



Q: We live in a high rise in downtown Los Angeles. It's a two-bedroom condo, just across the street from MacArthur Park, and ten minutes from Hollywood and Beverly Hills. This year, instead of paying high prices for hotels and restaurant food when we travel, we'd like to try swapping homes with another senior couple for several weeks. We'll mostly do our own cooking, with occasional visits to cafes, entertainment and other local features.

We haven't quite made up our minds about where we'd like to swap. High up on the list are New York (Broadway shows), London (museums, history), St. Petersburg (Russia's royal past) or San Francisco (Chinese restaurants). Maybe Rome, Venice or Paris to celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary. How do we get started?

A: Before you do anything, be sure to agree on several aspects, such as time of year, climate in swap home area, how long you want to stay, budget limits and of course, location, location, location. The safest way is to check first with your professional association, school, university, church, senior group or other major social organization where you or family members have been active.

They often have swap listings in their online newsletters, usually at no cost. Most offers they post are non-commercial and trustworthy, so you may not need to put out any money except for transportation and expenses when you're in the swapped-for residence.

Next, check with your hometown travel agency for swap listings, or search online travel agencies for their posts. There are other websites that specialize in swaps, such as destinationvillas.com. If you arrange your home exchange through any commercial agency, expect to pay a fee. Good luck in your search for a fun swap!