

A man and two children are running barefoot through a lush green lawn. The man, on the left, is wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans. The girl in the middle is wearing a floral dress, and the boy on the right is wearing a striped t-shirt and blue jeans. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. In the background, there are green trees and a white house with a red roof. The sky is blue with some clouds. The image is framed by a large, semi-transparent white circle.

h·me  
exchange

# Your Guide to Your First HomeExchange Experience



# Congratulations!

You have booked your first exchange! Be ready for an enjoyable and relaxing vacation. You are about to have a fantastic and unique experience by planning the vacation you always dreamed of.

A first home exchange is always very special. The happiness of having been able to book the exchange is mixed with a little nervousness about everything going as well and as planned. We know. But we assure you that the feeling you get when you open the door at your first exchange home is unique: enjoy it!

HomeExchange recommends that you enjoy your trip's planning and preparation to the fullest. You are about to discover a different way of travelling: quiet, safe, and above all, catered to your needs. Talk to your exchange partner and enjoy a new kind of vacation.

 **Welcoming  
Sharing  
Respect  
Caring  
Generosity**

# 1. Communication with your exchange partner

Once the exchange is finalized, don't forget to continue communicating with your guest or host! Use the messaging system to address any questions or concerns you may have about the exchange, the destination... or whatever else is going through your head!

**Fluid and transparent communication is the key to a successful exchange.**

Whether you are a guest or a host (or both at the same time), we recommend that you maintain close communication and address everything that has to do with organizing and preparing the exchange. Here are some of the basics that we recommend:

## A. Basic Exchange Logistics.

What kind of basic information should you agree on before your exchange?

- Approximate arrival and departure times.
- How the keys are to be delivered upon your arrival.
- Where and with whom the keys are to be left at the end of the trip.

### Is there a chance you'll meet?

It's nice to meet in person! Maybe you'll meet at the airport, at home or somewhere in between, if the exchange is simultaneous.

Can't stay? No worries! Here are **some of the solutions** that other members have come up with:

- A family member or friend delivers the keys.
- Hide your keys somewhere near the front door and tell your guests.

- Prior shipment by mail/courier.
- Use some consignment service.
- Power to creativity!

### Are there certain instructions to follow at your exchange home?

Maybe you can send or receive a **Home Manual** with information about some things to take note of. You can also indicate some basic aspects of how the house is organized: where you can find certain things or where you will leave space for luggage.

#### • Leave the home as good as you found it.

It is important to be clear about whether or not your host has cleaning staff that is responsible for the same after the exchange or if, by default, you (as a guest) will be responsible for cleaning the house at the end of the exchange. In the event that cleaning staff must be paid, the host should have informed the guest of this before the finalisation of the exchange so that they can both agree on this additional payment.

• **Sheets and Towels.** It is also important to indicate what to do with towels and bedding: how and where they should be left when leaving the house. For example, an idea can be leaving an additional clean set of sheets on all the beds to be used, and ask your guests to put them on before their departure. This way when you come home if it's late you can fall into bed! When you have small children visiting, extra sheets are a must as you never know about accidents.

#### • Information in case of emergency.

Always indicate who to call in case of an unforeseen situation at the home.



## B. Build a Relationship with your Exchange Partner. Customize your Exchange.

As a guest or host, you may want to know your exchange family better. You could tell your host what plans you have, if you're traveling as a family, what you would like to visit, and could ask for recommendations about the area. They will give you the best suggestions! ;) Or, if you are a host, ask your guests what they would like to do. Maybe you can surprise them with some special suggestion.

You can use other communication tools, if they are more comfortable for you, like for example WhatsApp or... what do you think about the idea of organizing a video call? Through Skype (for example). This can be a lot of fun to have a first conversation. If you are traveling with children, your hosts' children would be delighted to meet yours! *Or If you have a facebook page for your family you can share with your guests.*

**Your exchange partner will not be a stranger, take the time to get to know them a little better.**

## C. Details Are Important.

In addition to basic logistics, it is also important to agree on other points, such as:

- Some chores that need to be done during your HomeExchange such as **watering the plants, picking up the mail, or taking care of a pet**. It's one of the advantages of a home exchange! The guests take care of their exchange house as if it were their own.

