

A Beginner's Guide to House Sitting

Everything you wanted to know about becoming a house sitter, but were afraid to ask.



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What is house sitting anyway?

House sitting means taking care of someone's home, garden, possessions and often their pets whilst they are away from the property. The house sitter lives in and cares for the home as if it was their own, receiving free accommodation and often, free utilities. Sometimes, they may earn a small income, especially if pet care is required.

You can learn more about the advantages of house sitting by checking out my blog, <http://blivingrock.com/2012/04/10-great-reasons-to-become-a-house-sitter/>

Introduction

House sitting has been my way of life for over a year. I enjoy the lifestyle and freedom it offers and the frequent opportunities it provides for meeting new people. Since friends often ask me how it all works, offering my tips for house sitting seemed like it would be helpful to many. I am glad you have chosen to download this free document so you can get access to all my tips, and share with others.

House sitters and house sitting jobs come in many shapes and sizes. Some homeowners want nothing more than for you to collect the mail and water the house plants. Others require you to care for a number of pets, tend to a vegetable garden, and possibly oversee tradespeople in their home.

For these reasons, my number one tip is to get as much detail as possible about a house sit, and be truthful about whether it is really a good match for you. An ocean view home in San Diego during the winter months might at first seem highly appealing, but caring for three large energetic dogs who require long walks twice daily, with one dog requiring daily diabetes shots, another with bowel problems, and suddenly you may want to reconsider!

Some say that life begins at the end of your comfort zone. How does that sit with you? Regardless, take an honest look in the mirror and figure out exactly why you want to house sit, what you are prepared to accept as work in the house and yard, and where you are prepared to spend some time. House sitting is not a good match for everyone!



Consider the following:

- ❖ Am I comfortable looking after a cat? A dog? Chickens? How many of each?
- ❖ What type of accommodation is minimal for my comfort (one bedroom? two bathrooms? A deck?)
- ❖ What's the shortest time period I would accept? The longest?
- ❖ Am I prepared to accept only a rural location? An urban location? Another country?
- ❖ How will I get to the house sit? Fly? Drive?
- ❖ Will they have a car I can use? What will be the limits of its usage?
- ❖ Will I be alone or with a partner?
- ❖ Am I open to living in a home that may be untidy, cluttered or dirty?
- ❖ Am I able to have family or friends to stay? Where will they sleep?
- ❖ Will I have to stay at the home every night of the house sit?
- ❖ How will I be if I don't like the home? The location? The pets?
- ❖ Will I charge for my services?

This document is divided into two equally important sections: The first provides tips of the trade; the second is about finding work. My own stories and experiences are in *italics*.



Part 1: Tips of the Trade

- ❖ Be Flexible
- ❖ Talk, Talk, Talk
- ❖ Dive In
- ❖ Consider Kindness
- ❖ Words of Wisdom

Be Flexible

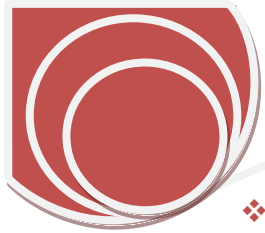
It probably goes without saying, but to be a successful house sitter you need to go with the flow and be open to possibilities. I often remind myself to expect the unexpected.

- ❖ Commit to living without some of your creature comforts. Things will NOT be the same as they were at home.
- ❖ Roll with the punches. New adventures and opportunities to see and learn about another part of the world are always at your fingertips. Being rigid and stubborn in a 'Well this isn't the way it is at home' type of thinking will only lead to disappointment.
 - ❖ *If you have plenty of time and an unlimited budget, whenever possible, have an open agenda about destinations. You may find yourself in a place you knew nothing about which turns out to be one of your favorite spots on the planet!*
 - ❖ *Attempt to stay for at least a month in any one place. It's essential to fully experience life in that part of the world.*
- ❖ Be open to whatever living situation shows up. It's only for a while and that's why you're doing this, right?
- ❖ If you don't like something about where you're staying, do what you can to change it! If you find a place untidy or not up to your standards of cleanliness, fix it! This is your home for the next few weeks, so make it comfortable for you.
- ❖ If you can't live without a specific kitchen gadget, buy one. Leave it behind or give it away. Change around anything that's not working for you until the homeowners return. Make it work for you. Note: it helps to take photos before you rearrange the furniture. After a few weeks, you WILL have forgotten.



