



# 10 Insider Tips for Free (or Almost Free) Travel

By Susanne Pacher  
Publisher of [www.travelandtransitions.com](http://www.travelandtransitions.com)  
"Life is a Journey – Explore New Horizons"

As a passionate traveller with a limited budget and as the publisher of a website about unconventional travel, I have spent many years researching and practicing ways of cutting down on travel costs and here are some of the ideas that have helped me reduce my travel expenses.

Here are 10 great ways that will give you free travel or travel at much reduced rates.

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I wish you good luck with your travel planning and hope you save lots of money on your next trip.

Happy travels,

Susanne Pacher  
Publisher, [www.travelandtransitions.com](http://www.travelandtransitions.com)  
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## 1) Hospitality Exchanges

This free travel concept connects travelers with individuals who are willing to host a stranger, generally for one to three days, in their private homes. Accommodation will completely depend on the host, it may be as simple as a pull-out couch or inflatable mattress in a living room, or it may be as fancy as a private room with a private bathroom.

Hospitality exchanges can usually be arranged on short notice, in some cases even same day. There are several directories that specialize in hospitality exchanges and most of them are free.

Some people arrange back-to-back hospitality exchanges where they spend several days in a row without paying for accommodation.

It is important to keep in mind that you will be staying in a private home and that you must respect the rules of the household. You will also be expected to help out with small chores around the house or pitch in with some of the cost. Many hosts will also show their guest around in their community.

Some hospitality exchange organizations serve special interest groups such as teachers, seniors, gays and lesbians and other specialized groups. The major hospitality exchange organizations include:

[www.globalfreeloaders.com](http://www.globalfreeloaders.com)

[www.hospitalityclub.org](http://www.hospitalityclub.org)

[www.couchsurfing.com](http://www.couchsurfing.com)

[www.hospex.net](http://www.hospex.net)

[www.servas.org](http://www.servas.org)

## 2) Home Exchanges

This free travel concept involves two people in different locations who exchange each other's homes at no cost. In many cases an exchange of cars is involved in the arrangement. Home exchange participants are expected to treat each other's property with respect and care. Usually chores like pet care, lawn care and basic home maintenance go hand in hand with a home exchange.

Home exchanges can be simultaneous where both parties travel to one another's home at the same time. Often they do not take place at the same time, particularly if one of the parties involved has a vacation home or a second home that can be traded in the exchange.

The majority of home exchanges are arranged through a listing service. Both participants in a home exchange are usually interested in finding out some basic information about the potential home exchange partner, such as:

- Contact information
- Location
- Desired exchange dates and availability
- A description of the home
- Information on whether cars will be exchanged
- Local neighbourhood information, things to do and see, public transit
- Specific requirements (wheelchair accessibility, non-smoking, etc.)

Usually these home exchange listing directories will feature photos of the properties in question. Most directories charge a reasonably small yearly membership fee. Some home exchange sites will allow you to send free queries through their email system to the listing owners, giving you access to their properties without having to pay a membership fee. Properties can be anything from a one bedroom rental apartment to a multi-bedroom mansion.

Here is a listing of the most well-known home exchange organizations:

[www.homeexchange.com](http://www.homeexchange.com)  
[www.intervacusa.com](http://www.intervacusa.com)  
[www.homelink.org](http://www.homelink.org)  
[www.exchangehomes.com](http://www.exchangehomes.com)  
[www.tradecondos.com](http://www.tradecondos.com)  
[www.homeforexchange.com](http://www.homeforexchange.com)  
[www.thevacationexchange.com](http://www.thevacationexchange.com)

### 3) Housesitting / Caretaking:

This free travel concept involves rent-free living as a property caretaker in a wide variety of locations. The type of properties can be very diverse and may include mansions, large estates, farms, ranches, vacation homes, hunting and fishing lodges, retreats and a wide variety of other types of lodgings.

The caretaking profession includes positions such as housesitters, ranch sitters, Bed & Breakfast and Innsitters, property managers, Estate Managers, and hosts at resorts and campgrounds.