**If you travel with children, taking care of a pet can be fun. It can be a great opportunity for them to take new responsibilities.**

- **Basics in the pantry (salt, sugar, oil...), bathroom (toilet paper, some hygiene products) and ultimately throughout your entire house...** Are they available for your guests to use? You can agree with your guest or host on how to go about it. Many of our Members follow the norm of "use what you need, but please, replace it if you finish it or if you consume a large quantity of it".

- **Bicycles to ride in order to get to know the surroundings better; a scooter for the children; beach things; sports equipment (rackets, etc.), umbrellas at home if needed or a highchair for the baby... etc.** When we exchange houses, the generosity of our members makes everything much easier and more fun. Not just the house is exchanged, but the whole home!

- Are your exchange partners traveling with children? Prepare something special for them at your house! They will love it.

### Our Recommendation!

Is your guest arriving at your home late or after a long trip? Maybe you can leave some food in the fridge or a special dish prepared. Your guests would very much appreciate not having to worry about the basics or the first meal when I first arrive at my exchange house.

### Member Tips

A fun idea to help your guests with instructions for your home is to record short videos that you can then send to them directly via WhatsApp: how certain appliances work, what drawers they have available or where the bikes are. Videos can help you show them more easily!

## 2. Welcoming with HomeExchange

The first time we exchange homes, we are often surprised by the simple gesture of being welcomed, which is quite unusual nowadays. As there is no monetary exchange between the Members, hospitality is really experienced in its purest state: a human experience that is always different and is nourished by the small details that turn the stay into an unforgettable memory.

**Creating a bond with our guests, receiving them as if they were friends or family just for the pleasure of making them feel at home is part of the HomeExchange philosophy.**

At HomeExchange, Members give their best welcome to make their guests feel at home from the start.

Here are some tips and ideas to welcome your guests, but of course... power to creativity!

- A letter or a welcome message.
  - A welcome gift: some local specialty (a good wine, some typical product) or a homemade or personalized gift that you think they or their children (if they have any) may like.
  - Special welcome decorations. A kind message on a blackboard or wall or a note on the fridge will make you feel very welcome.
  - A Home Manual.
  - Tourist information for the area, a practical map, and a list of your best recommendations (restaurants, preferred activities) and perhaps practical information (nearby supermarkets, etc.).
- Tip:** to make the stay easier you can leave them information about public transportation in the city.

- You can leave a notebook out as a GuestBook or a Signature Book, where your guests can leave you a farewell or thank you note and tell you how their stay in your city was. It will be a precious memory for you, and they'll also enjoy reading other experiences from previous guests (they can even get good ideas from them!).

As HomeExchangers, we like to immerse ourselves in the local culture, so maybe if the exchange allows for it, you can introduce your neighbors or a relative and share a dinner or activity of some sort with your guests. You will love spending a little time to get to know them better and who knows, you may end up meeting some great new friends.

"During our end of the year exchange in Finland, we maintained contact with several HomeExchange families. Since temperatures are not so extreme in Spain (in Finland it can go down to -40°F), one of them left thermal and snow clothes for the girls, and thermal coats and shoes for us adults."



**Lorena, Spain**  
18 exchanges

"During our exchange in Slovenia, our hosts had prepared a gymkhana to welcome my kids, with sweets and hidden toys. They loved it! And we were deeply grateful."



**Pilar, Spain**  
20 exchanges

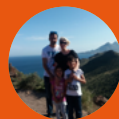
### 3. When You Are a Guest

Being a guest involves enjoying the generosity and hospitality of another Home-Exchange Community Member at a given time. **Communication is the key in the relationship with your host, so remember to review all the points that we have indicated above in this Guide to make sure** that everything is clear.