Talk, Talk, Talk

- ❖ Communicate regularly with homeowners. Just a weekly update to share some basic news is fine. Some homeowners really appreciate this while others consider it unnecessary. It's wise to err on the side of too much rather than too little. People especially like to hear about how their pets are faring in their absence.
- ❖ For clarity and comfort, try to meet with homeowners before their departure. If not, be really specific about receiving detailed notes.
- ❖ Insist that they leave the contact names and numbers of their vet and the go-to person for emergency repairs or car problems.
- ❖ Find out where they keep their spare keys and fire extinguisher, and where the water and gas shut offs are located.
- ❖ Request Wi-Fi login name and password (more on this later).
- ❖ Request notes about household appliances (especially if there are any quirks), and names of favorite restaurants and places to visit.
- ❖ Discuss the need for a house sitting contract. All the house sitting web sites provide samples. A contract between homeowners and house sitters provides protection and clarity about costs and expectations for both parties.
 - ❖ *I have only signed one contract in twelve house sits. It was an eight-week house sit with homeowners using a house sitter for the first time*
- ❖ Even if you plan to meet the homeowners before the house sit begins, connect with them via Skype prior to the start of the house sit. It's a great way to get to know each other and to discuss pet care routines, Wi-Fi information and final details of any contract you have decided to create.
- ❖ Discuss who will pay for what. Generally the shorter the house sit, the less likely it is that homeowners will require you to pay for basic utilities such as water and heat.
- ❖ Ask for what you want. Remember, you want a good reference to come from every house sit, and clear, honest communication is key.
- ❖ If you use their car, be sure they have adequate (third party) insurance or purchase some for yourself. Peace of mind is more important now than ever, especially if you're driving on the other side of the road.



- ❖ If you want to invite a friend to stay, be sure to clear this with the homeowners before the house sit begins. They will likely be more than happy to have someone join you while housesitting and understand that you will be happier. This translates to an all-around better experience for you and ultimately, for them.
 - ❖ *All the homeowners I asked were happy to allow me this request, sometimes even preparing guest beds before departing.*
- ❖ If you plan to spend a night away from the home, ask if this is acceptable beforehand. Offering a plan of action is more likely to calm their concerns if pet care is required.
- ❖ Be completely open and transparent with your homeowners. Secrecy, lies, or cover-ups do **nothing** for your own comfort or for any respectful relationship between you and your homeowners. If you make a mistake or something goes wrong, admit it, be open and up front. They're not likely to cancel their plans and come home to deal with an issue. They expect you to deal with it. Asking for guidance is appropriate (after you've contacted the emergency contacts they provided). Use your discretion.
- ❖ Sometimes things come up in your life too. If you need to cancel an arranged house sit, CONTACT HOMEOWNERS IMMEDIATELY. Remember, they are counting on you to show up and to care for their pets so they can fly away on vacation worry-free. They need time to make alternate arrangements. Be considerate of their needs too.

Dive In

- ❖ Be sure to ask homeowners to connect you with their friends. For maintenance concerns and for social reasons, this is essential.
- ❖ Accept offers to go out with locals. Put yourself out there. Find out what's going on in your area. Immersing yourself into a new environment is pivotal to your enjoyment.
- ❖ Get to know the neighbors. They are your safety net and are usually keen to offer their help and ply you with all kinds of tips about places to visit.
- ❖ Get involved in community events. Be in the place you've chosen to call home. Solitude certainly has its place, but not 24/7.
 - ❖ *While in Bunbury, Western Australia, I attended a two-week film festival with my homeowner's friend. During a house sit in North Vancouver, I was able to enjoy the free summer concerts in the local village just a short walk from my home.*



