

INTERNATIONAL LIVING

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“We Spend Half the Year in Chiang Mai and 6 Months Globetrotting Rent-Free”

By Steven LePoidevin



Early each evening a shepherd comes with his herd of over 100 goats to graze on the vegetation beneath the olive and almond trees. We would hear them coming long before we saw them as their bells chimed in the distance,” says Melbourne native Glenn Lamb. Scenic vistas and these daily visits of a wandering shepherd and his goats greet Glenn and his wife Jacqueline in the small town of Riogordo, on the Costa Del Sol in Spain. The 200-year-old, white-washed stone cottage is surrounded by rolling hills, old olive orchards and almond trees and is just five kilometres from the local town.

“This is only one of the beautiful properties and lovely houses we have stayed in...for free,” says Glenn.

During the past year, the couple have spent time in Thailand, Hong Kong, Spain, Gibraltar and the U.K. And their cost of accommodation? Absolutely zero! Instead they housesit which allows them to travel economically for six months and live the rest of the year in the university town of Chiang Mai, Thailand. The bonus is that they still have the time and money to head back to Melbourne once a year to visit family and friends.

Housesitting was not part of their original early retirement plan. In fact, they didn’t even really know much about it until they received an email from *International Living* telling them about it.

Jacqueline said, “It was a training course that *International Living* did online which basically was a fast-track way to start and be successful. That’s how we got started.” (See sidebar for details.)

The couple found out that they could apply to look after

people’s houses—housesit—while the owners were away. The result is free accommodation for a few days to a few weeks.

“We apply for a housesit with a lot of other people,” says Jacqueline. “The owner will shortlist people and then we Skype and have a bit of a chat and get to know each other. And if we are successful, we continue to build a relationship via email prior to getting there. This all begins months in advance.”

They have found most of their housesitting opportunities through the website, [Trusted Housesitters](#). They also put together their own website, [The Aussie Lambs](#). The site includes their bio, the services they offer and references from homeowners they have sat for. Now they also refer potential clients directly to their website for more information.

“Our original idea was to move to Thailand for six months and then spend a couple of months in Europe,” says Jackie. The couple moved to the city of Chiang Mai, in northern Thailand for a couple of months to check it out and ended up staying. They moved here for the low-cost of living, great year-round climate, friendly locals and easy access to fresh and vegan-friendly food.

“We figured the offset from the cheap time in Southeast Asia would give us the money to afford a couple of months in the more expensive countries. But then we discovered housesitting and that took out one of the big chunks of the expense for our accommodation.”

Glenn and Jacqueline Lamb discovered how to stay for free in Hua Hin.



We get to stay in places that you wouldn't normally go as a tourist."

invited to look after a place in the southern seaside resort town of Hua Hin. Three months later found them boarding a plane to Hong Kong for 10 days where they were offered a housesit to look after Tang, a beautiful 12-month-old energetic cross-breed rescue dog.

While living in their small rental apartment in Chiang Mai, Glenn and Jacqueline don't have any opportunity or space for a garden. And as much as they love animals, their lifestyle doesn't really support having any around. Housesitting has given them the chance to indulge in both.

Glenn said, "When we are on the road housesitting, it gives us that reconnection with animals. And depending on the property, looking after the garden as well and poking about.

"We have looked after some really great pets from Alfie, the Catalan cat, on the coast of Spain to five Cavalier King Charles Spaniels in Western Scotland.

"But, for me, the best thing about housesitting is the fact that we get to visit and stay in places that you wouldn't normally go as a tourist. When we were in France, we were living about five or 10 minutes from the main village of Mauleon in the French Pyrenees. They had a summer fair on for the afternoon; entertainment and singing and stalls in the shadow of the large castle overlooking the town."

With their foot in the door, an informative website and great references from families in Thailand and England under their belt, their housesitting life has taken off with a vengeance.

As they travel the world, the idea of a typical day changes with every passing country. May found them back on the coast of Spain housesitting a beautiful Labrador named Scaline. Their temporary two-bedroom apartment was located only 152 metres from the beach in a small community with a view to Gibraltar and Africa.

"Whilst the Algeciras area is not a popular destination for overseas tourists, it has a lovely Spanish feel about it and there are beautiful, clean beaches. We stayed in Getares, just 25 minutes away from Gibraltar. From this area you can get a fast ferry to Morocco, Africa, but we found some other beautiful places to visit including Tarifa, Bolonia, Castillo de Castellar and the ancient Moorish town of Cadiz," says Glenn.

Because the couple don't pay for accommodation on their travels their expenses are about \$2,500 per month.

"We could do it cheaper if we were a bit smarter. This year, we flitted back from the U.K. to France, U.K. to Spain. If we organised our housesits a little better, we wouldn't have so many travel sectors to do which add on cost. Because this was our first year doing housesitting, we didn't know if anybody would even want us. We were flying to everything and anything. If anybody said 'yes we want you', then yes we would go. So we were sort of flittering about quite a bit," says Glenn.

With repeat housesits already booked for next year, they've decided to be a bit more selective.

"We had a lot more success than we expected. Now we are going

They moved to Chiang Mai at the end of 2015 and, as luck would have it, their first housesit opportunity came up soon after they arrived when they were

5 TIPS TO GET RENT-FREE STAYS

By Yvonne Bauche

Housesitting gives you the opportunity to travel and sample different retirement lifestyles while not breaking the bank.

My husband, Michael, and I have lived rent-free in Tuscan farmhouses, French vineyards, Spanish casitas, English heritage homes, luxury Costa Rican villas and a jungle retreat in Belize. In exchange for looking after the house, garden, pets and pool, we have saved thousands in accommodation costs.

But how do you get picked for the housesits you want? Here are some of my tips.

Register on at least one housesitter site. We use HouseCarers.com and TrustedHousesitter.com. These online sites allow you to build a "profile" so the homeowner can understand who you are and why they should trust you to take care of their home.

Think about your profile as a sales pitch. You are really selling yourself so make sure to concentrate on the benefits that you can provide. Successful profiles also include your personal story, photographs of you, your home and garden, photographs of you with your—or other people's—pets, excellent character references and glowing endorsements from previous housesits.

Write your own initial character references. When starting out it is perfectly ok to write your own reference and ask your friends and employers to okay them. You can also use homeowner's feedback as the basis of a written testimonial. Write up the testimonial, send it to them and ask for permission to use it.

Have a criminal record check. Having this available for homeowners (as well as an international driver's licence) you are adding to your credibility.

Have your own personal website. These are easy to set up (ours is TheBauches.com). When I contact homeowners I always suggest they check out our website for more information about us. To stand out from the crowd, we added a short video introducing ourselves.

Editor's Note: The best tip? Yvonne and Michael Bauche have put everything they know about how to get the best housesits all over the world in one definitive resource—it's what Glenn and Jacqueline used to start on their own road to rent-free travel. [Take a look here.](#)

to concentrate on Spain for a period and then concentrate on the U.K. for a period.

"We'll probably go home once a year for a month and try to do a housesit in Australia and see the family. We won't have any permanent residence per se. We'll keep our property in Australia and rent it out for about \$380 per week. It's a good investment for us and also helps to cover our monthly expenses."

"Life is too short, if you can afford to do stuff, you should do it," says Glenn. ■