Here are some of the most important tips for you on your next exchange:

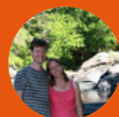
- **R-E-S-P-E-C-T.** Whether you exchange reciprocally or travel with GuestPoints, remember that respect is the key point in our community. Leave and treat your exchange house as if it were yours. Empathy is key to the entire HomeExchange process.
- **Communicate any doubts to your host,** as well as any personal needs and concerns you may have. Your host will be happy to help you.
- **Be thoughtful.** Maybe you can bring some typical present from your area or city to your host to thank them for their hospitality. In addition, leaving a farewell and thank you note before your departure will make your host very happy.
- **Make sure you follow all the instructions your host has given you,** both when you arrive at and depart from the house. Read the Home Manual that your host has provided carefully.
- **Did any unforeseen problems arise during the exchange?** Do not hesitate to contact your host.

"In addition to advertising several restaurants, places that deliver food, a couple of city maps, a book about the area etc... we've made a video explaining the operation of electrical appliances (the stove, the air conditioning, etc...) and we send them to you along with the house's location via WhatsApp a few days before the exchange."



**M.Ángeles, Spain**  
14 exchanges

"When we meet our guests, we always create wonderful memories! And otherwise we love the surprises when we arrive, whether at home or on the way home. Sometimes the simplest thing makes a big difference: a homemade soup just for us, for example, during our last exchange."



**Sophie, France**  
26 exchanges

"We just met our next exchange family on Skype, which is what we've customarily done. I am very happy to involve my children in this exchange adventure, which helps me introduce values such as sharing, valuing experiences more than material things, respect for others, the importance of languages, and above all, appreciating differences."



**Lorena, Spain**  
18 exchanges

## 4. When You Are a Host

### A. Welcoming.

When your guests arrive at your home, you want them to be as comfortable as possible. Make them feel at home from the time they walk in the door. You may prepare your house very carefully and, in addition, think about what welcome gift you're going to leave (perhaps a local bottle of wine, a typical product, etc.)

You already know that welcoming is the most characteristic feature of all Home-Exchangers, so... let's go!

### B. How to make your Home Manual.

Now, you also want to prepare a manual for your house, so that it is easy for your guests to adapt to it and also for them to get to know those tricks that should be taken into account to ensure everyone's happiness. Where you keep things; what can they use, some trick to open and close the windows and keep the house cooler; or that knob that doesn't open well and that tap that doesn't turn off all the way.

**Once made, you should print it and leave a copy of the manual at home. You can also send it to your exchange partners in advance via email, so they can read it calmly before arriving.**

What should you include in your home manual?

#### 1. Briefly introduce yourself and your family.

There's no better way to give a warm welcome than showing the face of the family behind the house. Even if they've already seen your profile on the HomeExchange website, it is best that the first thing your guests see in the Guide when they open

it is you: a nice picture of your family. If you add a welcome phrase and a brief introduction of each member of the family, that would be magnificent!

#### 2. How to get to your house.

If you send them the guide in advance it would be very useful to include a description of how to access your street, living complex, or portal. Maybe a Google Maps map would be a good thing to add, and a detailed description of how to access the portal (possible blocks, access codes, etc.), to make the arrival as smooth as possible.

Explain how to access the garage well, if there is one. Where they can park and how to access this area is vital, so that your guests don't feel lost on arrival.

#### 3. Front Door.

It is worth adding a section about the door, especially if there is something to take into account upon entering: what lock must be opened first, if there is any alarm to deactivate after opening it etc.

#### 4. A House Tour.

If you take a tour of each room, you can mention all the details. Imagine giving your guests a real tour, what would you say? Perhaps you can add a general description of where certain "general" elements are found such as where to switch the water on, air conditioning / heating, etc. and then go on a tour of all the rooms.

In the living room, maybe you can mention how to work the TV, the wifi password, if there is something in a drawer that you think may be useful, books that you like that you invite them to read, or some trick of operation (perhaps an awning to lower some time during the day, some window that doesn't close, etc.). **Many of our members like to leave post it notes on drawers and furniture indicating what can be found in each one.**

In the kitchen, you can give some instructions for the operation of a particular appliance, or where you keep some food. It is also good to indicate whether or not there is food available in the fridge or where those items that you consider most important (coffee maker, toaster, etc.) are stored. It is also interesting to explain how garbage is recycled (and where it should be disposed).

