

# MY HOUSE IS YOURS



A Worldwide Study on  
Home Exchangers' Profiles  
and Motivations



CONDUCTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF BERGAMO  
ON THE **HOMEEXCHANGE.COM** COMMUNITY

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# INTRODUCTION

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This study represents the first in-depth research into the rapidly-growing phenomenon of home exchange, also known as “home-swapping.” The study goes right to the users themselves, profiling the new breed of traveler known as the “home exchanger,” setting out to discover what their motivations, travel habits and the ways in which they utilize the service might tell us about home exchange’s future.

Though home exchange has been around since the 1950s, the proliferation of the internet has greatly increased its popularity by providing the ability to easily and more effectively communicate with people around the world, increasing exponentially the pool of homes from which to choose.

According to study co-author Professor Roberta Garibaldi, **“Swapping houses is the result of an increasingly globalized world, which can take advantage of all the benefits made possible by the worldwide spread of sophisticated technologies.”**

Implicit in that statement is that home exchange’s rise has not occurred in a vacuum. In fact, its expansion coincides with the re-emergence of a much broader system known as **“Collaborative Consumption.”** A system that is older than money.

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As study co-author Professor Francesca Forno puts it, **“Collaborative Consumption describes transactional models like lending, exchange, swapping and bartering that are now able to operate again on a grand scale, across geographic boundaries, thanks to the advent of modern technology.”** Forno goes on to say, **“I believe that investigating these phenomena can help us to find useful insights that may help to make our societies work better towards a “sustainable future.”**

In other words, where we once had paid classified advertising, we now have Craigslist. Where we once had bookstores, we now have eBay. And where we once were limited to traditional means of travel, we now have the option of home exchange.

Professors Forno and Garibaldi, both of the University of Bergamo, have conducted the survey using the 46,000 members of home exchange industry leader HomeExchange.com. The questions on the survey cover a wide swath, touching on subjects ranging from basic data like “age” and “occupation” to more in-depth subject matters like “dining habits,” “motivations for joining” and “trust.”

Explaining their own motivation for conducting the survey, Forno and Garibaldi state:

**“Very few studies have focused on home-exchange in spite of its rapid growth, which has recently been observed even in countries where it has long remained a niche phenomenon. With this formula, tourists have the opportunity to organize custom tailored trips without seeking the services of travel mediators and with the only cost being the loan of their own home.”**

The survey results show a surprisingly diverse set of demographics, motivations and behaviors, all of which support the notion that home exchange is more than a passing fad.

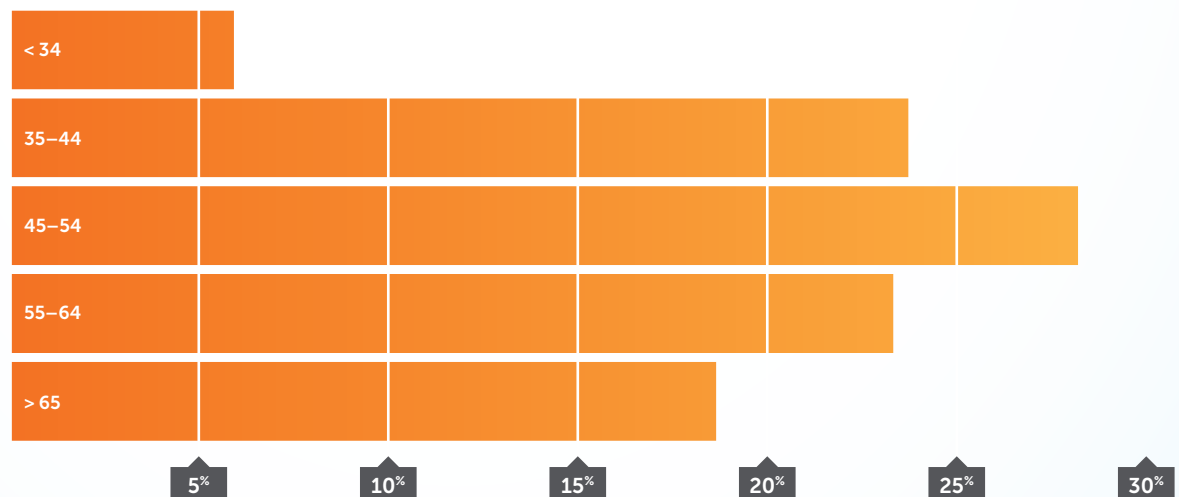
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# HOME EXCHANGE PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Though it is no surprise that a high percentage of home exchange participants are highly educated, in several of the other categories, many do not fit into the demographics that one might expect.

## AGE

It would be reasonable to assume that an Internet-savvy group like home exchangers would be highly represented in the lower age groups. This is not the case. In fact, not only is 45-54 the largest age group (28.3%), but with just 5.9% of the total, those below the age of 34 are the smallest group, with less than a third of the next smallest group of 65+ (18.7%).



