

'Home Sweet Anywhere': Why these retirees traded their home for life around the world



Lynne and Tim Martin are breaking all the rules of retirement.

At a time when they had every right to kick back in their cozy Paso Robles, Calif., home and live out their golden years surrounded by children, grandchildren and friends, they chose to sell their house, pack their lives in two rolling duffel bags, and see the world.

Since 2010, Lynne, 73, and Tim, 68, have been chronicling their journey on their popular blog, HomeFreeAdventures.com, where they share the rules of living “home free” as they learn them first-hand. This week, Lynne’s memoir, “[Home Sweet Anywhere](#),” hit shelves. Lynne retired from a career in public relations, and Tim retired from his job running a small electronics firm.

Their lifestyle is the stuff of dreams for most retirees, but the couple’s decision to travel full time was very much rooted in reality.

“We looked very carefully at what our overhead was living in California, and what it cost us to wake up every morning in our house,” says Lynne. “We added everything together and it was staggering. We found we could live for less traveling the world.”

If they needed a sign they were on the right path, they got it as soon as they put their house on the market — it sold in one day. In less than four months, they began the first leg of their journey in San Miguel, Mexico, where a friend agreed to let them house-sit for free. A month later, they were in Buenos Aires for six weeks, where they tried (and failed) to fine-tune their Spanish.

After a brief visit to the U.S. for Thanksgiving, they flew to Florida and took a one-way cruise to Europe, where they spent seven months hopping around France, Italy, England, Ireland and Portugal. They're re-visiting their favorite destination, Paris, this June.



Photo: Lynne and Tim Martin

“We try to schedule our destinations [based on our budget],” Lynne says. “If we’re going to London or Paris, which are expensive, we try to counter them by going to Portugal or Spain afterward, which are cheaper. It all cost-averages.”

About that budget... living abroad without a home base isn’t something one can do on a whim, especially without a steady income. We asked the Martins to tell us how they manage to make it work.

Funding: With the help of an investment advisor, the couple decided live off of a \$6,000 monthly stipend, sourced from returns on their joint investment portfolio. They also get a boost from Lynne’s Social Security income. Since they book trips as far as six months in advance, they keep a “slush fund” of about \$20,000 to make deposits ahead of time on any lodging or transportation they may need without biting into their monthly budget.

“When we did this, the first thing we told our family was ‘we know it sounds like a wild idea, but you’ll never have to support us,’” Tim says. “What’s remarkable is that the stipend we take from our portfolio has not changed a nickel since we hit the road.”

It took decades to build the nest egg that now sustains them overseas. Lynne was always an aggressive saver, but Tim, like most Americans, didn’t start saving for retirement until he was well into his 40s. To catch up, he dabbled in real estate for a while and ran a small electronics firm. “I was lucky,” he says. “I saved the money from [real estate deals] and made up for the times when I was younger and foolish.”

Transportation: One of their favorite ways to bundle transportation and lodging together is to take “repositioning” cruises. Twice a year, cruise lines relocate their ships as the seasons change and sell cheap one-way fares to passengers who want to come along for the ride. The Martins recently traveled from the U.S. to Europe for \$2,000 — Not exactly ideal if you have to book a flight home as soon as you land, but for Lynne and Tim, it’s an economical way to get from point A to point B while enjoying all the amenities a cruise has to offer. Often they travel from the U.S. to Europe this way.

“When you consider what airfare costs, we’re getting transportation there, plus 12 or 14 days of food and housing,” Lynne says.

On the ground, they stick to public transportation whenever possible and use [CarRentals.com](https://www.carrentals.com) when wheels are necessary. The site lets them search for rental agencies in most countries and compare prices in one place..



Photo: Lynne and Tim Martin

Lodging: With a housing budget of around \$2,400 a month, they don’t have room for pricey hotels. They use [Homeaway.com](https://www.homeaway.com) and [VRBO.com](https://www.vrbo.com) to rent apartments, condos and sometimes houses. To stretch their dollar and have time to settle in to new places, they stay in countries for several weeks at a time.

And their first destination in any new city is always the grocery store. If they do eat out, it's usually for lunch, a much less expensive meal.

"The concept of living home-free is different from being on vacation," Lynne says. "When we are in a place, we may stay home all day because we have things we need to do. We have a life. We're not in a big hurry. We eat at home almost all evenings."

Shopping: Living out of two suitcases doesn't allow for much souvenir shopping. They purchase new clothing as they need it, but every new item that goes into their bag means another must be tossed. When hopping from warm to cold climates, they pick up heavy coats at secondhand stores and donate them before moving on again. "We used to have an extra suitcase," Lynne says. "By our second trip we swore to ourselves never again."

Health care: Since Medicare doesn't cover overseas health expenses, Lynne and Tim have an international catastrophic health care policy. It's not much, but it ensures they can be transported home if they become too ill for travel. For more common health needs like dental checkups, they pay out of pocket. "Health care in other countries is remarkably good," she says. "If you get sick in Paris, lucky you."

Of course, homesickness isn't covered by any health policy, stateside or beyond. The Martins are avid users of Skype and FaceTime. They were so determined to keep in touch with family and friends that they took computer classes before they started traveling to be sure they knew how everything on their new Apple computers worked.

The time table: Tim usually handles nitty gritty trip-planning duties, but they're careful to leave room in their schedule. "We try to plan six months ahead because I'm old and I need to know where I'm going," Tim says. "When we first started, we tried planning a year ahead and I thought that lacked a little flexibility."

Currency: Credit is king with the Martins. They take advantage of their airline-specific credit cards for free checked baggage perks and otherwise use credit cards that earn points for travel and don't charge foreign exchange fees. Mostly, they rely on their United Presidential Plus MasterCard, which comes with access to United's airport club lounges and two free checked bags (saving them \$240).

The end of the road: With the benefit of good health on their side, the Martins say they'll continue traveling as long as their bodies allow it. But they purposefully leave their principal retirements savings untouched as a form of security for when they do finally need to slow down.

"Someday our health will deteriorate and at that point, we'll have to [slow] our pace," Tim says. It's all part of their plan, Lynne adds: "That's the vow we made. We're not going to show up at anyone's home needy."