- ❖ Hanging out with locals and friends of the homeowners is a highlight of house sitting. This means talking less about yourself. Listen to others' stories. Find out what they love about where they live and a little about their life stories. As Linda Ackerman states, "One of the gifts of travel is the discovery of oneself through other people."
- ❖ Check out local deals.
 - ❖ *Signing up for a free one-week gym membership was a great way to start my Seattle housesit.*
- ❖ Read the literature about a city or country before you arrive.
 - ❖ *While in Mallorca, I read 'There's a Lizard in my Luggage', a humorous book about a former London journalist's gradual migration to a new life in Mallorca. And no trip to India would be complete without reading Sarah Macdonald's 'Holy Cow' along the way.*

Consider Kindness

- ❖ Be respectful of others' hospitality. If people invite you to their home or ask you to join them at an event, be sure to reciprocate or find an alternate way to express your gratitude. Be good company.
- ❖ Leave a thank you note. It is a privilege to live in someone else's home for free.
- ❖ If homeowners left things for you, be sure to do the same for them. Leave coupons for gas, or special time-limited offers at stores and restaurants.
- ❖ When your homeowners return, they will likely be exhausted and travel weary. Make them a dinner on their first night home or leave some freshly baked goodies.
- ❖ Leave the fridge freshly stocked with basic foods and drinks.
- ❖ Leave flowers on the counter and sort the mail.
- ❖ Leave the house cleaner than when you first arrived.
- ❖ Offer to pick up and drop off your homeowners at the airport.
 - ❖ *These gestures go a long way towards homeowners' appreciation of you and your services, and will likely add to your list of wonderful references!*



Words of Wisdom

- ❖ Figure out what comforts you while you're away from home and prepare yourself adequately.
 - ❖ *For me, having Internet access is essential. It allows me to connect with others on Skype, email, and Facebook, and to purchase and read Kindle books. I am able to post on my blog and upload my pictures to Flickr for friends and family to see.*
- ❖ Being away from the familiarity of home can be unsettling. Prolonged solitude can also lead to feelings of loneliness. Be prepared.
- ❖ Then again, be sure to enjoy the times of solitude. It may be one time in your life that solitude is gifted to you in a way you've never experienced before. Take advantage of not being 'at home' with all the busy-ness of property maintenance and social expectations.
- ❖ Dates for house sits often don't synchronize perfectly, so you need to make other plans while you're between jobs. Consider all the people who might want to see you and vice versa. Make some calls...
 - ❖ *I chose to house sit in areas I wanted to visit that were also close to a friend or relative. I was able to stay with friends in Perth and Melbourne before and after my two Australian house sits.*
- ❖ Breaks between house sitting jobs provide wonderful opportunities to travel.
- ❖ House sit for free. Some house sitters do charge for their services, especially if there are many animal and/or household responsibilities.
 - ❖ *I have never charged for my house sitting services, as I prefer to be open to a greater choice of assignments.*
- ❖ If you are house sitting and traveling simultaneously, book one-way flights.
 - ❖ *TIP: Try giving up control of your seat selection. Imagine accepting any seat available as you arrive at the airport. Remind yourself that you don't need that aisle seat, you just want it. Besides, it's just a few hours of your entire life. It's great practice for releasing control in life. Who knows, you may experience something that turns out better than any amount of preplanning.*



Part 2: Finding Work

- ❖ Word of Mouth
- ❖ House Sitting Web Sites
- ❖ Advertising Yourself
- ❖ Responding to Ads

Word of Mouth

- ❖ Let people know you're a house sitter. Connections lead to more connections. You'd be amazed how many people know someone who'd like a house sitter while they're out of town. If you don't tell them, they might never know.
 - ❖ *This is how I get 50% of my house sits.*
- ❖ Word of mouth is THE BEST way to get local work as a house sitter.

House Sitting Web Sites

There is a variety of house sitting sites online. Each has its pros and cons. Look at each site to see which might be the best match for you.

