

Intervac Home Exchange Guidelines

Use of these guidelines

These guidelines are written to advise and assist you to get the best out of your membership of Intervac and your home exchange experiences. They also deal with a number of matters that have caused difficulty, including car insurance, car servicing, payment for damage and breakages and pet hygiene. The guidelines are intended to be useful in Intervac members’ negotiations and they are written with frankness for this purpose. They cover the following matters.

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Your Intervac entry

Your online entry

- 1 Your online entry allows you to record a great deal of information about your home and its surroundings. This is intended to save a lot of questions and potential for misunderstanding when you are negotiating an exchange.

Advertising your home

- 2 To get the best from your membership it is essential to promote your home and its area, indicating where you are, how best to be reached and what's on offer. Obviously your presentation must be honest but the more information you can give, the more it helps other members to decide and the more attractive offers you will obtain.

Our facilities

- 3 Our new site provides substantially increased facilities to present your home in its best light. You can post up to twenty photographs, with unlimited descriptive text, under the headings of your home, family, lifestyle and neighbourhood. Some members have posted descriptions in different languages.

Personal webpage

- 4 Some members like to have their own web page and, if you have one, we provide a link to it on the system. We also offer the service of building a web page and hosting it on this site. The web page might show photographs of your home and garden, details and photographs of your family and descriptions of the surrounding area and its facilities. We build the page to your specifications and agree it with you before it is posted.

Holiday dates

- 5 You show your holiday dates on the system and they are an important means of allowing members to search for the most convenient times. You should try and be as flexible as possible though obviously, with school holidays for example, this is not always possible.

Residence

- 6 Under Intervac rules each member is registered in the country of his or her residence and, thus, to register in Great Britain ("GB") (which for this purpose (only!) includes the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark) you need to have your main home in Britain. As a resident in GB you can list a second or holiday home overseas provided your normal residence is in GB. If you leave Britain and take up residence abroad you need to join Intervac through the Organiser in the respective country. Please note that Northern Ireland is administered by Frank Kelly the Organiser for Ireland.

Contacts with other members

Activation

- 7 As soon as you become a member of Intervac and receive your membership number and password, your entry details will become visible to others, whether members or visitors, on our international web site. This means you can start contacting other members, who can and will start contacting you.

Current members

- 8 We do not recommend exchanging with members whose membership has expired. As much as anything this is for your protection as we do not think you should exchange with someone who does not consider membership to be important. As part of our terms and conditions we require that all members remain current until their final home exchange is complete.

Email

- 9 Most of our members use email to make contact. To contact another member, you login to your entry, which gives you access to member correspondence details. For security we have hidden the email address of all members. Via our system, however, you can send an email to the member of your choice. When you receive a reply your contact's email will be known to you and you can correspond freely.
- 10 It is best to prepare a standard email to send out to other members inviting them to come to your home. Your email should cover a brief description of your home, its attractions and its location, your desired holiday dates and some information about yourself and your family. If, as I advise, you have given plenty of information about your home in your listing you can keep your email shorter by referring to it.
- 11 When you have composed the email to your first proposed exchange partner, copy it by following these procedures.
 - (a) Open the email, place the cursor on the text and press CTRL+A to highlight it.
 - (b) Press CTRL+C to copy the text to the "clipboard" inside your computer.
 - (c) Open up Notepad (a standard Windows programme) and press CTRL+V to paste the text you will have copied into the document that appears.
 - (d) Save the document as, for example "My standard email.txt".
 - (e) To send this email to others just open "My standard email.txt" in Notepad and reverse the above procedure.

This procedure is for Windows users only as I am sure that Mac aficionados will know what to do!

Replies to emails

- 12 It is very frustrating if people send out invitations and no response is forthcoming. If you decide that your home is no longer available it is important that you change the traffic lights to say so. When your traffic lights are green, however, it is common consideration for others that you reply to emails of invitation. Please prepare a standard email, as above, which says something like, "Thank you for your expression of interest in our home but our circumstances are such that we are unable to proceed." and use it to reply to all those offers that you do not wish to take further.

Negotiating your exchange

Get to know your proposed exchange partner

- 13 The more trouble you take to get to know your exchange partner the more likely it is that your exchange will be successful. Try and get things to the point that you have a friend staying in your house and please read all the paragraphs in this section with this in mind.

Try out the system

- 14 Many members offer weekend exchanges and the same principles apply as with a longer holiday. Weekend swaps are an excellent introduction to home exchanging.

Describing your home, your family and the local area.

- 15 The facilities on the international site allow you to provide photos of the inside and outside of your home, your family and your pets, together with a full description. You need to give a good and

honest description of your house, its general decor, the local facilities, your neighbourhood, the transport you use, the access to shops and everything else that people staying would need to know. Remember that people want reassurance before they commit themselves. The best way to provide this information is to post it on your entry and if you do it properly, you only need to do this once. You can see for yourself how much easier it is to decide when there are full details posted.

Confirmations

- 16 Once you receive an offer you are happy to accept, you must confirm it in writing either by email or post. Do not rely on an oral agreement and ensure that all the points that matter are confirmed, including insurance, both household and where appropriate car insurance, pets and their hygiene, use of computers/internet and the details of the exchange. You should make sure you deal specifically with the matters in the next four paragraphs, if they are appropriate, and one way of doing this is to attach this document to an email that says, “This is what I am doing can you confirm that you will do so as well?” When all is agreed you and your exchange partner should complete an Intervac Holiday Agreement Form and send me a copy please. I must advise you not to proceed, however, if your proposed exchange partner is unable to agree on these matters.

