

BELLEVUE CLUB

HOTEL BELLEVUE

# reflections

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# HOME SWEET (*someone else's*) HOME





*Skip the hotel or rental on your next vacation, and swap houses instead.*



WRITTEN *by* HALEY SHAPLEY







While sharing with your neighbors is a concept that dates way back, recent technologies have taken the sharing economy to all new heights. Instead of being limited to the circle of people you know to ask for a cup of sugar or a ride downtown, now you can use websites and apps to connect in ways that previously weren't possible.



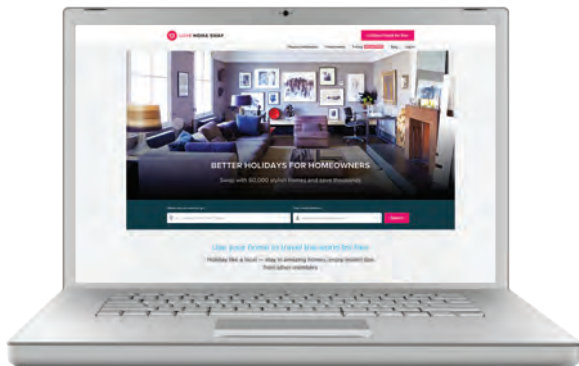
“We’re seeing [the idea of borrowing] made accessible in a way that is unique and is attractive to people,” says Beth Buczynski, author of *Sharing Is Good: How to Save Money, Time and Resources through Collaborative Consumption*. “By implementing technologies to help make it safer and using the Internet as a sharing platform, we’ve greatly expanded the geography of sharing.”

One result has been the rise in home swapping, in which people trade spaces for a set amount of time. Instead of spending money on a pricey hotel, you can stay in someone else’s home for close to free (most services charge an annual fee, but it’s generally less than you’d pay for even a night’s worth of accommodations). In return, your host stays in your house while you’re away. There are also non-simultaneous exchanges, which usually involve a second home; you may stay at your swapping partner’s vacation house in February while he or she stays at your property in March.



## Who Swaps Houses?

As nice as hotels can be, sometimes you’d rather stay in something with a little more sense of place—a beachside bungalow or an Italian villa, for instance. Those who like the idea of immersing themselves in a neighborhood and living like a local are drawn to home exchange. You’ll find home swappers of all demographics, but it’s particularly appealing to families who need more space than a 250-square-foot room can provide; sophisticated older travelers who’ve been there, done that with traditional hotels; and savvy younger travelers who are budget conscious and familiar with other sharing economy staples such as Uber and Airbnb.



## Where to Get Started

There are a number of websites that facilitate home swapping. Each offers something a little different as far as customer service, type of listings, etc., so look around to see which appeals most to you.

Here are a few of the options:

**HOME EXCHANGE:** Started as a print-and-mail book in 1992, Home Exchange is one of the pioneers in the home-swapping space. There are more than 55,000 listings in 150-plus countries. Rate is \$9.95 a month for 12 months.

>> [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com)

**HOMELINK:** Founded in 1953 by a professor from New York, HomeLink claims the highest percentage of European members, so this could be the site for you if a visit to Paris, Prague or Pamplona is calling. Rates are \$95 for a yearlong membership or \$152 for two years. To exchange in the United States only, the cost is \$39.

>> [homelink-usa.org](http://homelink-usa.org) and [homelink.org](http://homelink.org)

**LOVE HOME SWAP:** This UK-based site offers rentals in addition to home swaps. Listings include more than 60,000 homes in 160 countries and counting. Prices start at \$20 a month for the basic membership.

>> [lovehomeswap.com](http://lovehomeswap.com)





## Tips for Trouble-Free Swaps

- Keep the lines of communication open with your swapping partner. You'll both feel better if you've discussed all the details of the exchange in depth. Both sides should be clear about what they need to know about each other's home—certain areas that are off-limits, where to pick up the keys, etc. If you talk on the phone, reiterate the important points in a written message. That way, everyone will be on the same page.
- Take nice photos of your home (professional ones, if possible) that accurately represent its current state. After all, isn't that what you want from the listings you're viewing? Play up your home's assets, but always be honest about what people can expect.

- Don't go into an exchange lightly. Once you've decided to swap homes with someone else, plans are set in motion: plane tickets, admission to events, car rentals and so on. Unless you're stuck in an unavoidable circumstance, you should honor your commitment to swap.
- Check with your home insurance company to make sure your policy covers other people in your home.
- If you have any particularly important valuables, lock them up or store them with a trusted friend while you're gone.
- Leave a few travel tidbits for your guests. You may not be a concierge, but it's nice to have some brochures and maps handy for your out-of-towners to peruse. A couple of local recommendations that they can't find in guidebooks are likely to be appreciated. ■

