

Think outside the box for inexpensive travel lodging

Photos



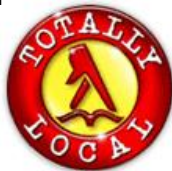
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While some dorm rooms may be a little cramped, they can offer big savings when traveling. The University of Wisconsin-Superior rents rooms for as low as \$20 per person during the summer.

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Housebound? Don't let the high cost of hotels force you to stay home this summer. Low cost — even free — accommodations are available, from dorm rooms to a friend's couch. To find alternative housing, you might have to spend time online or make a few phone calls, but your savings could be dramatic.

Here are few tips and websites to get you started:

RENT A COLLEGE DORM ROOM

Some colleges and universities, both here and abroad, rent empty dorm rooms to visitors when students are gone for the summer.

For instance, the University of Wisconsin-Superior rents rooms for as low as \$20 per person. (For reservations, call (715) 394-8438.)

The University of Northern Colorado-Greeley has hotel-style lodging for \$28 per person (room with twin beds) to \$65 per person for a two-bedroom suite with living room and bathroom. (970) 351-4070.

You'll have to be a bit of an investigator to find American dorm rooms. The quickest method is to call the chamber of commerce in the city you plan to visit, ask what colleges are in the area, then call a school and ask if it rents dorm rooms to summer visitors. It's easier to find dorm rooms in England because a consortium of schools has a website (www.budgetstayuk.com) with photos, maps and links.

SWAP HOMES WITH ANOTHER FAMILY

Home exchanges (also called house swaps) have grown steadily in popularity since the early 1990s. Simply put, you stay in their house while they stay in yours. A variation is the host exchange, in which a family stays with you, then later you stay with them.

Myriad websites lists homes available for exchange, from a log house in the Idaho mountains to a villa in Dalyan, Turkey to a duplex in Brussels.

One of the oldest sites is www.homeexchange.com. Some sites charge members an annual fee. There are specialty sites such as Christian Home Swap and Teachers Travel Web.

A good place to start is www.knowyourtrade.com, a directory of home exchange sites with scads of helpful information.

GO ON RETREAT

Retreat centers run by churches, monasteries or non-profit organizations are scattered throughout the U.S.

Many guests sign up for a package deal of classes, meals and lodging, but some retreats offer rooms for those just passing through. Rooms are as low as \$20 a night, including breakfast.

Retreat houses, meant to encourage reflection and renewal, often are nestled in pastoral sites, with gardens, walking paths, libraries and art studios.

For a directory of retreats, check out www.expandretreats.com and www.findthedivine.com.

TRY COUCH SURFING

The mission of the non-profit network, www.couchsurfing.org, is to promote cross-cultural encounters by connecting travelers with locals.

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Hosts offer a couch or bed and get an opportunity to meet people from all over the world without ever leaving home. Travelers (“surfers”) save money and get to know the local community.

HOSTELS — NOT JUST FOR YOUTHS ANYMORE

In the early days of hostels, there were age limits. No more. You’re as likely to see a retiree as a backpacking 20-something.

Rooms are usually no-frills, and sometimes bathrooms are shared. Prices start as low as \$10 a night.


For information, start with [Hosteling International at www.hiusa.org](http://www.hiusa.org) or www.hostels.com, which also lists apartments and guesthouses.

ADDED BENEFIT

Perhaps you hope to connect with “the locals” while on vacation this summer. It’s difficult to do that from the imposed isolation of a hotel room.

But alternative accommodations such as hostels and home exchanges can add an enriching social element to your travels.

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