

# Embrace True Freedom: Travel in Retirement

## “We Love Living the Housesitters’s Life”

Names: Johanne Sauve and Doug Dyer  
Ages: 59 and 65  
From: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Right now, my husband Doug and I are living rent-free in a four-bedroom luxury villa overlooking the Caribbean. From our veranda, we have a 300-degree view of the colorful homes dotting the hillsides of our island home. Our days are spent mostly lounging around the infinity saltwater pool, making sure the pets get everything they need. A small price to pay for such a great lifestyle.

It’s a far cry from the life we left behind in Vancouver. In 2015, with Doug approaching retirement age, we began to consider a move to a more affordable country, where the sun would shine every day and we could shed our winter clothes. Barefoot on the beach sounded much better than shivering in the Canadian winters.

That year, we explored Ecuador and fell in love with the small coastal village of San Clemente. We planned to return in January 2016. But when it was time to book our trip, a serious El Niño was predicted for Ecuador, so we decided to explore Nicaragua, instead.

Just days before our plane was scheduled to leave, we saw a request for a four-and-a-half-month house/pet sit on the rim of a volcano at Laguna de Apoyo. The home was in the jungle, with unobstructed views of Lake Nicaragua. I could picture myself having my morning coffee, rocking with a cat curled up on my lap.

Doug responded to the homeowner and set up a Skype call. They were eager to meet us, so I added Laguna de Apoyo to our itinerary. The four of us had a couple of visits and hit it right off. Like that, Doug and I were on our way to our first housesit.

While learning about what housesitting entailed, I was discovering a new purpose in life. My career of 37 years caring for small children was soon to be over. And it would be replaced with caring for animals—not a bad trade.

Back in Vancouver, my decision to retire

came as a shock to all concerned. We were moving to a developing country and living rent free under the sun. With nothing but a few suitcases in tow, we would become slow travelers instead of mere tourists.

Our first housesit was a blast. The super-friendly homeowners even organized a barbecue to welcome us to Nicaragua. I was loving the life of a housesitter so much that I agreed to delay our plans to settle down somewhere, and to find more housesits, instead. We eventually spent nine months in the area, paying no rent.

Our second destination was Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula. I absolutely loved everything about this region. The cost of living was very low and the people were so welcoming. We spent two fabulous months there, doing a few spectacular sits in the beautiful colonial city of Mérida and the quiet fishing villages of Sisal and Celestún. The housesits in Sisal and

**“We spent nine months in the area, paying no rent.”**

Celestún were directly on the Gulf of Mexico. Picture long, invigorating walks on deserted beaches awash with miniature shells. Warm, blue-green waters were tempting all day long. Pelicans skimmed the waves searching for the catch of the day as flamingos flew by overhead. In Mérida, we found many restaurants that offer tasty meals for two (with a drink) for less than 200 pesos (around \$12). The evenings were particularly pleasant for a stroll in the old city, stopping to enjoy free entertainment.

Right now, we’re enjoying the Grenadine Islands, in the eastern Caribbean. Then, to close out 2017, the winds will blow us toward Bocas del Toro, on Panama’s Caribbean coast: another new country for us.

It’s been a great adventure so far. I know I have made the right choice with my life.—*Johanne Sauve.*

## “The World Is Huge and I Want to See It”

Name: Vadim Ponorovsky  
Age: 52  
From: New York City

Since retiring two years ago, Vadim Ponorovsky has been traveling non-stop. He has been to Mexico, Costa Rica, Italy, Spain, France, Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam, immersing himself in new cultures and making new friends. “Every day is a new experience. You see something you’ve never seen, you hear something you’ve never heard, and you eat something you’ve never eaten before,” he says.

“Many years ago, at a college party, I said that I would retire at 50.” And he did. When Vadim turned 50, he became a roving retiree. He always loved traveling, but after a successful career owning French restaurants in New York, Vadim is enjoying a more relaxing lifestyle traveling 12 months a year.

Choosing a new destination is easy for him. He says that, if a country is safe, he wants to go there. “Most of my life has been ruled by spontaneity, and my motto is, ‘Let’s see what happens.’ The world is huge and I want to see it.”

Vadim prefers slow travel, staying as long as his tourist visas allow. “I can stay in a European country with a tourist visa for 90 days, six months in Mexico,” he explains. “When I get there, I am not interested in going to the museums but in experiencing life and understanding how people live on a day-to-day basis.”

Vadim’s monthly budget (funded by his investments and savings) is never above \$3,000. “I avoid touristy destinations, as they tend to be more expensive. For instance, in France, instead of Paris, I may choose to stay in Lyon.” He also tries to alternate expensive countries with budget-friendly ones. “Last year, I spent quite a bit of time in Europe during the summer, which is the most expensive time there. But I offset it by spending a while in Thailand and Vietnam, which are incredibly inexpensive.”

