

STRANGERS TO FRIENDS

When it comes to home exchanges and turning strangers into friends, Betsey Sansby of Minnetonka, Minn., can relate. She had no idea what to expect when she went online to search for a vacation home to exchange. The water, bike trails and beautiful trees were sure to be of interest to someone, right?

A woman from Scotland contacted her asking if she knew where Hampton Court was. Betsey certainly did. The street was a 30-second walk from her door step. That's where some friends lived and the reason they were searching for a home to exchange.

It was a success! Betsey and her husband exchanged their home for a stay in Scotland at their converted stable, including a car to drive. "When we arrived, a neighbor picked us up from the airport. Then, we were welcomed at the house by their gardener who had a bottle of wine, block of cheese and maps as a gift to us," she says. Betsey and her husband became such friends with the Scottish couple they went back in October and again in February.



FIND A SELLING POINT

Finding exchanges weren't always that easy for the Sansbys. "Trying to get someone interested requires a description that sells," Betsey says. Although she lives in a beautiful area, she must "sell" her location to get to other locations she wants. "I always tell them I am interested in a couple specific places...but, I always say 'surprise us with something interesting and it will be considered.'" That leaves her options open.

Using the "surprise-me" tactic, she has had some interesting offers. Most recently she was offered an exchange with a family who owns a castle in Puerto Rico. "My email went something like this... 'UMMMMM...let me think...OK!'" Although she already has her exchange secured for this year, plans are being considered for Christmas next year.

Betsey and her husband have made at least two or three other friends through the home exchange process. "We become so attached from the emailing process we end up visiting them anyway or finding some other house to exchange through them," she says.

Recently, a woman from Barcelona contacted her about exchanging because her husband was working in the Minnetonka area. Although the exchange didn't work out, Betsey is working hard to find a three-way exchange so her Barcelona friend can see her husband and Betsey and her husband can see a new area of the world. "It becomes a little bit like musical chairs...but I really enjoy the process," Betsey says.