In most cases homeowners get to advertise their housesitting assignments for free while the caretakers will need to pay a membership to get access to the listings.

Depending on the home and the property owner, rent-free living assignments may be available for singles, couples and families. Housesitting assignments can range anywhere from a few days to several months.

Homeowners generally expect their caretakers to handle the following:

- Standard home care, pet care, lawn care
- Ensuring the safety and security of the property at all times
- Forwarding mail, faxes or important documents

[www.caretaker.org](http://www.caretaker.org) (\$29.95 newsletter subscription)  
<http://housesitter.ca/>

Here is a useful interview about the topic of care-taking:  
<http://www.travelandtransitions.com/interviews/caretaking.htm>

#### **4) Bed and Breakfasts, Rentals from the Owner**

In some countries, bed and breakfasts can provide a great opportunity for low-cost accommodations. Countries such as England and Ireland have a long tradition of bed and breakfast hosting, and in Canada you can also find some reasonably priced bed and breakfasts while a bed and breakfast in the United States is usually more upscale and expensive.

Different parts of Europe will offer accommodation in private houses for very reasonable rates (they may be called “gites” in France, “Pension” or “Frühstückspension” or “Zimmer” in German or “sobe” in Slovenia, but they will hook you up with a local family that has a room for rent that is way less expensive than a traditional hotel). Quite often farm stays are available too and in places like Switzerland you can even sleep inexpensively in the stables on the hay...

Recent additions on the accommodation scene include websites such as [www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com) and [www.vrbo.com](http://www.vrbo.com) that allow you to book rooms or even entire apartments and houses directly from the owner, often at very reasonable prices.

<http://www.bedandbreakfast.com/>

<http://www.bedandbreakfast.com/>

<http://www.bbcanada.com/>

<http://www.bedandbreakfast.eu/bed-and-breakfast/>

<http://en.gites-de-france.com/>

<http://www.pension.de/index-pc.html>

<http://www.educatorstravel.com/>

<https://www.airbnb.com/>

<http://www.vrbo.com/>

## 5) Cheap or Free Airfare and other Transport Options

### **Frequent Flyers Programs:**

Most airlines offer frequent flyer programs and there are also separate loyalty rewards companies that allow you to collect frequent flyer miles or loyalty points at different retailers and enable you to redeem these miles with different airlines. Flights might not be completely free of charge as these frequent flyer programs may charge you taxes, airport security fees and various fees and surcharges. Many of these loyalty programs are also offering merchandise rewards and other benefits (e.g. airline upgrades, airport lounge access and priority bookings) in addition to traditional air travel.

Here is a comprehensive list of frequent flyer programs by continent:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_frequent\\_flyer\\_programs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_frequent_flyer_programs)

Here is a list of loyalty reward programs that are not tied to specific airlines and may offer benefits other than air travel:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loyalty\\_program](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loyalty_program)

### **Low-Cost Airlines:**

You might not be able to fly for free with them, but some airlines offer very low rates on their regular routes. Please be aware that these airlines offer no-frills service and will probably charge you extra for meals, luggage, blankets, headphones and other amenities. Here is a comprehensive list of low-cost airlines:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_low-cost\\_airlines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_low-cost_airlines)

### **Car Pooling or Ride Sharing:**

This low-cost transportation option allows you to link up and car pool with people that are going to your desired destination. The added benefit of car pooling is the reduced carbon footprint that is achieved by two or more people sharing a ride. Here is a list of ride share companies in different locations that may help you connect with other people who want to share a journey.

<http://www.carpooling.com/us/>  
<http://www.erideshare.com/>  
<http://www.carpoolworld.com/>  
<http://www.pickuppal.com/pup/intro.html>  
<http://findcarpool.ca/>  
<http://www.carpoolglobal.com/>

### **Inexpensive Bus Tickets:**

Bus transportation can sometimes be purchased at very reasonable rates. If the conditions are absolutely perfect, you might even be able to travel for \$1 for a bus trip. Some bus companies also sell inexpensive travel packages in different locations.

