

We're retirees who live in a mountain foothills community in Southern Arizona next to the hot, dry Sonora Desert. Our home association's Olympic-sized pool is two minutes away, a supermarket and row of restaurants are five minutes away, and a large upscale resort hotel with an 18-hole championship golf course is just ten minutes up the street.



We travel frequently, and after tiring of paying \$300-\$500 per night for hotels in London, Paris, Shanghai, Vienna, Tokyo, Singapore, New York and other areas of the tourist-trap world, we decided to try house swapping. We knew our desert-situated home would appeal to senior vacationers who wanted to escape cold and snow in January and February, when our average daily temperature is 75 degrees. And they can have it without paying exorbitant hotel prices.

Our first "customers" was an older couple from Oxford, just up the Thames from London. Both were retired faculty members, and coincidentally, the prof-emeritus husband was booked to give a two-week lecture course at the university in our town. We were a bit reluctant to spend two February weeks in foggy, cold England, but couldn't resist the opportunity to roam around Oxford and London and attend their world-class theater (theatre?) offerings. Of course, saving nearly \$4,000 in hotel charges was also quite an incentive.

With the use of each other's houses, we also had cars available. After some hectic moments learning to drive on the wrong side of the road, we enjoyed the freedom of "motoring" along the lush, green English countryside. Meanwhile, our guests drove through the nearby desert, played rounds of golf at the resort and marveled at the huge saguaro cacti all around.

We're planning another house swap this year with a couple in Vienna, and look forward to trying our limited German language skills, while visiting the beautiful city on the Danube. We're also fans of Viennese pastry, and have enrolled in a one-week baking course while we're there. The Austrian couple speaks excellent English, and should have a great time in our warm desert town among the saguaro stands.

Would we recommend house swapping? Yes, if all conditions on both sides of the swap are OK.

You can do it without paying any fees if you arrange it with people you already know, or list your house with a college or university faculty organization. You can also insure safety and honesty by making swap arrangements through an accredited, fee-charging agency, such as www.homeexchange.com and www.brainstormrealestate.com/.

If you contact a home swap agency, make sure it has the reputation for doing thorough research on potential home swappers, assuring participants that the offers are legitimate, and the conditions of all listed homes are compatible to approved standards of condition.