

# How to have a holiday for nothing

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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2009/oct/17/free-travel-holiday-budget?page=all>

How to have a holiday for nothing  
 way to have a buckshee break. It's simply a case of knowing where to look

From swapping your home to going on a pilgrimage, there's more

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Free and easy ... Terme di Saturnia, Tuscany, Italy. Photograph: Alamy

Article history

Swap your home

There's a home-swap site for almost everyone nowadays. Thelma and Louise, the women travellers' online network, is the latest to get in on the act and is consequently modest in size, but for a wider range head to HomeLink International; established in 1953, it offers a choice of properties across 75 countries. You don't have to be gay to join Mi Casa Su Casa, the home-trade network &ndash; a gay-friendly attitude is all that's needed &ndash; and you don't have to work in a school to benefit from Teachers Travel Web; "anyone who teaches something to someone" is eligible to sign up for their home swap scheme. For travellers with disabilities, there's the Independent Living Institute's Vacation Home Exchange programme: latest listings including an accessible family home in Victoria, Australia. But if it's a staycation with the kids you're planning, then check out the National Childbirth Trust's House Swap scheme. Until 20 November this year, you won't even need to pay the £30 joining fee. And of course, don't forget to check out the Guardian's own home-exchange site. For arty types

Given that the words "penniless" and "artist" are generally found together, it's no surprise that there are so many free-stay opportunities for creative types. Launched in 2008, the Creators Inn in Gothenberg, Sweden, offers free short-term accommodation for visiting "creators" &ndash; just apply with a convincing case. A capsule version of the hotel was launched in the same city earlier this year, and a third branch has opened in the Scandic Malmen hotel in Stockholm. For those wanting to put in some serious work on their masterpiece, there are numerous residency opportunities worldwide. For example, Mount Tremper Arts in New York's stunning Catskill mountains offer work exchange monthly residencies from one month to one year. In return for your labour (approximately 10 hours per week), you'll get accommodation (minus food) and use of studio space when other residencies are not in session. And then there's La Muse Inn, whose idyllic Languedoc location alone is enough to get you rhapsodising. In parts dating back to 12th century, the Inn is built of local stone and chestnut wood; bedrooms have original fireplaces, Caunes marble windowsills and terracotta tile floors. Writers and artists can barter their skills, receiving a free room in exchange for approximately three days' work a week (outside the summer season). Kiwi car hire

If you've already shelled out for an antipodean airfare, then you'll want to keep other costs down, including car hire. New Zealand's newly launched Transfercar is an "online relocation service" bringing together travellers and a host of car rental companies. Simply register, choose from the list of free rental vehicles that need relocating, and away you go &ndash; the only catch is that nearly all vehicles need taking from south to north, against the prevailing flow of travellers. Current listings include a two-berth motorhome with shower and toilet (pick-up at Canterbury's Christchurch airport, drop off at Auckland airport; time allowance five days), and a five-seat station wagon for a Bay-of-Plenty pick-up and drop off in Canterbury. Most vehicles include basic insurance and ferry tickets between the North and South islands; if you're lucky, even the gas could be thrown in. Learn to ski for free

Still can't ski? If it's already a 2010 New Year's resolution, then head to some of Europe's top resorts in January or March next year and you could be learning for free. During two Freshers Weeks, an initiative by the Association of Snow Sports Countries, novices can enjoy free tuition, lift passes and equipment hire when booking through participating tour operators. Choose from 30 resorts across six countries and the pistes will be your playground before you know it. But with places filling fast, you'll need to get your, er, skates on. Freshers Weeks are 16-23 January and 20-27 March 2010. Freedom of the city

Winter festival in Reykjavik, Iceland. Photograph: Alamy

Here's an inspirational tale. When Reykjavik resident Inga Jessen lost her job following Iceland's economic meltdown, she set about building a website for cash-strapped visitors to the city. And, as an ex-economist, she's an authority on making a little go a long way. At freecitytravel.com, you'll find full listings of Reykjavik attractions and events that can be enjoyed without charge. Whether you're in search of culture (in which case visit The Culture House Museum on a Wednesday to avoid the entrance cost and browse medieval manuscripts till your heart's content), or nightlife (head to new, free club Auster for a live DJ at weekends), the site is sure to soften the cost of this most expensive of cities. Make a note in your diary of 12 and 13 February 2010, too, when Iceland's Winter Light festival will be dispelling the northern gloom. Free events are scheduled to take place across Reykjavik, from tours and exhibitions to puppet shows. Mountain hideaways

The Back Hill of Bush Bothy, Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland. Photograph: Adam Lee

Bothying is no business for the faint-hearted. "No tap, no sink, no beds, no lights, and, even if there is a fireplace, perhaps nothing to burn." The Mountain Bothies Association sure believes in telling it straight. But with about 100 stone shelters spread across the remotest parts of Scotland, Wales and the Borders, you'll be right where the wild things are.