In the bedrooms and bathrooms, it is important to indicate where the clean sheets and towels are stored just in case. You can indicate if you left space in a closet, or if there is a drawer for them to use. Also, if there is any part of the house that you don't want them to enter, do not be afraid to let them know. Communication is the key to a successful exchange.

If you have bikes that they can use in your garden, maybe you can give them some instructions on where to find the padlock, the bike pump, the tool box, etc. Everything you can think of!

### 5. What can your guests do for you?

Do you want the plants to be watered, the fruit and vegetables to be picked, or your cat to be fed? Leave them all the instructions! How often they should water the plants and any precautions to be taken; where the mailbox is located and where to leave the mail they pick up; where to find the cat food, where to leave it, and how often.

Do you have a garden or patio? Tell them if there's something they should keep in mind (how to turn on the grill, how to use the awning, etc). Or maybe they would like to try the delicious apples or tomatoes growing in the garden. They would love to pick them!

### 6. What happens after the exchange?

It is very important to remember how you want things to be done at the end of the exchange: whether or not you should

"I have a kind of guide with tourist recommendations, restaurants, and attractions, as well as a box full of tourist brochures of the whole area. I send the house guide and the tourist guide by email, in case they have any questions before their arrival."



**Victoria, France**  
27 exchanges

"As my home is pet friendly, I have a section in my guide book that lists all the dog friendly parks, beaches, and trails near my home. Also some dog friendly restaurants."



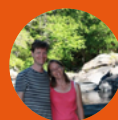
**Jerri, USA**  
64 exchanges

"During our exchange with a young family from Slovenia, we were introduced to the family's little sister, who was our age (25 years old) and it was great! We got along very well and went out with her and her friends for a drink or dinner several times."



**Roser, Spain**  
42 exchanges

"For key-exchanging, many families have key boxes with codes. It really makes things easier. No need for neighbors or key mailing. For everything else, communicate openly and agree on what you think is important. It's the basis of a successful exchange."



**Sophie, France**  
26 exchanges



wash used sheets and towels, whether or not you should clean (is someone going to do the cleaning?), Where to leave the keys before your departure, etc. Don't be afraid to communicate everything you want or don't want. **Transparency and expectations management is key to a successful exchange and will ensure everyone's happiness.**

### 7. Emergency Contacts.

A good list of your family's/friends' contact information to go to in case of an emergency as well as certain services in your city (the nearest hospital or medical center, police etc.). It is usually a good idea to leave this on hand in the guide.

## C. How to prepare a guide to your area or city for your guests.

One of the many advantages of traveling via HomeExchange is the possibility of living like a local. It is a good idea to give the exchange family a city guide with first-hand information and help them learn about their travel destination in a more authentic way. Because after all... nobody knows your city better than you!

Some of our tips:

- Don't include what is already in the tourist guides (it is very likely that they have already read them). Instead, explain what **YOUR favorite activities** are in your city.
- Include a range of restaurants, especially your favorite ones, from the cheapest to the most special ones for a nice dinner (and clearly indicate the prices). You can also leave the numbers of places that deliver that you enjoy ordering from when you don't feel like leaving the house.
- Leave a list of the local stores and supermarkets that you usually go to. If the store that is a few miles away offers better

"Here I leave a set of sheets and towels and indicate where to find extras just in case. Fridge/ food... there is a lot to talk about. Depending on the expected arrival times, I leave at least enough food for my guests to prepare a first meal, or more! "



**Florent, France**  
31 exchanges

"This guide will be very helpful, wonderful information shared by everyone."



**Jim, USA**  
11 exchanges

"One of the things I like about home exchange is that you have to learn about or do things that aren't necessarily part of your daily life. For example, during our exchange near Strasbourg, we had 2 cute cats to look after as well as a beautiful garden."



**Myriam, Spain**  
18 exchanges

"I agree that a Lock box with a code is a safe way to transfer keys. I also tell the arriving family to put the keys back in the lock box. That way, if something happens with the keys the family is carrying, they can still get into the house. Have extra keys for the visiting family inside the house."



**Jim, USA**  
11 exchanges

quality products than the one directly across the street, the family might appreciate knowing this information (as well as how to get there).

