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Home-swaps can be like something out of a movie

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By Kitty Bean Yancey, USA TODAY



Enlarge By Zede Rosenthal, Columbia Pictures/Universal Pictures

At home in someone else's house: In the romantic comedy *The Holiday*, Iris (Kate Winslet) leaves boyfriend problems behind in England for a home-swap in Los Angeles, where she meets Miles (Jack Black).

In the movie *The Holiday*, opening today, Kate Winslet and Cameron Diaz play disheartened singles who swap homes with each other for vacation and find new loves.

The film's director, Nancy Meyers (*The Parent Trap*, *Something's Gotta Give*) got inspired while browsing the real-life [HomeExchange.com](#) website, deciding that two strangers who step into each other's worlds is a great plot device. HomeExchange is prominently featured in the film.

"We lucked out," says HomeExchange.com president Ed Kushins, who says some clients who use the service do find romance while vacationing in a stranger's home.

Ditto at [Digsville.com](#), another home-swap service. Its website tells the tale of an Israeli woman who vacationed in a Manhattan apartment and fell for a neighbor.

But finding romance isn't the main motivation for home-trading. It's an increasingly popular means for travelers to experience a new place as a local and save a bundle on lodging costs. The Internet is behind the boom, making it fast and simple to view prospective properties and hash out details of the trade with other owners.

For a yearly fee, members of swap companies can post descriptions and photos of their houses or apartments, browse listings in places they'd like to stay in the USA and abroad, and make arrangements directly with owners of the home they fancy. (Tips: Spell out details of what's included in the trade and what's allowed in your home, lock up valuables, leave directions on how to work systems in your home.) Some sites even post user reviews of the domiciles.

Kushins says almost a third of his members do more than five exchanges a year, swapping is ideal for retirees with a yen for travel.

It also allows participants to try out a different lifestyle.

In *The Holiday*, Diaz's character trades her spacious, ultra-modern Beverly Hills home (actually a house in San Marino, Calif., Kushins says) for a historic country cottage in Surrey, England (in the quaint village of Shere), with a clawfoot bathtub. (Neither home is a real HomeExchange listing, by the way.)

During interviews to promote the movie, L.A. gal Diaz playfully invited Winslet to do a real-life home-swap with her. No word whether the Britain-based actress will take her up on the offer.

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Some home-swap sources:

HomeExchange.com: It boasts nearly 14,000 listings in 100-plus countries. Annual fee is \$59.95. 800-877-8723.

HomeLink.org: HomeLink International has about 13,500 listings in 60-plus countries. \$90 yearly. 800-636-3641.

Intervac.com: The 53-year-old company, with about 10,000 members in more than 50 countries, says it's the oldest exchange service. \$65 a year for U.S. trades; \$95 adds international swaps. 800-758-4663.

Digsville.com: It offers homes and apartments in 50-plus countries. Annual fee is \$44.95. 877-795-1019.

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