Accommodation is absolutely free &ndash; just turn up &ndash; but visitors are entirely responsible for their own comforts (and that includes digging out a loo). For those venturing further afield, then Finland's network of wilderness huts offers hikers equally basic free shelter. Slightly more luxurious huts (equipped with blankets and mattresses as well as stoves) are also available and can be reserved in advance, for a few euros. Visit outdoors.fi to learn more and search for destinations. Walking the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route remains as popular as ever, and as 2010 is a Holy Year, now is the perfect time to plan a trip (you'll have to wait till 2021 for the next one to come along). Pilgrims' hostels &ndash; refugios &ndash; punctuate the route, and while the price of accommodation varies between &euro;3-7, most ask simply for a donation. Just don't forget your pilgrim's credentials. Some like it hot

If the thought of autumnal wild swimming sends a shiver down your spine, Italy's natural hot pools offer a much less punishing alternative. While some of southern Tuscany's hot springs have been incorporated into commercial spas, others can be enjoyed for free. Most well-known are the waterfalls at Saturnia, south of Siena, created by Saturn himself with an earth-splitting thunderbolt (or so legend has it). The soothing, sulphurous water bubbles up, then down, through a series of picturesque, naturally stepped pools and, at 37C, your mind will be all that's chilled. Pools and spas are marked on the carta della provincia (province road map) for both Florence and Siena &ndash; or simply look for towns with commercial spas and a free version is almost certain to be nearby. House work

There's one way of making sure your hostel is up to scratch &ndash; and that's by doing the chores yourself. And there might be a free bed in it, if you go about it the right way. While the editor of HostelWorld, Colm Hanratty, points out that it's rare for hostels to advertise this kind of arrangement, a number of properties listed with the agency have accepted hard labour in lieu of hard cash. They include the ever-popular Green Tortoise Backpackers in San Francisco and Green Tortoise Hostel in Seattle; the Deco Walk Hostel in Miami (the self-proclaimed "world's most stylish hostel", and the only one on Ocean Drive); Southside Lodge in Whistler, Canada (situated just 200m from the Whistler Creek Gondola, it's practically part of the 2010 Winter Olympics downhill course); and the snappily monikered Backpackers Hostel K's House in Kyoto (only nine minutes' walk from JR Kyoto Station). Closer to home, the Scottish Youth Hostel Association requires volunteers to work at its remoter properties for up to two weeks at a time. Chores include gardening, decorating and minor maintenance work, but there are also opportunities to get involved in the running of the hostel &ndash; and earn some valuable brownie points for your CV. Successful applicants for the association's volunteer management positions are given two full days' training, learning about health and safety, cash handling, the booking process and reception duties. Then it's off to put theory into practice at properties such as Broadmeadows, the association's first hostel, opened in 1931. Situated in the stunning countryside of the Scottish Borders, with rabbits, pheasants and sheep for neighbours, it's just half an hour's drive from the 7stains mountain bike trails at Glentross forest &ndash; the perfect setting in which to hone that work-life balance. The festive spirit

Hay-on-Wye, Wales. Photograph: Martin Argles

A man reads at the Guardian Hay festival 2009 in

Unlimited energy? Ultra-thick skin? High tolerance for mud? Then become a festival volunteer and you could save yourself some serious dosh. Oxfam's scheme, which covers Reading, Leeds, Rockness, Bestival and Latitude, to name but a few, is perhaps the most popular and well-known: a deposit is required, but returned on completion of duties. Stewards can expect to work a minimum of three 8hr shifts, and applications open in February. As the number of festivals continues to rocket, however, so do the number of niche opportunities. Named this year as one of the Observer's 10 best alternative festivals, Festinho, in the magical grounds of Kentwell Hall in Suffolk, has opened applications for its 2010 volunteer programme already. Help with everything from car-parking to artist liaison, and in return you'll get a free camping ticket and food (not to mention the use of award-nominated festival loos). If classical music's more your thing, then it's worth considering the Aldeburgh Festival's Hesse Studentships. Applications for the June festivals open in the New Year, to people aged 18-25 with a real passion for classical music. Bed and breakfast accommodation in Aldeburgh is provided, together with tickets to all events; duties range from turning scores to assisting on festival walks. Thinking outside the (music) box, applications are open now for the established Hay Festival internship programme. In return for accommodation and meals, you can expect to work in the festival's press office and celeb-packed green room. Last but not least, the Edinburgh Festival has an embarrassment of riches for canny volunteers: keep an eye on [edinburghfestivaljobs.com](http://edinburghfestivaljobs.com) for the latest opportunities.