# HOME EXCHANGE PARTICIPANT PROFILE



**6** OUT OF **10** ARE HIGHLY EDUCATED

## LEVEL OF EDUCATION

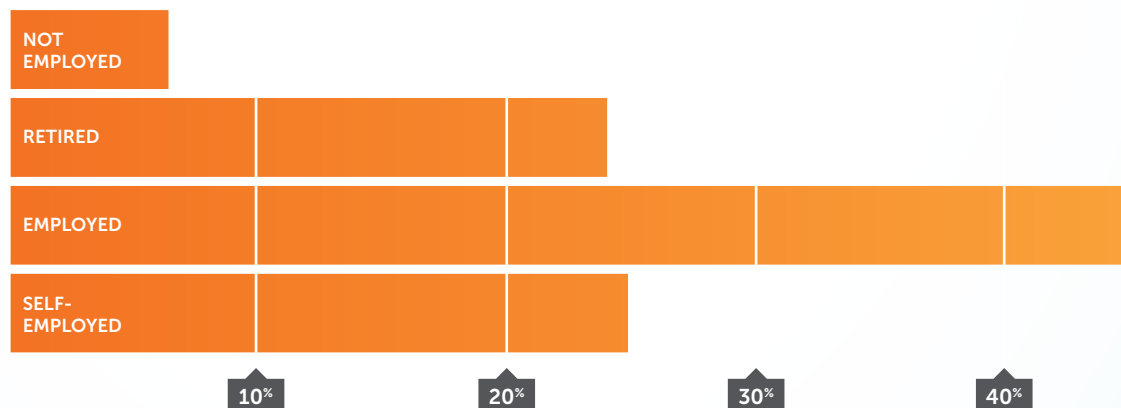
It comes as no surprise that 62.1% of home exchangers regard themselves as highly educated, a designation which might be interpreted as including a graduate school degree or above.

### CONSIDER THEMSELVES AS HIGHLY EDUCATED

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
60%	43%	62%	73%	66%	71%	79%	65%	47%	65%	52%

## OCCUPATION

It should also come as no surprise that nearly 70% of home exchangers are employed or that of this 70%, 24.9% are self-employed. This shows an independent streak that might be responsible for someone to “think outside the box” in their choice of accommodation. Retirees also make up a big piece of the pie with 24.1%. The thrifty option of home exchange might be attractive for a retiree living on a fixed income. This leaves only 6.3% of respondents not employed.



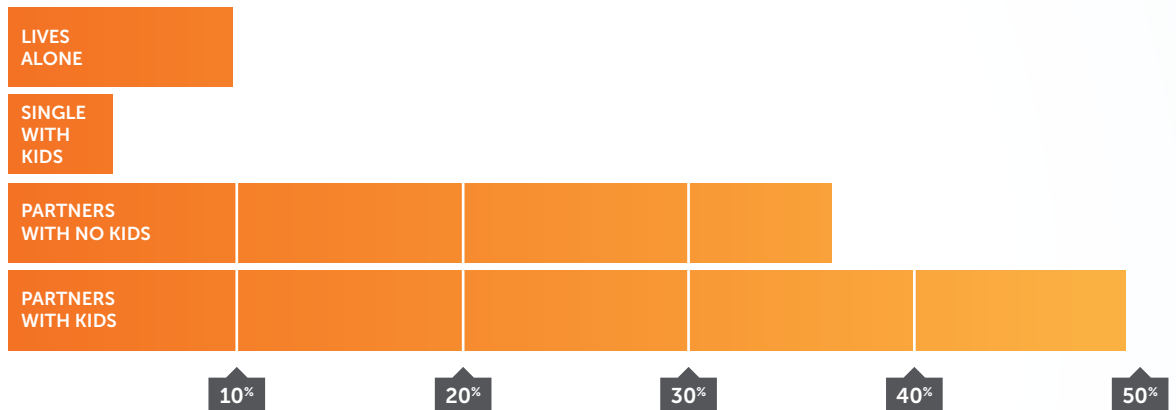
# HOME EXCHANGE PARTICIPANT PROFILE



**1/2**  
TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN

## FAMILY TYPE

Another surprising characteristic that emerges is the high percentage of families who choose this type of tourism. While just under one in ten respondents live alone, nearly half of the total number of home exchangers have children.



## HAVE KIDS (PARTNERS WITH KIDS AND SINGLE PARENT WITH KIDS, COMBINED)

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
29%	41%	75%	69%	72%	70%	70%	82%	70%	63%	33%

# HOME EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

It would be a mistake to think of home exchangers strictly as “budget travelers.” Though home exchange is a low cost option, we will begin to see that those surveyed differ from customers of budget hotels and hostels in some important ways. Many of the motivations, types of homes exchanged and lengths of the average stay reveal that while money is a concern, it is not the only concern.