I signed up as a house sitter on the three sites mentioned here and would recommend them all. I list them here in order of preference concerning my own success with acquiring work. There are other sites for house sitters, which I joined but did not renew due to their limited listings, and for that reason, I shall not mention them here.

www.HouseCarers.com

Pros:

- *Updated interface (ongoing)*
- *references can be uploaded to the system and only viewed by people who have signed up with House Carers*
- *allows for very specific search criteria for daily email alerts*
- *based in Australia, has many worldwide as well as Aussie listings*

Cons:

- *I find it difficult to manoeuvre around the Members Area*
- *I find uploading photo parameters restrictive*

❖ My profile: <http://www.housecarers.com/housesitter-profile.cfm?mem=2145609430>

Annual Fee: US\$50



www.MindMyHouse.com

Pros:

- *great interface*
- *community area with support*
- *blogs and stories from house sitters*

Cons:

- *many listings are for variable dates, i.e. looking for people that live locally who can just show up for a weekend or short period at a moment's notice. This is great if you live locally and want a change of scene for a few days but NOT what you want for a year away*
- *references have to be sent to individual homeowners upon request*

❖ My profile http://www.mindmyhouse.com/owners/sitter_listing/8964

Annual Fee: US\$20

www.caretaker.org

Pros:

- *amazing locations*
- *many opportunities to earn money e.g. ranch hand, hotel manager*
 - *One ad was for a private manager for a wealthy NY household offering a salary of \$100,000!*

Cons:

- *few listings for just house sitting*
- *very specific demands*
- *often more suited to couples*

I no longer have a profile at this site.

Advertising Yourself

Regardless of which site you choose, you need to create a profile. Take the time to make it the best it can be.

- ❖ Write a **great** ad. All the sites above provide samples of ads you can read and tweak to match your particular profile.
- ❖ Homeowners prefer to offer their homes to older people, especially women.



- ❖ Many prefer couples, especially if they are in a remote location or in a home that may require more duties and responsibilities. Two house sitters can mean greater peace of mind.
- ❖ Include a profile picture. People really want to see you!
- ❖ Find good references. Consider whom you know that could speak to your responsibility, flexibility and communication skills. Write each a letter telling them of your intentions to become a house sitter.
 - ❖ *I provide the name, email, phone number and address (get permission before releasing all this information) of six references. When I first started out, I provided just four.*
- ❖ Be sure to adjust and add to your references as you complete new house sits. Longer term and recent house sits need to be on your reference list.

Responding to Ads

All sites provide daily alerts. **Sign up to receive these email alerts.**

1. Respond to email alerts IMMEDIATELY. Homeowners often work on a first-come, first-serve basis, as there are more sitters available than there are house sits advertised.
2. Once a homeowner has begun corresponding with a potential house sitter, the likelihood of you being considered is drastically reduced. Do what you can to be one of the first two or three respondents to an ad.
3. Personalize your response to the homeowner. Outline why you would be a great house sitter and how you can best meet their needs. If pet care is required, mention the names of the pets in your reply. Ask them to take a good look at your profile (it is automatically attached with your reply). Offer your Skype address for future correspondence. Don't be too lengthy and certainly don't send a generic reply. They will sense your lack of commitment right away.
4. Follow up. If you haven't heard anything within 48 hours, check to see how your application is going. Even if you're rejected with a 'To All Applicants' message, respond with a positive note. If things fall through, and they do, you might be the first person they contact.
 - ❖ *That's how I got my Tasmanian house sit. It turned out to be one of the most joyful experiences of my life!*
5. Remember, this is a job. You have to work at getting house sits in the places you want to stay.



Additional Resources

If you are considering house sitting as a way of life or simply for a limited period, you may want to do some further reading. The following e-books provide more in-depth information than is included in this document.

<http://www.housem8.com/house-sitting-work.html>

On this site, you can purchase and download their book, *Successful House Sitting: An easy how-to guide* for \$7.95 at the time of writing this.

<http://www.housesittingtravel.com/more-about-the-book/>

A 100 page downloadable book written by experienced house sitters with House Carers.com. Cost \$9.99 at the time of writing this.

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Be Living Rock

One day at a time