- Customize your recommendations if you can. If your exchange family likes hiking, they would surely love it if you leave a map of roads and paths in the area.
- Regarding your city's activities and museums, leave information about free admission days and upcoming exhibitions.
- If your guests come by car, it may be useful for them to know about strategic parking areas in the city.
- If you live in the outskirts of the city, indicate the best way to get to the center. If there is traffic on the highway at peak times, what is your secret shortcut? The family will appreciate not having to waste time stuck in traffic and to be able to dedicate themselves to enjoying the activities offered by the city.

In short, think about what kind of information you would like to receive, and don't hesitate! Include it!

## D. How to prepare your house for your guests.

One of the most exciting and rewarding parts of a HomeExchange trip is welcoming your new guests. Here are some tips and ideas on how to ready your house for your guests.

- **Clean and organize.** Make sure you organize your house once (or even twice) before your exchange guests arrive. Vacuum, dust, and clean the bathroom thoroughly. Clean the refrigerator, empty the garbage and recycling bins, change the sheets, and leave clean towels folded on top of the bed. And in case of doubt, you can always ask yourself: if it weren't your house, would you like to be here?

"I just leave my keys under the mat and ask departing guests to do the same."



**Jerri, USA**  
64 exchanges

"We leave the keys at the airport consignment and vice versa. Or a family member waits for the guests, gives them the keys, and then brings them home."



**Eva, Spain**  
8 exchanges

"I print out a custom 'Cheat Sheet' which I tape to the microwave for every exchange. In one place it reminds my guests of: trash day, pool service day, gardener in the backyard day, please water plants day, etc."



**Jerri, USA**  
64 exchanges

"I have prepared a manual for exchanges with everything related to the house, its operation, appliances, who to call if anything breaks down, there are accidents, or other problems. I also include the locations and telephone numbers of stores, banks, pharmacies, hospitals, shopping and leisure areas, the telephone number of a family member or friend of mine in case there is an emergency that they can't solve, and the house's GPS location (Google Maps) and how to get there from different directions (north, south ...)"



**Fernando, Spain**  
12 exchanges



How would you like to find your exchange house?

**Leave a mop in the kitchen and a new bar of soap in the bathroom.**

- **Make space for your guests.** Make sure your guests will have room for their suitcases and clothes. Leave space in the cupboards, empty some drawers, leave some hangers unoccupied, and also leave some room in the kitchen. You can also tell them which items can change places and which ones should not be moved.

**If you do not have extra space for your guests, a good solution may be to buy a folding clothes rack for guests.**

- **Make sure that there are clean sheets and towels...** at least enough for your guests.
- **Stock up on basic products** such as toilet paper, soap, or bath gel and cleaning products.
- Leave your Home Manual or a few brief instructions in writing, as well as the Guide to your area that you have prepared for your guests.

## Ready for your guests to come?

Do you still have any questions that you would like to ask? Don't hesitate to contact our [Happiness Team](#) who would be happy to answer your questions.

And if you want to be in contact with other Members to exchange tips, tricks, and experiences, you have the option of joining the Facebook Groups for Optimal Members (in [English](#), [French](#), and [Spanish](#)) as well as the [International Facebook Group](#) (open to all Essential and Optimal Members).

## Member Tips

How about including all this information attached to a Google Map of your area? You can update it periodically with your new discoveries and it is very easy to send to your guests (just share the link). They will love checking it out!

"Housekeeping depends on your communication with your hosts. At least restore the house to the state in which you found it. You'll quickly understand that not everyone has the same perception of a household... Don't empty the cabinets, but do make room for your guests to settle! The longer the stay, the more space they will need. Precious objects under lock and key? Up to you. In 20 exchanges I only once was prohibited from accessing a room. It all depends on the value of your items, whether it's sentimental or financial! My daughter is very fond of her musical instruments, we leave them out, but we specify that they are not toys..."



**Florent, France**  
31 exchanges

"We take out a set of sheets and towels and let our guests know where the others can be found. We have plenty of them so if people need them, I don't mind that they use them as long as I only have one set to wash."



**Joanna, Spain**  
20 exchanges