## HOW LONG A HOMEEXCHANGE.COM MEMBER

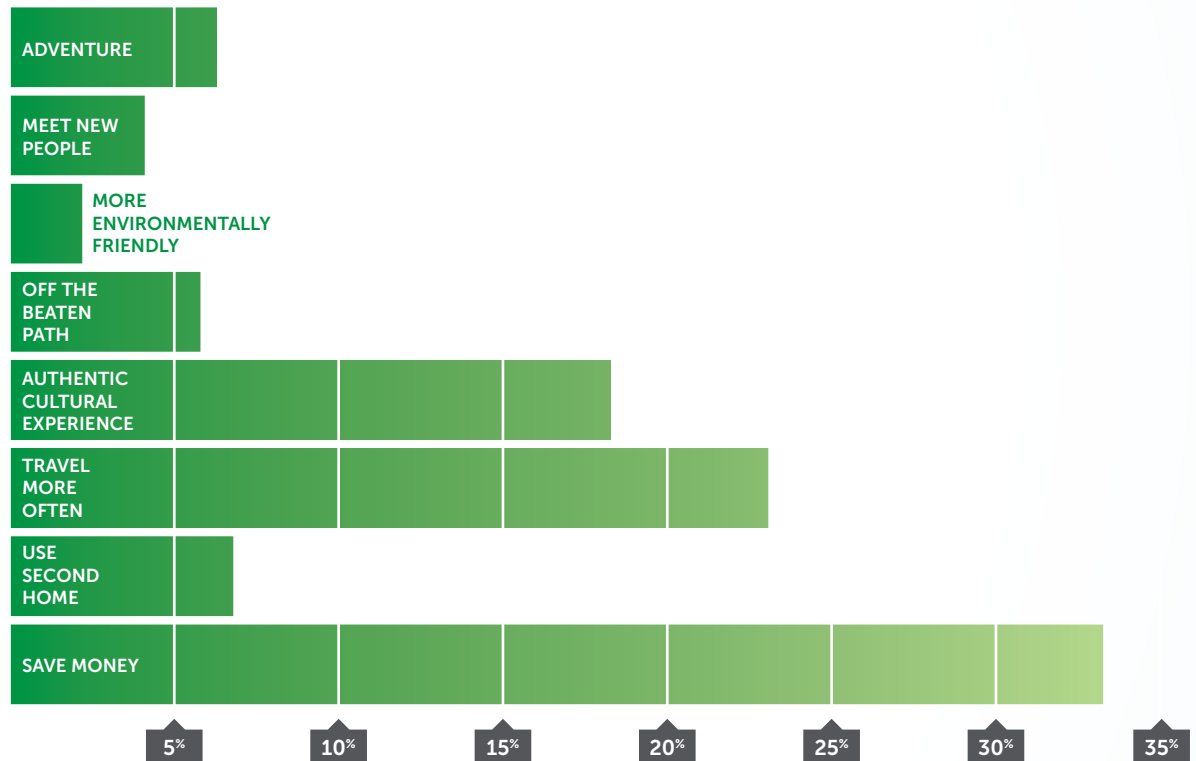
The survey reveals that nearly three out of four respondents have been members of HomeExchange.com for over a year, with an additional 9.1% having joined over six months before. This is evidence that home exchange has staying power.



# HOME EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

## MOTIVATIONS FOR JOINING HOMEEXCHANGE.COM

Though by far the biggest motivation for participating in home exchange is still to save money (33.3%) with the goal of traveling more often (23.1%), there are other motivations that show home exchangers are after more than just discounted travel. Just over 18% are looking for the authentic cultural experience that comes with staying in a home, and motivations like “adventure,” “meeting new people” and staying “off the beaten path” also come into play.



### SAVE MONEY

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
31%	42%	37%	37%	25%	41%	30%	34%	32%	48%	39%

### TRAVEL MORE OFTEN

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
32%	30%	16%	28%	26%	14%	27%	22%	22%	17%	28%

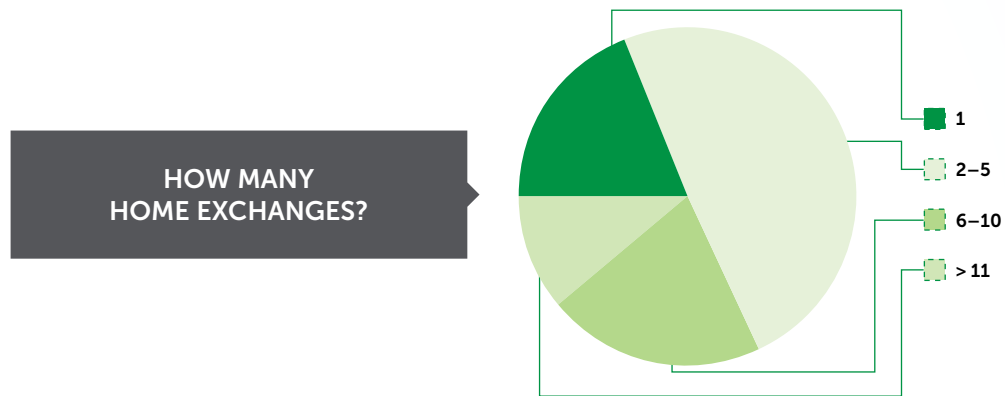
## HOME EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE



**4/5**  
EXCHANGED AT  
LEAST TWICE

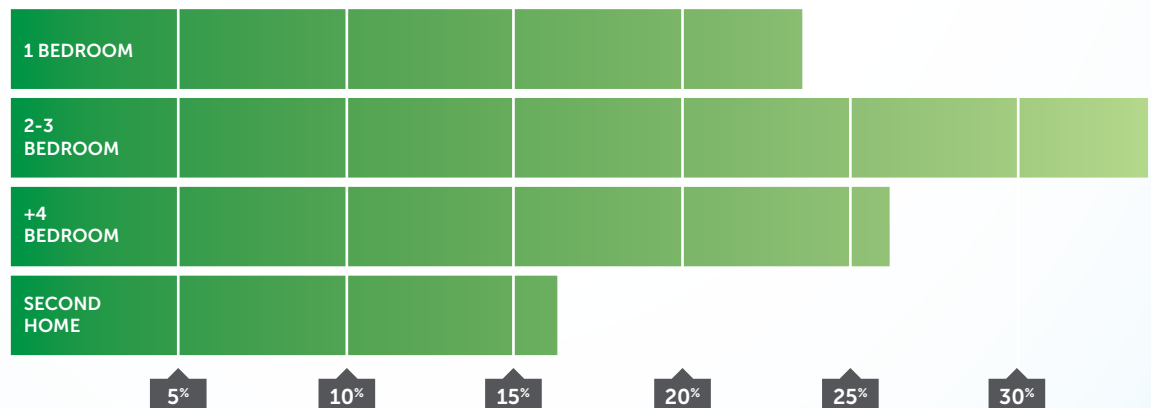
### NUMBER OF EXCHANGES

HomeExchange.com members are taking advantage of their memberships, with four out of five having already participated in at least two exchanges and over one in ten having participated more than 11 times. This is also further evidence of the potential longevity of home exchange.



### TYPES OF HOMES

The types of homes exchanged also attest to the wide variety of home exchangers, who come from all levels of affluence. On one end of the spectrum, 23.6% of participating homes are only one bedroom, while at the other end, 16.3% are being offered by exchangers who have the luxury of owning second homes.



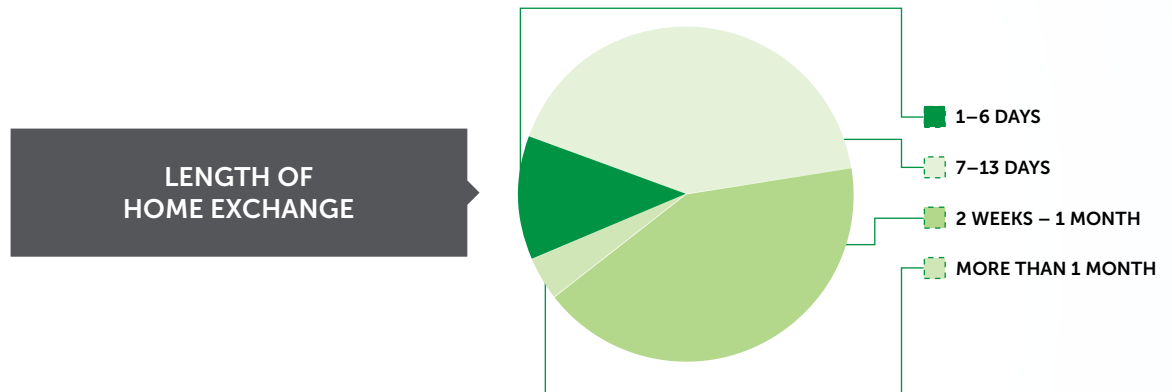
HOME  
EXCHANGE  
EXPERIENCE



**93%**  
ARE SATISFIED  
WITH EXCHANGES

**LENGTH OF EXCHANGES**

Though we see here too the wide range of ways home exchange is used, we also see durations of accommodation lasting much longer than the average hotel stay. Nearly one-half of home exchangers average a stay of over two weeks, with 42.1% staying between two weeks and a month and 3.9% staying over a month – a period that would be prohibitively expensive when paying for traditional accommodations.. This also suggests that a large number of home exchangers can afford to take extended vacations – or perhaps derive their income from working remotely.



**LEVEL OF SATISFACTION**

A third example of the potential longevity of home exchange is the high level of satisfaction among HomeExchange.com members. A whopping 76.8% report they are “Very Satisfied” (with another 16.4% “Satisfied”), while the combined “Dissatisfied” and “Very Dissatisfied” is a marginal 6.2%.

**SATISFIED WITH EXCHANGE** (SATISFIED AND VERY SATISFIED, COMBINED)

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
92%	96%	84%	96%	93%	91%	81%	99%	99%	95%	94%

# HOME EXCHANGE TRAVEL PROFILE

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While looking at the way home exchangers travel, a specific picture begins to emerge of a traveler filled with curiosity, seeking unique experiences, concerned with their environment and passionate about their own culture and the cultures of others.

