

# How to Travel on a Budget by Housesitting or Pet-Sitting

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It's no surprise that the cost of travel is rising. A report from travel insurance provider Squaremouth found that [travelers planned to spend nearly \\$10,000 on average](#) for their 2024 summer travels. This number, attributed to both the rising cost of travel and inflation, reflects an increase of 7% over 2023 summer travel spending and 14% over that of 2022.

To combat exorbitant airfare prices and other rising travel costs, travelers are learning how to travel on a budget when visiting other cities and countries. That's where platforms like HomeExchange, Workaway and Worldpackers come in. These companies offer ways for people to travel while providing housesitting or pet-sitting services or doing other work in exchange for a free place to stay. ***(It's important to note many countries view these services as work and therefore require a work visa, rather than a tourist visa. Be sure to research immigration laws for any countries you plan to visit.)***

The post-COVID rise of [digital nomads](#) has also contributed to these programs' popularity. Those who are looking to travel and work remotely can have their housing covered while providing housesitting or pet-sitting services.

While some programs draw young people wanting to travel during a gap year, others are popular with budget-conscious retirees. There are even some house swap programs that appeal to families looking to spend an extended period of time abroad.

# How to travel on a budget with house swapping, housesitting and pet-sitting programs

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## HomeExchange

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When Karilyn Owen was looking for someone to care for her cat while she traveled last summer, she turned to [HomeExchange](#). While she originally thought HomeExchange only worked on a direct exchange model, Owen learned that this was not the case. “I discovered that you do not have to ‘swap’ homes directly,” she says. “Rather, you can use points you earn to stay at other people’s homes for free.”

HomeExchange members pay a yearly fee of \$220 to post their homes for exchange. Once you’ve added your home and available dates, you can look for exchange options. These can be reciprocal exchanges, where families swap homes directly, or one-sided exchanges, where you are offered GuestPoints in exchange for letting someone stay in your home.

While Owen is off camping and backpacking with her son, she offers up her Los Angeles home and has lots of interest from those wanting to stay in this desirable location. This has allowed her to accumulate over 2,000 GuestPoints that she can then use for future stays on the platform. Owen and her son have used their HomeExchange points to stay in locations like Seattle, Big Bear and Mammoth, and she finds that last-minute bookings sometimes have more success than trying to plan out a stay months in advance.

A love of travel motivated HomeExchange super-users Jean and Michael to join the program. “We were looking for a more affordable option than staying in hotels or rental condominiums,” they share. “Although we are still tourists, we love the idea that we are living like a local in their community. And of course, having the extra space, plus cooking and laundry facilities, is a huge bonus! These cost savings add up to the opportunity for us to travel more often to more places in the world.”

While using the program over the last ten years, Jean and Michael have been part of 65 exchanges. They have stayed in homes in 15 countries on six different continents and have hosted people from around the world in their own home while they were traveling.

“We have met wonderful people from all over the world [who] have shared their lovely homes and welcomed us gladly—we still stay in touch with many of them,” they say. “We have had appreciative guests at our home [who] always cared for our home as if it were their own. And many have left thoughtful gifts that we cherish, including a beautiful drawing of our landscaping and birds.”

## Additional house swapping, housesitting and pet-sitting services

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While HomeExchange is one of the most popular programs, there are a number of other options for homeowners to connect with housesitters and pet-sitters. These programs may have smaller databases, but their fees are typically lower. They might also offer opportunities and different countries that other platforms don't.

- [MindMyHouse](#): This platform provides house- and pet-sitting services with an annual fee of \$29.
- [Nomador](#): Most of the housesitting opportunities that are available are located in France, though the platform is international. Nomador also offers a three-month Discovery option for around \$32, if you wish to try it out.
- [House Sitters America](#): This service is available in the United States only. Sitters pay \$49 per year to join the site, and they can choose to charge a pet-sitting fee if they wish. Homeowners can post an ad for free.
- [Housesit Match](#): This platform is focused on Europe, though other locations are available.

## How to travel on a budget with work exchange programs

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Travelers who are looking for a different experience beyond housesitting and pet-sitting can explore work exchange programs. Sometimes called “voluntourism,” these programs offer a collaborative exchange where the host provides lodging and other perks, like meals and access to transportation, in exchange for a limited amount of work done by the traveler.

Hosts look for workers who are interested in performing all sorts of tasks, from hospitality and housekeeping duties at hostels to gardening and harvesting assistance on farms. These work exchange programs provide a culturally immersive experience, as workers have time to explore the area when they are not working.

### Workaway

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“I remember working at a family vineyard in Italy through [Workaway](#),” says Nausheen Farishta, travel expert and founder of [Globe Gazers](#). “Every day was an adventure—picking grapes, learning how wine is made and eating delicious meals with the family. It was an amazing way to learn about Italian culture.”

Typical Workaway arrangements require around five hours of work per day in exchange for room and board, but experiences vary. Travelers also have the opportunity to connect with hosts before their stay to get all their questions addressed.

While these programs tend to appeal to college-aged people, they are open to travelers of all ages. “You might meet students on a gap year, digital nomads or retirees looking for adventure,” Farishta adds. “These programs are great for anyone who wants to travel without spending a lot of money.”

Workaway not only connects hosts with interested workers, but it also creates a community where travelers can connect at meetups and find others to travel with. You can enroll as an individual, or couples can join together and can even bring their kids along. You can also connect with a travel buddy to apply for Workaway positions together.

## **Worldpackers**

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[Worldpackers](#) touts itself as the “safest community for travel and volunteering,” and its users seem to agree. The program offers the [WP Safeguard](#) program, which helps travelers who have to leave a work exchange early find a new host. It also provides reimbursement for three to fourteen nights in a shared hostel if needed, depending on which Worldpackers plan level the traveler purchased.

Work experiences on Worldpackers aren't limited to traditional housekeeping and maintenance jobs. For instance, you can find positions where the host is looking for someone to build a website for their business and create social media content. Tour guides, yoga instructors and language teachers can also find a variety of experiences on Worldpackers.

## **Other work exchange programs**

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Workaway and Worldpackers are the most popular programs for work exchange, but you can find other programs with more specific focuses as well. [Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms](#) is one such platform that connects farmers with workers who share their passion for sustainable farming. [Hostel Jobs](#) lets workers post their profiles to connect with hostel managers who are looking for assistance. Additionally, [HelpX](#), [Global Work & Travel](#) and [HippoHELP](#) provide a variety of other work exchange opportunities.