After choosing his destination and researching visa requirements, Vadim looks for accommodation. “Airbnb is a good way to start. If the prices are reasonable, then I just book for the duration of my stay. If they are more expensive, I book for the first couple of weeks and then try to find something cheaper when I arrive.”



Johanne Sauve and Doug Dyer discovered that they could travel affordably in retirement, without needing to settle down anywhere, or pay rent.

Making friends with locals and expats alike while traveling around the globe has been easy for Vadim. “I am constantly expanding the circle of people that I know around the world. Traveling solo is the best way to make new friends, because you are not tethered to someone and people approach you without hesitation.”

Vadim has no doubts about what has been his favorite place on his adventures so far.

“Thailand has been my favorite, due to the time I spent in Chiang Mai. A place with 600 Buddhist temples is bound to make an impact. I spent days exploring the temples and quite a bit of time chatting with the monks.

“Food is central to my travels. I love it and want to go as native as possible as quickly as possible. And Thailand certainly offers an opportunity to broaden one’s palate. The wide variety of meats and seafood certainly has me counting the days until I’m back.”

Vadim is loving his life as a roving retiree and has a piece of advice for everyone who wants to do the same: “Buy that ticket and just go! I have traveled so many times when a plane ticket was all I had. We only live once.”—*Anna Lebedeva.*

## “Nothing Could Be Better Than What We’re Doing Now”

Names: Christina and Tim Daggett  
Ages: late 50s  
From: Maine

“Traveling is a fountain of youth,” says Christina Daggett, as she sits down to dinner with her husband, Tim. It’s evening in the town of Hawick, Scotland, where they are currently staying. “I can’t imagine going back to the States or our old lifestyle. Nothing could be better than what we’re doing now.”

What they’re doing is traveling around Europe on their pension income. They’ve explored 16 countries so far—all on \$2,600 a month.

Their life of travel began in 2009. Tim and Christina moved to Ecuador when Tim was offered early retirement from the postal service. “We chose Ecuador after reading about it online,” says Tim. “The cost of living was so low compared to the U.S. The climate was perfect, the landscape beautiful, and we could live there without a car.”

**“Just take the plunge! You’ll be so grateful you did.”**

Although happy in Ecuador, the couple thirsted for more adventure. After a couple of years, Tim asked Christina, “If there was a way we could travel through Europe, would you?” Her response was an immediate yes, so they went home right away and started their research.

“When I started reading about Schengen and non-Schengen countries, I realized this was our chance,” says Tim. “We could live in a Schengen country for three months and then move to a non-Schengen country for three months, alternating between the two.” (The Schengen area includes most of the E.U., and U.S. and Canadian citizens can stay in these countries for 90 days out of every 180-day period.)

In 2011 they packed their suitcases and went to Budapest, Hungary. “We got our first place on Craigslist, which can always lead to being scammed,” says Tim. Fortunately, they later discovered Airbnb, which was just starting to gain popularity. “Airbnb was an absolute miracle for us,” says Tim. “We can so easily find an

apartment, plan our trips months in advance, and have a secure way to pay.

“Don’t limit your Airbnb search to one specific city like Paris or Rome. Search within a wide area, or even the whole country in general. We shop apartments first by price, and then we look up what city they’re in.”

“By doing things this way, we have found so many lesser known cities that have fewer tourists and have given us a much more authentic experience,” Christina says. “We were in Ukraine, waiting for a train to Kiev, and knew it would be a few hours, so we walked over to a bar nearby. We met a group of university students who were very curious about us. We bought a bottle of vodka and shared stories with each other.”

The Daggetts rent apartments in buildings full of locals and shop at the grocery so they can cook at home most nights. This approach easily keeps them within budget.

“On average, we spend around \$700 a month for rent, and a further \$1,200 a month for all other living expenses. That includes groceries, public transportation, and at least two days out each week to places like museums,” says Tim. “We’ve lived in supposedly expensive countries, like France and Italy, on this budget.”

One of their favorite places was Dazio, Italy, a gorgeous town in the Alps only a couple of hours from Lake Como. “It was a town with zero tourists, and we lived below a real Italian family,” says Christina. “We would sit downstairs eating spaghetti and pinching ourselves, thinking we couldn’t really be where we were.”

Health can also be a big concern for many retirees from the U.S. But Tim says it doesn’t have to be. Dental work is significantly cheaper in countries in the Balkans, for example, and very good. “Pharmaceuticals are very cheap in many countries here, especially in Eastern Europe, and most of the time you don’t even need a prescription.”

As for their relationship, Tim and Christina say they feel closer than ever. “When we lived in the U.S., Tim worked at night and I worked during the day,” says Christina. “We never saw each other. Now we get to spend every day together and we couldn’t be happier.”

Any advice for other expats looking to rove in retirement? “Just take the plunge! You will be so grateful that you did.” —*Sarah Daggett.* ■