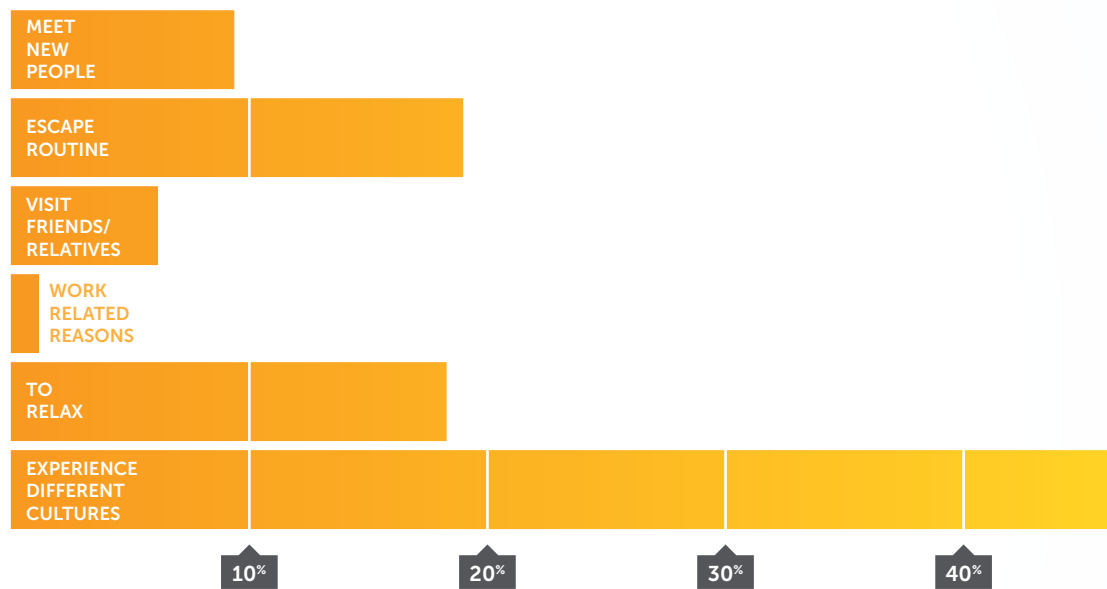
Accommodation that provides direct contact with local residents, home exchange allows the traveler to establish relationships with the house owners and neighborhood, surrounded by the comforts of home, creating a literal “home base” from which to explore and learn.

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# HOME EXCHANGE TRAVEL PROFILE

## REASONS FOR TRAVELING

The main reason to travel among home exchangers (46%) is to experience different cultures; something that is easier to do when living in a residential neighborhood that those staying in a hotel would likely not get to experience. Escaping routine (19%) and relaxing (18.3%) get high marks as well.



### TO RELAX

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
7%	8%	21%	6%	13%	29%	10%	18%	8%	28%	10%

### TO EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT CULTURES

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
77%	80%	65%	77%	70%	54%	71%	62%	67%	52%	75%

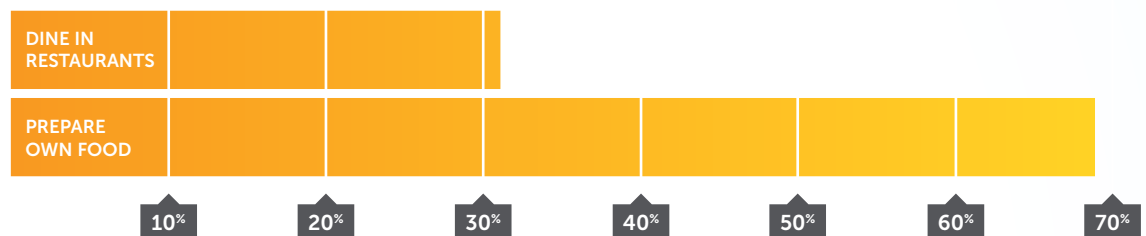
# HOME EXCHANGE TRAVEL PROFILE



**69%**  
PREPARE THEIR OWN MEALS

## DINING HABITS WHILE EXCHANGING HOMES

Home exchangers see dining as part of their cultural experience, as evidenced by the surprisingly large percentage (68.9%) preparing their own meals while traveling. What better way to experience a culture than to shop in local stores, purchase local ingredients and prepare them in your own home?



### RESTAURANTS RECOMMENDED BY TOUR GUIDE

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
8%	5%	5%	9%	11%	5%	8%	3%	7%	12%	13%

### RESTAURANTS DISCOVERED ON OWN

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
25%	14%	19%	10%	21%	24%	19%	20%	22%	19%	29%

### PREPARE OWN FOOD

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
66%	80%	74%	80%	67%	71%	71%	75%	71%	68%	56%

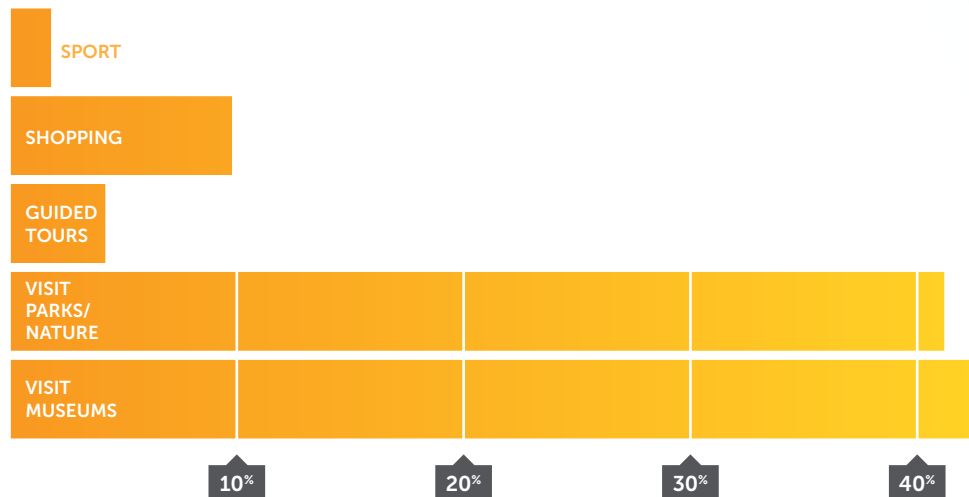
## HOME EXCHANGE TRAVEL PROFILE



**84%**  
VISIT PARKS  
AND MUSEUMS

### PREFERRED ACTIVITY WHEN ON VACATIONS

Between museums, parks and the great outdoors, respondents overwhelmingly embrace their destination's unique surroundings, with a combined 84.3% responding that these are their preferred activities. By contrast, only 9.8% mentioned that they prefer shopping while on vacation.