<http://www.megabus.com/>  
<http://www.cheapbustickets.org/>  
<http://www.chinatown-bus.org/>  
<https://www.boltbus.com/>  
<http://www.eurolines.com/en/>  
<http://www.busabout.com/>  
<http://www.eurocheapo.com/bus/buslines.php>

## 6) Working Abroad

### Teach English as a Second Language

Opportunities abound for teaching English in many countries, particularly in Western and Eastern Europe, Asia, the Americas and Africa. Depending on the location, opportunities may exist in the public school system, with NGOs or with private language schools. Issues: culture shock, exploitation. Different TEFL organizations offer different certification levels, and quite often a minimum of 100 hours of course work plus a practicum of 20 hours are required to graduate. Please keep in mind that not every country or organization requires certification, but your options do increase if you complete a certificate or diploma in teaching English as a foreign language.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teaching\\_English\\_as\\_a\\_foreign\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teaching_English_as_a_foreign_language)

[www.teflcourse.com](http://www.teflcourse.com)

[www.globaltesol.com](http://www.globaltesol.com)

<http://www.tesl.ca/>

### Foreign tourism opportunities: Work on a cruise ship/ in a beach resort / as a tour guide / crewing a yacht

Cruise ship jobs cover a wide range of occupations, but please do keep in mind that despite the perceived glamour that the cruise industry projects to its customers, working on a cruise ship is not a holiday and often entails long work hours and significant responsibility. Here are some of the jobs that are in demand by the cruise ship industry:

- deck and engine jobs, electricians, engineers, other technical experts
- services (photography, retail, florists, security, etc.)
- food service (waiters/waitresses, bartenders, chefs, bakers, butchers etc.)
- housekeeping (cabin stewards, hotel managers, cleaners etc.)
- office jobs (administration, marketing, data input, receptionists, etc.)
- personal care (beauticians, massage therapists, doctors, nurses, etc.)
- entertainment and sports (hosts/ hostesses, cruise directors, disc jockeys, musicians, dancers, singers, excursion staff, casino staff, lifeguards, fitness instructors etc.)

Here is a list of websites that provide job listings for the cruise industry:

<http://www.cruisejobfinder.com/>  
<http://www.cruiselinesjobs.com/>  
<http://www.allcruisejobs.com/>  
<http://www.cruiseplacement.com/>

### **Au pair**

Distinction between nannies and au pairs is quite fluid. Domestic assistant who works for and lives with a host family. Usually, some childcare as well as housework. Small monetary allowance. Au pair: age range is usually late teens to late 20s, a young person from another country seeking cultural exchange. Nannies generally perform child care as a career and are residents of the same country where they work.

<http://www.web-aupair.net/en/>  
<http://www.greataupair.com/>  
<http://www.aupair-world.net/>  
<http://www.newaupair.com/>  
<http://www.easyaupair.com/>  
[www.canadiannanny.ca](http://www.canadiannanny.ca)

### **Other Jobs**

There are a variety of websites available for job openings in other countries. Please check visa and immigration restrictions before accepting any job offers.

<http://www.overseasjobs.com/>  
<http://jobs.goabroad.com/>  
[http://www.swap.ca/out\\_eng/index.aspx](http://www.swap.ca/out_eng/index.aspx)

## 7) Volunteering Abroad

“Voluntourism” has become a big buzzword in the tourism industry, and there are many companies out there that offer you volunteer vacations, but often at rather steep prices. Here are some organizations that offer volunteering opportunities with all expenses paid, as well as modest stipends. Opportunities are mostly focussed on Africa, Asia and South America and some are geared towards volunteers with specific backgrounds, e.g. business, finance, information technology, arts, etc.

### **Total Free Volunteer Programs:**

Long term:

Peace Corp: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/>

Volunteers for Prosperity <http://www.volunteersforprosperity.gov/>

United Nations Volunteers <http://www.unv.org/>

ArtCorps <http://www.artcorp.org/>

Voluntary Service Overseas <http://www.vso.org.uk/>

Short term:

Geekcorps <http://www.iesc.org/geekcorps>

Winrock International <http://www.winrock.org/>

ACDI/VOCA <http://www.acdivoca.org/>

International Executive Service Corps <http://www.iesc.org/>

Financial Services Volunteer Corps <http://www.fsvc.org/>

### **Programs with Small Costs:**

These programs mostly entail free room and board in exchange for providing labour to the organization. Usually, volunteers have to pay their own transportation costs to get to the location and sometimes there is also a registration fee involved.

Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF - <http://www.woofinternational.org/>)

Volunteers for Peace <http://www.vfp.org/>

SCI-International Voluntary Service USA <http://www.sci-ivs.org/new/>

## 8) Organize Group Tours and Cruises

Tour and cruise companies love it when individuals organize a large group and they will often reward these people with free travel. Quite often, bringing 15 to 25 individuals on board will mean one free trip for the organizer. Some organizations may only require as few as 6 people for the group leader to travel for free.

<http://www.gadventures.com/travel-for-free/>

<http://www.cruisemates.com/articles/consumer/Group-Cruises.cfm#axzz2Bkwgbsrw>

<http://www.enchantingireland.com/Ireland-Tours/Ireland-Group-Travel.aspx>

<http://www.spainadventures.com/more-information/organize-a-spain-tour/>

[http://www.ststravel.com/sell\\_trips/group\\_organizers.php](http://www.ststravel.com/sell_trips/group_organizers.php)

<http://www.passports.com/GroupLeaders/Benefits.cfm>

### Other Creative Ways to Travel for Free

<http://www.howtotraveltheworldforfree.com/>

<http://www.vagabondish.com/8-tools-travel-long-term-live-rent-free/>

## 9) Contests

A wide variety of businesses use contests to promote their products and services. Travel prizes are a very popular prize giveaway. There is a wide variety of contests out there, some can be entered simply by entering your email address, others are photo contests, others again are story contests.

Some travel magazines feature a “Where are you” contest. Often retailers, resort and tourism organizations will also sponsor contests. Even regular flyers and advertisements in local newspapers can be great sources for contest leads.

Some popular contest websites can be found at the following links:

<http://www.contestalley.com/>  
<http://www.contesthound.com/>  
<http://www.contestlistings.com/>  
<http://www.online-sweepstakes.com/>  
<http://www.contestcanada.net/>  
<http://travelcontest.travelalerts.ca/>

Keep in mind that the more contests you enter the bigger chance you have.

For additional contests simply do a search on the Web for the key phrase: “travel contest(s)”.

## 10) Become a Travel Writer / Photographer

Travel writing is an excellent way to reduce travel costs but do keep in mind it also entails a significant amount of skill and work. You can either start your own website, which means creating lots of content, getting involved with traffic building and search engine optimization and other ways to promote and market your website. Or you can write for other online and print publications. The “Travelwriter Marketletter” will provide you with a number of travel publications that are willing to pay for articles on specific topics.

The basic process is as follows: Do research about publications that might be interested in publishing your piece. Read some of their other articles to find out what kind of style and tone they prefer. At the beginning it makes sense to approach smaller publications since you will have a higher likelihood of getting an assignment.

As a novice writer you will find it easier to give your articles away for free at the beginning. Once you have identified relevant publications, send a letter of introduction to editors of relevant travel publications. Explain the unique perspective of the article you are planning to write. Your objective is to obtain an assignment letter that you will bring along on your trip. This assignment letter can now get you discounted or even complimentary accommodation, airfare, tours, admission to various local attractions, museums, etc.

Here are some excellent resources on how to become a travel writer:

[http://www.writing.org/html/a\\_travel\\_writing\\_1.htm](http://www.writing.org/html/a_travel_writing_1.htm)  
[http://www.eurotrip.com/preparation\\_and\\_packing/travel\\_writing.html#Publish](http://www.eurotrip.com/preparation_and_packing/travel_writing.html#Publish)  
<http://main.travelwriters.com/>  
<http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/aug98/philcox.htm>  
<http://www.thetravelwriterslife.com/>

Have fun applying some of the strategies mentioned in this ebook to reduce your travel costs.

Drop us a line from your next trip or share some of your own low/no-cost travel tips with us.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Susanne Pacher

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