself in San Miguel de Allende, cozy in your home away from home, having breakfast outside on the patio among the bougainvillea blossoms.

With no hotel bills to pay, you could easily stay a month. Learn a little Spanish, get a real feeling for the countryside, meet the neighbors, make friends, shop in the local stores.

To turn the dream into a reality, you start by joining a house exchange club. There are a number of these; they publish directories listing available houses, both here in the United States and abroad, that cost from \$20 to \$45.

You can list your house, or simply buy a directory, select a house, and get in touch with the owner directly.

THE ROLE of the clubs is to put people interested in an exchange in touch with each other, and let them work out the details. One organization, Home Exchange International, will find a house exchange at a cost ranging from \$250 to \$325, depending on the kind of house and the length of stay.

People are interested in house exchanges for different reasons. Economy is, of course, a major factor, especially for families, who might find the cost of several weeks of hotel living and restaurant meals prohibitive.

A man scheduled to attend a conference in Paris, for example, was able to take his wife and their five children along for a 2½ week vacation, thanks to a house exchange with a French couple in a Parisian suburb; the total vacation cost, minus airfare, was a modest \$500.

RETIREES TEND to like the idea of a house exchange, as do teachers with a free summer or sabbatical leave. And then there are those with an adventurous streak, who want travel to mean more than a sightseeing-tour-bus experience.

After seven house exchanges, a couple in McLean, Va., feel that they "have friends all over the world." And a couple in New York City have traded their Manhattan townhouse for a castle in Ireland, and a 15th century English manor house.

House exchanges take place in this country, too. One of the best known house traders in Colorado's Gov. Richard Lamm, who, in 1982, traded the executive mansion in Denver for a week in the house of a San Francisco architect. This aroused the ire of some state legislators, who remarked that the mansion wasn't his to trade.



The flavor of London can be found at Queen's Crescent Market.

Nancy Pelletier Pansing's experience with house exchanges is fairly typical.

PANSING is a teacher and a novelist, author of "The Rearrangement," published by MacMillan last year, and is now at work on her second book. She lives in Marietta, Ohio, and comes to Michigan to visit a daughter in Clarkston and a son in Midland.

"You have to start planning early — but planning is half the fun," Pansing said. She listed her house in Marietta, and a vacation cabin in the West Virginia mountains, with the InterService Home Exchange.

After receiving the directory in February, she began looking for the right person — meaning, the right combination of place and dates.

"You have to find someone who wants to vacation about the same time you do. You could spend days pouring over the directory — it's such a wonderful wish book."

SHE ALSO had to sell Marietta, to a certain extent. "Most Europeans have never heard of it. So I explained that it's the oldest town in Ohio, and in a lovely setting on the river." The first time, she (traded for four weeks in a Victorian row house in London, complete with cat.

"It was in Camden town, a sort of Greenwich Village neighborhood, near Hampstead Heath, a large park-like area with a lake and a pond. We walked miles every day, exploring London. And there was

an open-air market near the house, where we could buy fruits and vegetables. We'd have the best melons for breakfast."

The second time, she spent five weeks in Le Touquet, France, in a three-bedroom apartment with a view of the English channel. "That apartment made a great home base. I had the use of a car, too, so we went on side trips — to Paris, and Normandy and Mont-St-Michel.

"You save so much money with a house exchange, you don't worry about splurging occasionally on side trips and restaurants."

THE PARENTS and other relatives of Franciose, the apartment owner, were very friendly and hospitable, she said. "They invited us to their house for dinner and took us on a weekend trip to a delightful country inn."

If you're thinking of a house exchange, Pansing's advice is to start early. "And be flexible. Not at either time did I get what I was looking for, exactly. But both exchanges worked out well."

Before leaving Marietta, she made arrangements for the exchange families to be able to "swim at the country club and water-ski on the river. And I asked friends to check to see how they were getting along."

All parties involved in the two exchanges took good care of each other's houses.

"In the London house, we fed Chiquita, a very self-sufficient cat, and faithfully watered the tomato plants."

She still hears from the two families: a young Irish architect and his wife, with young twin sons; and Franciose, a single parent with a teen-age son and daughter.

And Pansing is already thinking of another house exchange, in the next year or so.

Where to write

Here are the addresses of some organizations which can help those seeking an exchange.

• Vacation Exchange Club, 12006 11th Ave., Unit 12, Youngtown, Arizona 85363.

• InterService Home Exchange, P.O. Box 87, Glen Echo, Md. 20812.

• International Home Exchange Service, P.O. Box 3975, San Francisco, CA 94119.

• Holiday Exchanges, P.O. Box 878, Belen, N.M. 87002.

• Home Exchange International, 2245 Ventura Blvd., Suite Woodland Hills, CA 91364.

• Worldwide Exchanges, P.O. Box 155, San Leandro, CA 94577.

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Writer Nancy Pelletier Pansing found a house exchange which pleased her — a row house in London's Camden town, "a sort of Greenwich Village neighborhood, near Hampstead Heath, a large park-like area with a lake and a pond."

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