

Hotel rooms per night: Tokyo \$400, Miami \$375, Paris \$350, London \$300, Singapore \$275, Rome \$250, Los Angeles \$240, Barcelona \$225, Dublin \$200. Add 15 to 20% tax, plus currency charge, plus, plus. We live in Arizona, surrounded by desert saguaro cacti, and in recent years when we've traveled to Europe, we've swapped houses with people from Ireland, Geneva and Bonn. No problems and we've gained some new foreign friends.

If you live in a desirable area and plan to travel abroad for a week or more, consider swapping homes with a traveler from another part of the world. Several publications, including the New Yorker and Wall Street Journal post want ads on the subject.

If you have personal safety and other concerns, there are commercial websites that claim to thoroughly check out all offers. They charge fees for approved listings. In you're interested, try digsville.com (\$50) and homeexchange.com (\$100).