

How to pay for the getaway

More vacationers find deals or make their own

By Bella English
GLOBE STAFF

Jonas Petersson wanted to vacation in his native Sweden this summer. But with a newborn and a 20-month-old, he and his wife, Lori, figured a hotel room for two weeks would give them way too little space for way too much money. So in July the Peterssons will swap their Newton Victorian for a Swedish family's house in Stockholm.

Scott Harrington plans to visit Eastern Europe on his next trip — and will stay in hostels to save money.

Kai Armstrong recently visited her daughter, who is a senior at Rollins College. But instead of staying at her custom-

ary hotel in Winter Park, Fla., she shared her daughter's double bed in a small house the young woman rents with two roommates.

Though some people are skipping vacations altogether this year because of the miserable economy, others are plotting their getaways in spite of the dire times — or perhaps even because of them.

"I think people are still finding ways to take a vacation," says Louise Reilly Sacco cofounder of The Frugal Yankee, an online newsletter. "I'm as thrifty as anyone, but if it gets to the point where you're cheap and you're ruining your life, it doesn't make sense. People need a break in their rou-

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SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

Boston hostel manager Scott Harrington relies on hostels for his own travel.

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tine."

More than ever, travelers are getting creative. Some are making deals with friends, exchanging airport rides instead of taking cabs, and trading pet-sitting chores instead of using costly kennels.

Trish Karter of Milton hopes to take over the "yard fees" of a friend's sailboat in exchange for use of the boat this summer. She'll pay to get the boat back in the water after the winter and for its mooring. "So I'll have a weekend getaway and then can sail it to somewhere in the Cape or Islands for a little longer stay this summer; close by, simple, but still wonderful," says Karter, CEO of Dancing Deer Baking Co.

Even for high-end travel, there's much more price-shopping among consumers, says Nancy Greenfield, director of leisure sales for Garber Travel in Boston: "That's just the way of the world now."

Until recently, Joanna Ross hadn't paid much attention to e-mailed newsletters featuring special deals. But she and her husband were planning a trip to Charleston, S.C., in early March

when one such deal caught her eye: an extra night free during midweek. She grabbed it. Then she got another e-mail advertising a reduced rate for the same time at the same place at \$50 less per night, but "for new reservations only."

Undaunted — she was already booked — Ross called and, after some finagling, managed to get the better rate. Her message: be persistent. A psychologist who lives in Needham, Ross says that the dreadful economy motivated her search. "Now, I'm just more aware of how much we spend without thinking about it," she says. "We're all guilty."

For the Petersson family, house-swapping is about convenience and cost. Jonas Petersson had heard about such exchanges and signed up on intervac.com, an international online house exchange site. He paid a \$95 fee, listed his house ("Charming renovated Victorian in beautiful and quiet neighborhood"), and posted a photo of it. Under "destinations preferred," he simply put "Sweden." Before long, he heard from a Stockholm family who wanted to come to Boston.

It seems a perfect match. The Swedish family has two children around the same age as the Petersson offspring, so each house comes with baby equipment. The families will exchange cars, too —



JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

Kai Armstrong, shown with her dog Benson at her Galatea Fine Jewelry store in Milton, found low-cost airfare and car rental and bunked with her daughter during a visit to Winter Park, Fla.

equipped with infant seats.

"Those are the things that make everything so much easier," says Petersson, a manager at Hewlett-Packard. "It will be more space [than a hotel], and it will be free."

Kathleen Cook and her husband, Bruce McCue, of Boston also listed their Nantucket vacation home ("Beautiful Cape style, views of ocean. Walk to beach. Sunsets!!") on intervac.com. In May they will stay at a Tuscan farmhouse for two weeks; the Italian family visited the Nantucket home in August.

"You're saving not only on accommodations, but you don't have to go out to dinner every night because you have a kitchen," Cook says. She and McCue, who own a real estate company, are using frequent flyer air miles, so both their travel and digs are free.

Others are taking "stay-cations" — doing free things downtown or taking day trips, perhaps staying overnight with friends. "Even if you are completely dead broke, you can still hop on the T and find a week's worth of free things you haven't done before," says Reilly Sacco. College lectures, historic walks like the Freedom Trail, or trips to other towns are inexpensive diversions. "My contention is that ev-

ery little town in New England has at least one or two things worth seeing."

Reilly Sacco recently returned from Florida, where she stayed with a friend. Her next trip is to Delaware, where she will stay with her daughter. "As long as you're not going to stay forever, most people are happy to have houseguests for a few days," she says. "That can save you \$200 a night."

How about hostels? They're cheap, and breakfast is usually included. Reilly Sacco, who is 62, won't stay at them. "I am not going to share a room or bathroom," she says, adding that hostels are fine for people who are "younger and more flexible."

That would be Scott Harrington, 27, who recently returned from a year and a half traveling in Central and South America, staying in hostels the entire time. Now he manages Hostelling International Boston on Hemenway Street. On his trip, he paid between \$2 and \$15 a night for a bed. In Boston, his rates for a six-bed dorm room are \$32 to \$45 a night, and \$90 to \$110 for a single, including breakfast — high for hostels because hotels here are so expensive. Though Americans usually relate hostels with international student travel, the United States has about 300 hos-

tels that offer both dormlike and private rooms.

As for Harrington, he's planning a trip to eastern Europe, where he says he will once again stay in hostels: "It's a great way to save money and meet people."

When Kai Armstrong, who owns Galatea Fine Jewelry in Milton, stayed with her daughter in Florida recently, she flew late at night to save on airfare and rented the cheapest car she could find. Next week she's going to see her younger daughter in Savannah, Ga. She asked Annabel, 19, if she could stay in her dorm room.

"She said, 'Mom, that would be a little awkward. I'd have to get a visitor's pass for you and you'd have to be out at 2 in the morning.'" It will cost more, but Armstrong figures she'll bite the bullet and stay at the motel next door.