Security – home insurance

- 17 You should notify your household insurers that you will be having non-paying guests to stay for a specified period. Your home is obviously safer being occupied in your absence, but not all policies provide the same level of cover. Most insurers do not cover you for burglary unless there is evidence of a break in so make a point of agreeing mutually with your exchange partners that you will keep the home secure. It is best not to leave high value movable items such as jewellery, silver or small antiques in the house. (Have you yourself never forgotten to lock the house when you leave it?). You should examine also the insurance position regarding accidental damage and agree mutually that the exchange guest will “own up” as necessary to damage and bear any uninsured cost.

Car insurance

- 18 Similarly, if you are considering swapping cars, make sure your guests are fully covered and, if necessary, contact the insurers. Your exchange guests are entitled to assume, unless agreed otherwise, that the car is insured beyond the minimum statutory cover and you should agree specifically who should bear the cost of the excess on the policy. You must check that additional cover for non EU drivers can be provided. You should consider also, if your policy is not protected, whether to take into account the loss of any no claims bonus.

Other matters relating to cars

- 19 Other car matters are:
- (a) You should mutually agree that exchange cars are in good working condition and serviced before the exchange.
 - (b) You should agree that the user bears the cost of any uninsured damage, including minor accidents or, for example, damage caused by filling a diesel car with petrol or vice versa.
 - (c) In some countries people like to impose a radius limit. For example in Australia a condition might be imposed that an exchanger in Sydney should not try to drive to Perth (several thousand

kilometres across a desert!). For GB the question might be whether or not the car should be driven to the Continent and, if so, are insurance matters sorted out. Are you happy that your exchange partner can drive on the “wrong” side of the road?

Remember that the purpose of exchanging cars is to avoid the expense of hiring, which is the measure against which you should consider all these items.

Pets

- 20 Cats and dogs moult and carry fleas, which, sometimes, are impossible to eliminate completely. Dogs bark! There is no point in being mealy mouthed about this and they have other habits such as my cat goes hunting and shows off his prowess by bringing birds and animals, both dead and alive, into the house. If you are troubled by these habits you should exchange on a no pets basis, for which there is plenty of opportunity on our site. As a pet owner, however, you must be frank about your pets and generally it is only people who do not understand animals who will mind. On exchange you should agree that your pets will be appropriately dosed for fleas and worms, in accordance with your pets needs and/or veterinary advice, and make sure that the carpets and soft furnishings in the rooms that the pets use are thoroughly hoovered.

Use of computers/internet access

- 21 There is increasing demand for providing exchange guests with internet access. Antipodeans in particular prefer keeping in touch with their families by email to being woken up to answer the telephone at night! You should ensure that if you provide internet access you should agree whether or not it is free (eg: broadband) and whether or not your exchange guests should bring their own laptops. Make sure that sensitive information on your computer is secure.

Numbers of people staying

- 22 You should agree the number of people staying and, if you are entertaining visitors, let the owner know how many people are likely to come.

Checklist of other matters

- 23 Here is a list of other matters that need to be agreed
- (a) Instructions for care of pets or plants, as applicable.
 - (b) Each home owner is usually responsible for the fuel bills of his own home, unless otherwise agreed.
 - (c) Beds to be made up on arrival and departure.
 - (d) Laundry facilities.
 - (e) Settlement of phone calls. We suggest you charge only for international calls made by your guests.
 - (f) Emergency repairs costing above £25 to be approved by a telephone call to the home owner. Otherwise the cost should be borne by exchange guests.
 - (g) Breakages are the responsibility of the exchange guests.

Preparation for the exchange

Prepare to welcome Guests

- 24 Prepare an information pack for your guests. Your local Tourist Information Office should have numerous free leaflets on local attractions.

Introductory email

- 25 Write an email setting out all the necessary details, including, for example
- Instructions of how to get there
 - Arrangements for keys
 - Details of local facilities
 - Milk delivery
 - Local facilities and shops
 - Instructions for waste disposal
 - Important contacts such as emergency, doctor's, vet's and neighbours' telephone numbers.

Warm and inviting

- 26 Prepare your home for your exchange guests as you would for any of your own friends and make sure that your house is clean and ready for their arrival. Remember that you expect the same from your exchange partners.
- A bottle of wine and some flowers provide a special welcome.
 - Make up beds and leave some basic foods, for your guests' arrival.
 - Make sure that staple food supplies such as sugar, tea, coffee and salt have not run out.
 - Leave any necessary instructions regarding appliances and where to locate the central heating/hot water, fuse box and other facilities, if neighbours are not available to show them around your home.
 - Leave a list of important numbers next to the phone, including emergency numbers, operator, directory enquiries, doctor or hospital, friends for advice if a problem arises, and babysitters or vets, if applicable.
 - Store irreplaceable ornaments and special personal items, if there is worry about breakage. It is not necessary or desirable to remove all ornaments and furniture.
 - Provide any special instructions for leaving the house secure.
 - Indicate if any parts of the home are off limits or equipment not to be used e.g. a computer.
 - Leave information pack available for your guests' use.

Completion

- 27 Just before you go...
- Replace basic foods and leave linens as arranged.
 - Clean home and leave everything as you found it.
 - Leave cash for phone calls and any minor breakage. Leave a note of any incidents or items replaced or broken.
 - If you depart early for any reason, make sure that your exchange partners and their neighbours are notified.

- (e) Follow home security procedures prior to leaving, including return of keys.
- (f) A thank you note, and perhaps a small gift as a token of your appreciation, is always a welcome homecoming.

Cancellations

- 28 It is obviously unacceptable to cancel firm arrangements unless there really is a good reason. Inevitably, however, there will be good reasons for cancellations, such as unforeseen illness. If you have no alternative but to cancel you must inform your exchange partner as soon as possible.