



PROFESSIONAL TRAVELLER

Ed Kushins

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In 1992, Californian Ed Kushins had an original idea and created a club: “Feel at home... anywhere in the world”. It was the start of what was to become the biggest house-swapping agency in the world, HomeExchange.com.



Ed Kushins is fond of saying that his parents weren't travellers or adventurers, so he doesn't know where he got his wanderlust from: “My father talked a lot about travelling, but he never made any. I've always loved travelling! I crossed the States by car when I finished high school and as I was always looking to escape, I joined the Navy to see the world. I spent three years in a submarine and got to know the whole of the Pacific. I lived in Hawaii while I was on leave”.

After graduating from the University of Southern California (Los Angeles), and bitten by the travel bug, Ed Kushins ended up working as a marketing director for Flying Tiger airlines, which introduced him to Asia. At the time, he loved the discoveries he made all over the world. “Later, the family came along and I didn't want to be away for very long, so I took over a small company and turned it into something bigger. The next few years I only did car trips with the family, but it was fun seeing my children enjoying trips as much as I did.”

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Knowing how to share

At the end of the 1980s, Ed Kushins, always curious and open to new forms of travel, had heard of house-swapping happening around the world. In 1991 he tried it by staying in Washington with his children. “That experience opened my eyes to the fantastic opportunities of this way of travelling and I started a small club which grew into the largest house-swapping agency in the world. From a few hundred members in 1992, we reached 35,000 in 2010. In 2008, I launched HomeExchangeGold.com which has over 1,000 luxury residences on its books.”

What is strange about Home Exchange is that Ed doesn't regard the agency as “work”, but more as a fun occupation. Although he has a virtual team, he likes to communicate with his colleagues scattered to the four corners of the globe. “My greatest pleasure is seeing the benefits our members get when we add new features and opportunities to the site. It's exciting reading the spontaneous comments and recommendations as people share their experiences with us. I love that exchange. Our motto – ‘Feel at home ... anywhere in the world’ – perfectly expresses the type of service we provide.”Ed believes Home Exchange has contributed to a better world. No contracts are signed, there are no formalities. His aim is to get people to open their front doors, their spirits and their hearts. Their golden rule is: “Leave your exchange partners' house just as you found it or even better. While you are there, treat their house as you would want yours to be treated”. “One of my first exchanges was in New York. I swapped my house in Southern California for one in Greenwich Village. We ended up in the studio of a guy who only had a sofa-bed in the living room. He, on the other hand, got a four-bedroomed house by the sea. Our guest asked me several times if I thought it was a fair swap. It was one of the best swaps I ever did!”Another example of happy exchanges was what happened when Ed and his wife went to São Francisco to see their children: “A few years ago a craftsman exchanged his house in Berkeley Hills for our chalet in Palm Desert. We have since done the same swap six times, using each other's houses as second homes. I know where they hide the key and how to get the coffee machine working, even though we haven't actually ever met!”

An eye for an eye?

As Terry Kushins is a regular user of HomeExchange.com, the couple have a very close relationship. They love cycling, hiking, sailing, swimming, exploring and doing research: “We spend about three months of the year travelling, always with a few house swaps on the way”. Amongst their favourite is a second home at Grand Lake, Colorado: “It is a lake house. A wooden shack with two rooms built in 1904. Ideal for us!”

Another favourite is Dublin. They stayed in a house in Blackrock, 10,000 square metres in size. “It was like being in a film. The kitchen was enormous, with seven dishwashers.” Another trip which left an impression was to Tuscany: “We spent two weeks there via HomeExchange in 2008, and returned with fond memories”. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the couple they were going to swap with had to stay on and were given their room back: “Little did we know they would become our personal guides and best friends, showing us a side of Italy we would never have seen on our own. They took us to their favourite restaurants, to their friends' vineyards, we went shopping, we cooked, had fun, learned a lot and told each other stories”.

The project director says that one of the advantages of this kind of stay is that people behave like local residents instead of tourists. With free lodging. It is also ecologically-friendly and sustainable because the carbon footprint of a house swap is practically zero compared to staying in a hotel. It helps the local economy and lets residents capitalize on the value of their house, while guests can get much closer to cultural diversity.” HomeExchange has restored Ed's faith in humanity: “We've met some of the most hospitable people in the world. They collect us from the airport, greet us like old friends, and share a gourmet meal with us before setting off for our house”.

www.homeexchange.com

www.homeexchangegold.com

by Mário de Castro

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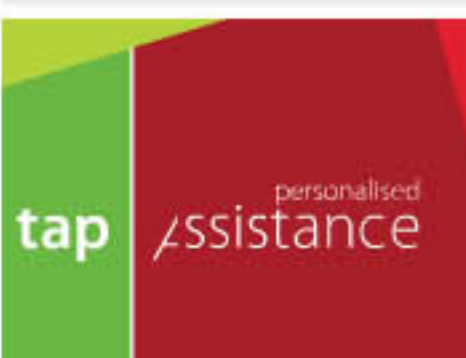
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