

Travel

Residence inn

Choose your home's adventure: Swap your apartment for one abroad, or sublet it for cash while on vacation. By Helen Yun

Housing exchanges

Your kindergarten teacher was wrong. Strangers aren't always dangerous, especially if they allow you to stay in their beachfront manses. Actually, NYC educator David Ostroff originated the concept of home exchanges in the '50s by creating a catalog of contact information for cash-poor but time-off-rich teachers around the country. Today you can surf more than 60 online housing-swap directories from over a dozen countries and contact interested parties directly. And because these sites are regulated by companies, which often charge a yearly fee (from \$25 to \$1,496), they're a safer alternative to Craigslist.

Chelsea resident Nicole Feist, who has honeymooned in a 16th-century canal house in Amsterdam's red-light district and partied in a converted monastery on the outskirts of Brussels, explains that she "got to see all these different cities in Europe without spending a nickel on lodging."

A 30-time veteran of residence harters, Feist receives five offers a day. "People are dying to come to New York!" and has even dedicated a blog, homeexchanger.blogspot.com, to her travels. She recommends London-based homebase-hols.com for folks who want to holiday in the U.K., and multinational homeexchange.com for domestic and international trips. The latter, which was featured in last year's rom-com *The Holiday*, draws from a multitude of country-specific sister sites—including the French-language trocmaison.com—and offers 15,000 listings. Though Feist possesses a massive 1,700-square-foot three-bedroom co-op, studio dwellers shouldn't worry: "The average NYC hotel room is 100 square feet and costs \$200 a day. Your place is still going to be more comfortable," she says.

For seasoned Upper East Side exchangers Cynthia and Hiram Lewis, global firms like intervac.com and [Homelink \(homelink.org\)](http://homelink.org)—both founded in 1963—provide a means for the retired couple to live like locals in Paris, Rome and Acapulco. "It's like playing house," says Cynthia of the conveniences of having your own kitchen and, often, use of a laundry room and car. Though many folks may worry about living in someone else's quarters and having an outsider in their own, the Lewises—who own a two-bedroom



How to: Prep your apartment for guests

- 1 Clear at least a foot in your closet, empty a drawer and provide an area in your medicine cabinet for toiletries.
- 2 Though you might live on takeout, make sure all major appliances are working. Stock up on flour, oil, sugar, coffee and salt, and provide pots, pans and dishware.
- 3 Less-than-pristine apartments are a major gripe and will sully your reputation on sublet services. Hire a professional, and leave plenty of clean towels and linens.
- 4 Most of the people we talked to don't lock up valuables, but it never hurts to take precautions: Stow away precious or breakable items in a fireproof safe (safetyfile.com). Also, arrange with a friend or neighbor to be an emergency contact.
- 5 Leave a letter stating that you allow the other party to reside in your home. Also, leave numbers for a nearby hospital. NYC guides and maps are also helpful for visitors. —HY

co-op in the 70s—dispel the myth that you're sharing intimate space with a stranger: "You talk a lot and find out about their kids, what they do, and get a sense of them that way," says Hiram. In essence, swapping "is a system based on trust," according to Carnegie Hall house manager Kimo Gerald, who often escapes to Paris via 12-year-old network ihom.com. A renter of a one-bedroom near Riverside Park, Gerald has never experienced theft. In fact, after eight years, his biggest gripe is hardly criminal: "People play with my remotes—once my TV would turn on every Monday at 10pm."

As for the rigmarole of exchanging keys and setting ground rules for your apartment, both Gerald and Feist suggest matting keys to the other party and leaving a folder containing appliance manuals, directions to nearby cleaners and grocery stores, and, if so desired, instructions for picking up mail and caring for pets. When you return, you might even find unexpected presents (and leftover liqueur and the like). Feist swapped homes with a New Orleans couple who "left a note with a \$100 gift certificate. And the house was impeccably clean."

Short-term sublets

If you'd rather get paid while surfing

in Costa Rica than shell out cash to travel, renting your sliver of real estate while you're away can be extremely lucrative. "I make \$25,000 a year through my apartment," says actor, singer and voice coach Paul Lincoln, who loans out his 700-square-foot Hell's Kitchen abode 60 to 80 days annually through sublet service [New York Habitat \(nyhabitat.com\)](http://NewYorkHabitat.com). "A lot of my gigs are out of town and don't pay much, so this is my income when I'm not here."

Though a drinking glass occasionally gets broken, companies like New York Habitat generally attract less flaky and more fetching users than free sites. "They tend to send me very beautiful couples from France. It's like

a modeling agency," explains Lincoln.

Another temporary lodgings service for Euros in NYC is affordablenewyorkcity.com. Though the business excludes boroughs outside of Manhattan and requires a five-night minimum stay, it breeds repeat visitors (ka-ching!), says Soho artist Chris Cairns.

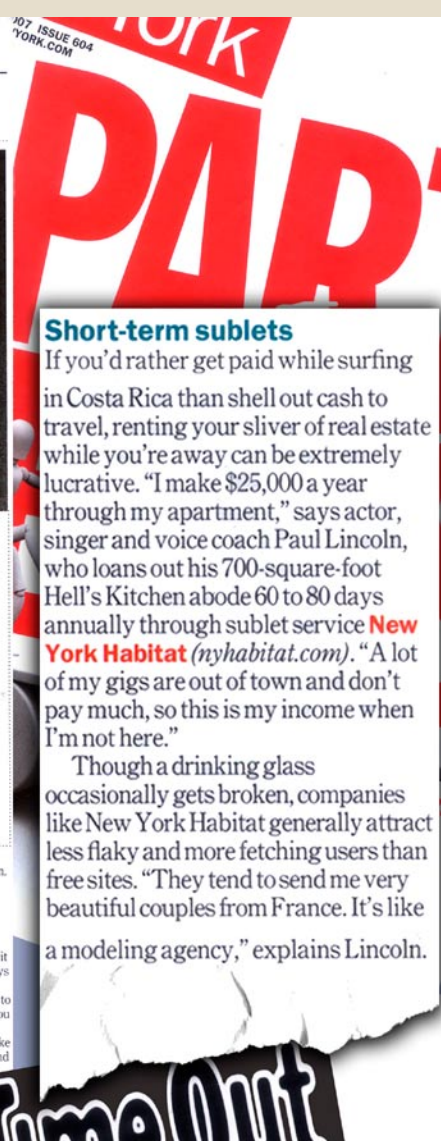
For Lincoln, it's almost insane not to take advantage of an empty nest: "You definitely have to leverage your real estate in Manhattan," he says. "It's like a gold mine of untapped reserves. And it costs us so much anyway."

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