

Value for Housesitters – Tips from an Expert

by Peter Wearing Smith



Want to have a great holiday without it costing a fortune? Well, in case you are not yet aware of the secret, housesitting, whether for Owners or Sitters is one of the best value propositions around – in principle at least.

This principle is quite straightforward: A homeowner has his or her house looked after and any pets cared for while the housesitter occupies the house rent-free for the duration of the owners' absence.

Previously, estate agents, classified advertisements in newspapers, magazines and newsletters, and word of mouth got sitters together with owners.

Today, the Internet provides an efficient and timely means of matching the two. It also has the twin advantages of covering a very broad area geographically, as well as being completely up to date, unlike printed directories which, by definition, are out of date the moment they are published.

Most housesitting web sites offer free listings to owners and make their money by charging sitters for access to these owners. And it is here that the value proposition goes seriously awry.

At one end of the value spectrum is a site that charges hundreds of dollars for access, while at the other are one or two sites that claim to offer free access. There is also one that charged its members high fees for carrying sitters' advertisements, but little else. Following a deluge of complaints and unfavourable publicity, that site is now virtually out of business and is not accepting new members.

One of the most expensive sites is not only expensive, it is also extremely complicated. If you want access to housesitting opportunities in suburban Melbourne it will cost \$295 for a year's access to owners. But only in the core of the metropolitan

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area. If you are interested in the wider metropolis, you must sign up for three additional zones, for a further \$295. Sydney is even worse. One inner zone is north of the harbour and the other south. If you want access to both, it will cost \$395, and if you want the whole of the metropolitan area, it will set you back a further \$495. Some similar states are cheaper, but no less complicated in their pricing.

For the travelling sitter, this is a no-value proposition, as travelling from one zone to another, say, on an extended round-Australia trip will cost a small fortune.

Discounting the free sites, which really offer very little, there is one that has a simple and straightforward value proposition. Access costs only A\$50 a year, with discounts for *SeniorSitters* members. But, as they say in the commercials, wait – there’s more! This site, HouseCarers.com, offers **world-wide access** for this price.

In just five days – from June 9 to June 13 – the HouseCarers.com site had no fewer than 48 new listings from owners all over the world, including the United States (22), Australia (15), New Zealand, Canada, Scotland, Ireland and South Africa. Listings also appear regularly for opportunities in England, France, Germany and Italy.

If you fancy a month’s holiday in Hawaii, for example, the following may be tempting: “We have a newly renovated 2,400 sq foot home on the marina in Hawaii Kai [Honolulu]. There are many good restaurants and a couple of small shopping centers within 1 mile, as well as a 24 hour fitness center. A kayak is available for use. Large pool that is maintained by a pool service. Several small grassy areas and areas of plants requiring little maintenance since most on sprinkler system. We just recently moved into house and all furniture and big screen TVs are new. There is a sliding security gate to the garage and front yard and a locked gate on the side so very private and secure. Wireless computer access is available...”

The sitter’s duties during this assignment are looking after three small to medium sized dogs. It’s as simple as that!



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Not all housesitting assignments are as simple or as straightforward as this, however. This writer looked after 40 cattle on a small farm in rural Victoria, Australia, two years ago. Although I had no farming background to speak of, I knew how to operate a tractor and have a natural affinity for animals of all shapes and sizes, and the duties were limited to feeding the beasts and moving them from one paddock to another every few days. The house was in a truly beautiful setting (below), so I decided to go for it.



Others perhaps require a much greater level of dedication, like the one I saw in Piemonte (Piedmont) in Italy. The location I know well, in the stunningly beautiful hills of Asti, not too far from the recent Winter Olympics city of Torino (Turin). An idyllic assignment, as long as you were prepared to care for seven boxer dogs, all of whom lived inside the house! But I have to say that for the opportunity of another sojourn in Asti, I was sorely tempted...

After all, it's not bad for fifty dollars, is it?