#### VISIT PARKS/NATURE

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
31%	43%	53%	50%	33%	50%	42%	68%	70%	57%	37%

#### VISIT MUSEUMS

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
56%	52%	34%	48%	65%	43%	55%	20%	23%	34%	57%

# HOME EXCHANGE TRAVEL PROFILE



**98%**  
ARE INTERESTED IN CULTURAL HERITAGE

## INTEREST IN CULTURAL HERITAGE

With 98% responding in the positive, home exchangers' interest in cultural heritage is virtually unanimous.

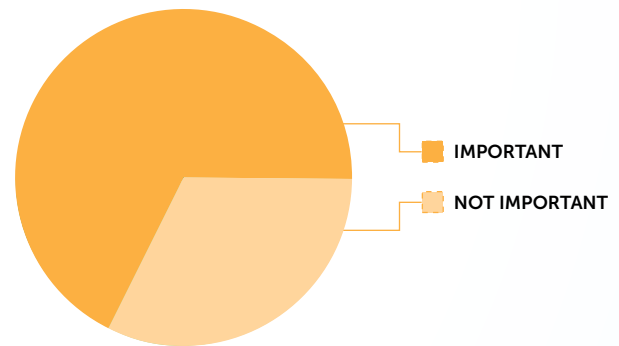
### INTEREST IN CULTURAL HERITAGE

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
97%	99%	96%	99%	100%	97%	99%	96%	98%	97%	99%

## IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY TOURISM

Over two thirds of the home exchange participants surveyed see the importance of environmentally friendly tourism. In fact, home exchange itself is a form of environmentally friendly tourism, as it utilizes resources that already exist.

IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY TOURISM



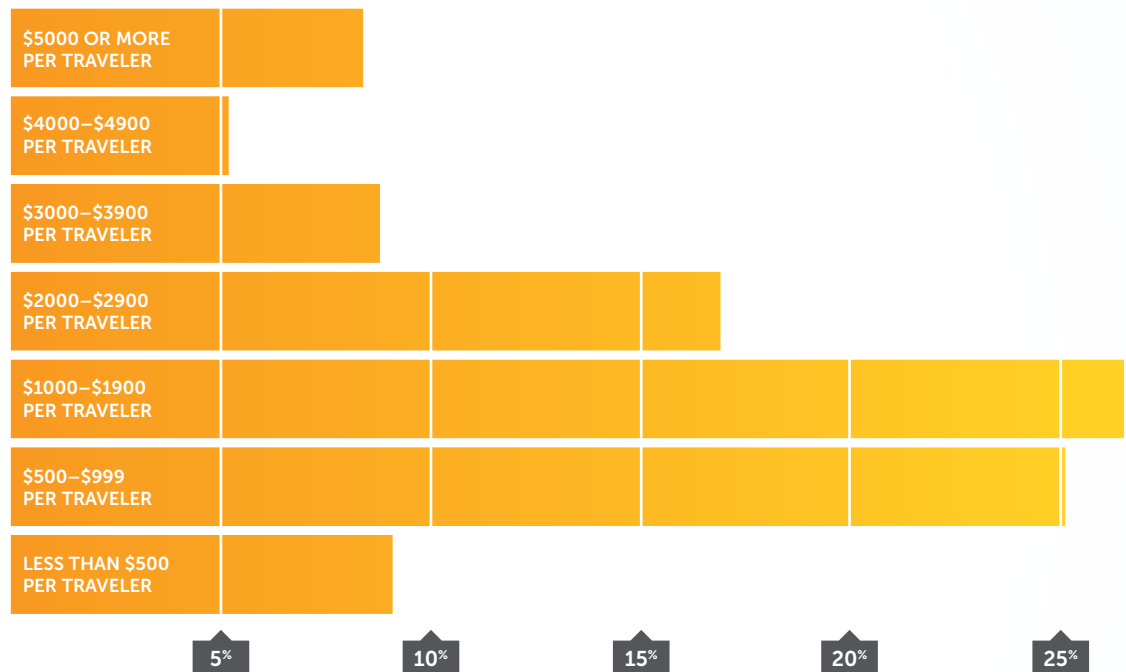
### ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY IS IMPORTANT

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
54%	72%	37%	82%	88%	53%	86%	53%	81%	54%	57%

# HOME EXCHANGE TRAVEL PROFILE

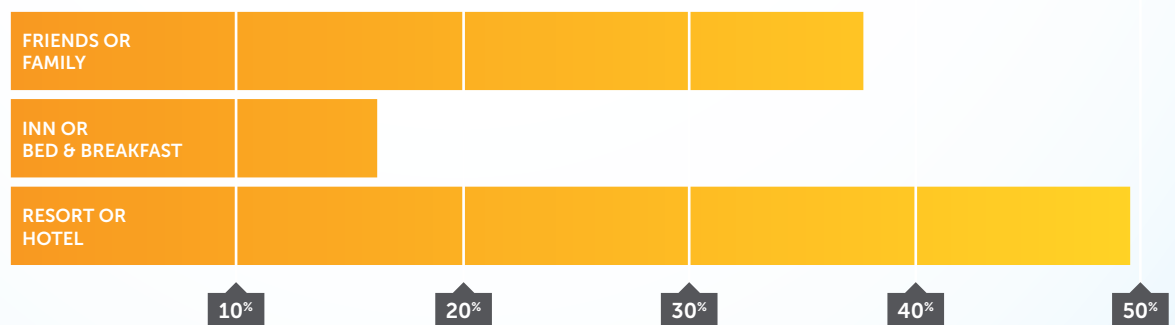
## AVERAGE COST OF NON WORK-RELATED VACATION

The responses to this question illustrate once again that the home exchange traveler represents a broad cross section of affluence, with the average vacation cost spread from one end of the spectrum to the other.



## ACCOMMODATION CHOICES FOR NON-HOME EXCHANGE TRAVEL

The accommodations used by participants when not utilizing home exchange show again that the industry is not just for those looking to travel on the cheap. 78.5% of alternate accommodations come in at the high end of the money spectrum (Resort, Hotel, Inn, Bed & Breakfast, Second Home), while only 37.7% are thrifty choices (With Friends, With Family).



# SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT AND TRUST

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Home swappers do not only prefer unconventional travel, but they also lean towards travel which is “intrinsically environmentally friendly.” When not traveling, they tend to be more involved in their communities as well.

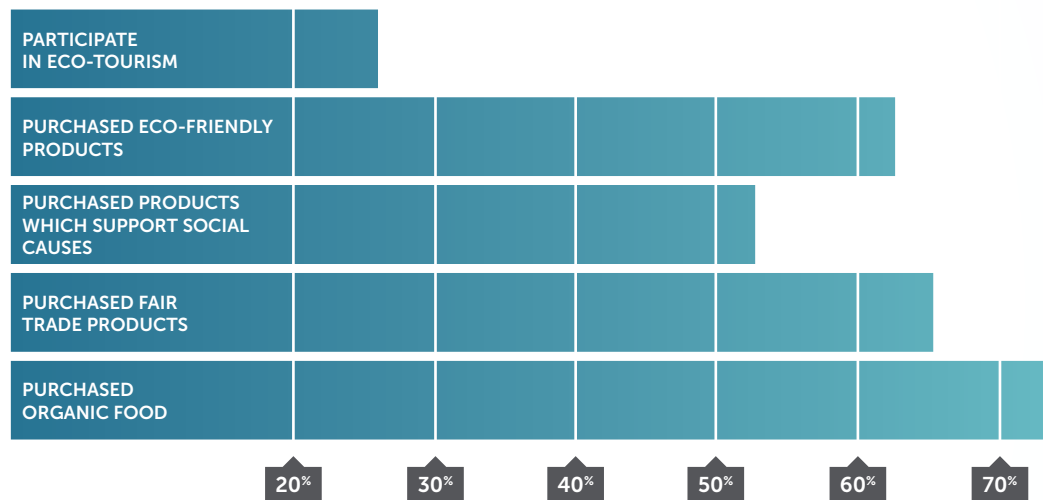
One element that emerged as particularly significant among home swappers is their high level of trust — an important component when exchanging homes.

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**CRITICAL CONSUMPTION**

As previously mentioned, home-swapping already results in a lower environmental impact, as it uses resources that already exist. But beyond that, home exchangers also show a concern for their environment in many ways, from purchasing organic food (73.5%) and fair trade food (65.3%) to purchasing products that are environmentally friendly (62.6%) and which support social causes (52.7%).



**CRITICAL CONSUMPTION: PARTICIPATED IN ECO-TOURISM**

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
37%	28%	12%	22%	27%	22%	29%	17%	26%	20%	27%

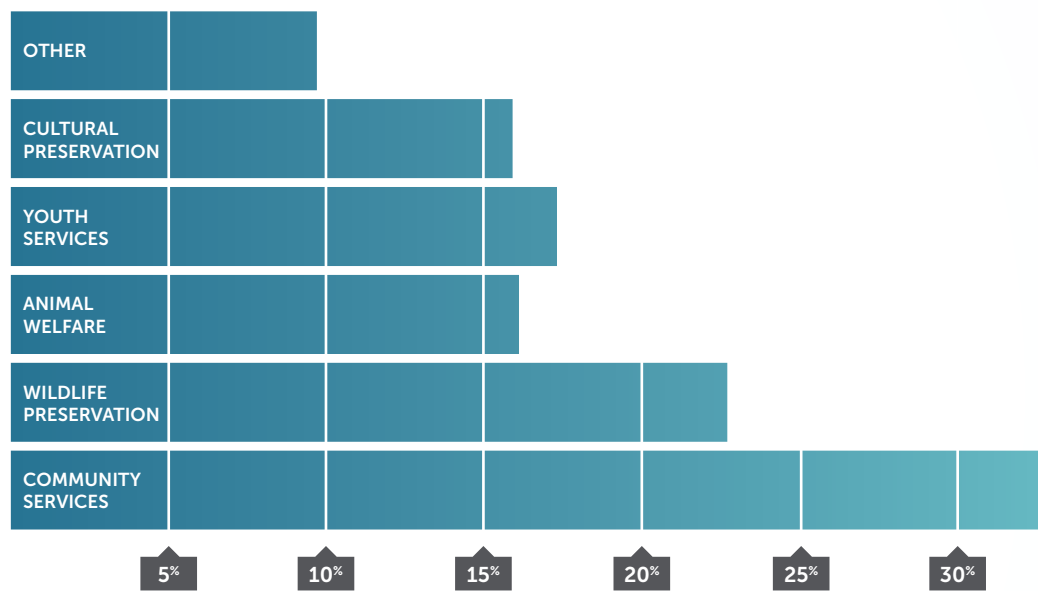
**CRITICAL CONSUMPTION: PURCHASED ORGANIC FOOD**

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
62%	67%	91%	73%	71%	77%	68%	82%	73%	72%	80%

# SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT AND TRUST

## PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

Home exchangers are also concerned with their communities when they are not traveling. Nearly three out of five respondents (59.1%) claim civic involvement at home. This involvement takes a variety of forms, from Community Services (32.8%), to Wildlife Preservation (22.7%).



## PARTICIPATED IN COMMUNITY SERVICES

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
21%	31%	18%	49%	33%	18%	46%	15%	34%	17%	50%

## SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT AND TRUST



**75%**  
SAY PEOPLE  
ARE TRUSTWORTHY

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### TRUST

The survey reveals that 75.3% home exchangers agree that "most people are trustworthy." This is not surprising as trust is an important factor when agreeing to swap one's own home.

Questions worth considering; how trusting were these respondents when they started with home exchange? Does Home Exchange attract travelers who are already trusting and trustworthy? Or do they develop trust after having positive home exchange experiences? Or maybe it is a combination of both.

#### MOST PEOPLE ARE TRUSTWORTHY

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	DENMARK	FRANCE	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	UNITED KINGDOM	USA
88%	82%	95%	60%	52%	87%	75%	90%	69%	87%	71%

# CONCLUSION

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The results of the survey suggest that home exchange has arrived as a legitimate accommodation option in the emerging global economy. Between the cross-section of the population now using it, the consistent pattern of use they are exhibiting, the high level of customer satisfaction and many other factors outlined in the survey, home exchange is proving to be an attractive, reliable alternative to traditional means of travel.

But the survey also reveals a deeper level. Not only is home exchange an alternative to traditional travel, but in some respects, it is its successor; a new accommodation choice for a new age. Restating the question, "Does home exchange make people more trustworthy and more trusting?" perhaps home exchange will eventually provide a pathway to building trust between individuals and ultimately to building communities.

In closing, Forno writes:

**"I believe that collaborative consumption is reversing the individualistic turn of our contemporary societies. Experiences such as home exchange are reinventing not only what we consume but how we consume it. Driven by growing dissatisfaction with their role as robotic consumers manipulated by marketing, people are turning more and more to models of consumption that emphasize usefulness over ownership, community over selfishness, and sustainability over wastefulness."**

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# CREDITS



The **University of Bergamo** (Italy) is recognized as a worldwide leader of academic teaching and research in the field of Travel and Tourism, offering two Master Courses in Tourism: *Progettazione e Gestione dei Sistemi Turistici* (in Italian), and *Planning and Management of Tourism Systems* (in English) characterized by a strong multidisciplinary perspective.

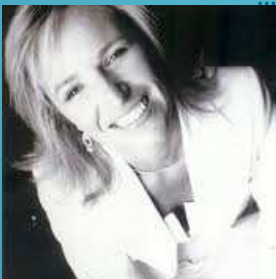
## University of Bergamo



### FRANCESCA FORNO

Assistant Professor of Sociology and Sociology of Consumption  
Director and co-founder of University of Bergamo's CORES LAB  
Co-editor of *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, the first Italian academic journal specializing in the analysis of social and political participation.

Professor Forno also conducts a research group on Consumption, Networks and Practices of Sustainable Economies. She has published articles on citizen participation and sustainable community movements and continues to conduct research into political consumerism and collaborative consumption. Her special focus in these areas is social consequences of the spread of market-based forms of citizens' actions and mobilization.



### ROBERTA GARIBALDI

Assistant Professor of Marketing and Tourism Marketing  
Member of the CeSTIT (Centro studi per il turismo e l'interpretazione del territorio)

Professor Garibaldi is considered one of the leading experts of tourism in Lombardy. She coordinates tourism projects for the Municipality of Bergamo and has gained a wealth of experience consulting and training organizations, institutions and enterprises. She is the author of dozens of publications, including "Economics and Management of Tourism Enterprises" (Hoepli, 2008) and "Professions of Tourism Between Trends and Changes" (Franco Angeli, Milan, 2008).

### ELENA SCANDELLA and ISABELLA POLINI

Students in Planning and Management of Tourism Systems at the University of Bergamo.  
Participated in data collection and analysis.

# CREDITS

## HomeExchange.com

Started in 1992 by Ed Kushins, HomeExchange.com has evolved into the largest and fastest growing online home exchange travel company in the world. This year their 46,000+ Members will make over 75,000 home swaps across 154 countries. HomeExchange.com makes it easy to plan and enjoy a home exchange vacation in almost any country, city or area of interest and offers travelers a memorable, authentic 'live like a local' experience. The site is available in 16 different languages. HomeExchangeGold.com, serving the luxury market, launched in 2012.

# CONTACT

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