

TheGreatEscape

Make yourself at home



Penniless post-Christmas? Try house-sitting and you could find yourself living in the lap of luxury for free, says Jo Caird

Ih God, we're locked in." "What are you talking about?" Having just taken his first slurp of carefully prepared homemade cappuccino, my boyfriend's tone was quite clearly that of a man not wishing to be interrupted.

"The gate, it's locked. It must be on the same power grid as the rest of the house. I can't get the car out." The house was in the grip of a power cut

was also an issue: we couldn't afford a short-term rental contract on any accommodation suitable for our needs.

Some friends suggested house-sitting, so we registered our details with housecarers.com, one of a number of websites that put property owners in touch with potential sitters. A few months passed without anything suitable coming up, but in the autumn we found our dream scenario: three months looking after a rural B&B in Puglia, southern Italy, that was closed for the winter while its owners, Leonie and Paolo, visited family in Australia

of four self-catering swimming pool and set in the middle of an olive grove - is a 20-minute drive from Ostuni, the medieval town known as La Città Bianca for its brilliant white buildings. Travel 10 minutes inland and you reach the beautiful Adriatic coast, deserted off-season but picturesque.

Set out on foot, you immediately surround ancient olive trees and more delicious



Penniless post-Christmas? Try house-sitting and you could find yourself living in the lap of luxury for free, says Jo Caird

Ih God, we're locked in." "What are you talking about?" Having just taken his first slurp of carefully prepared homemade cappuccino, my boyfriend's tone was quite clearly that of a man not wishing to be interrupted.

"The gate, it's locked. It must be on the same power grid as the rest of the house. I can't get the car out." The house was in the grip of a power cut, announced only by a sheet of poorly photocopied A4 taped to a tree at the top of the dirt track leading to the property. We were trapped.

In early summer 2008, my boyfriend and I decided it was time for us to escape London for a while. We had a couple of potentially tricky requirements, however: I needed to be able to write, and my musician boyfriend needed somewhere isolated enough to practise the trumpet without disturbing anyone. Money

was also an issue: we couldn't afford a short-term rental contract on any accommodation suitable for our needs.

Some friends suggested house-sitting, so we registered our details with housecarers.com, one of a number of websites that put property owners in touch with potential sitters. A few months passed without anything suitable coming up, but in the autumn we found our dream scenario: three months looking after a rural B&B in Puglia, southern Italy, that was closed for the winter while its owners, Leonie and Paolo, visited family in Australia. We would be working, but it all looked suspiciously like a very extended, yet inexpensive, holiday.

Emails were exchanged, references provided, a couple of Skype conversations took place, and a month later, at the end of November 2008, we were being shown around our new home, the beautiful Masseria La Rascina.

The B&B - a rather modest title for the luxurious six-bedroom *masseria* (farmhouse), complete with annexe

of four self-catering apartments, a swimming pool and lush garden, set in the middle of a 20-hectare olive grove - is a 20-minute drive from Ostuni, the medieval town known as La Città Bianca for its brilliant whitewash. Travel 10 minutes in the car and you reach the beautiful Adriatic coast, deserted off-season but picture

Set out on foot, and immediately surrounded by ancient olive trees that are more deliciously any we'd ever tasted. The fiercely hot summer months around La Rascina are a contrast into lush green wildflowers in the winter. As a cosmopolitan grey London, our local life much to be desired. We have been, but almost like a holiday.

As well as keeping the B&B, we were charged after the family pets: an elderly but enthusiastic and Doris, a former street extremely independent household tasks, including laundry, were taken care of by Irene. Left the keys of

NO SINGLE SUPPLEMENT
(incl. dates/availability)

VOYAGES JULES VERNE

discovering India . . .



9 nights from only £897

Travelling with Voyages Jules Verne

- Over 30 years of experience.
- Worldwide classic journeys with cultural and historical interest.
- Carefully planned, imaginative itineraries by air, road, river & rail.
- Exclusive excursions and events.
- English-speaking, specialist country guides.
- Limited group sizes.
- Total commitment to your enjoyment and satisfaction.

'India's Golden Triangle'

Experience the intoxicating culture & beauty of India, from its historical sights, famous temples & monuments, to its bustling market places.

Delhi (2 nts) • Agra (2 nts) • Jaipur (2 nts) • Kuchaman (2 nts) • Also visiting India Gate, the Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri, with a unique stay at Kuchaman Fort and a journey on the Shatabdi Express train • Extensions in Goa, Kerala, Nepal and Shimla available.

Includes a VJV Special Event.

Saturday departures from London Heathrow January 2010 to April 2011.

For more information on this tour and other arrangements, please call or visit our award-winning website

0845 166 7065 | 020 7616 1000 quoting **GUAR**

www.vjv.com/ads

ABTA
ABTA No. V1661

Sales & Information: 8am-8pm weekdays; 9am-5pm Saturdays; 10am-4pm Sundays

ATOL
0132

PIO TO

Whether it's a tailor or a travel agent, you know the places you want to go.

020 8622 8622
www.journeylatinamerica.com



Paolo's battered white Renault Twingo, we were able to take day trips to places such as Gallipoli, Lecce and Alberobello, the nearby town famous for its typical Pugliese cone-shaped trulli houses.

We did all our shopping in Ostuni, using the local shops as well as the couple of smallish supermarkets. The abundance of local and regional delicacies such as *burrata* - mozzarella blended with cream and encased in more mozzarella - fresh orecchiette pasta, and fruity primitivo red wine turned us into unashamed gluttons, and over-excited meal-planning came to take up more and more of our time. Although food in Puglia isn't especially cheap, the fresh produce and delicatessen treats we were buying were of a far higher quality than those available for the same price in the UK. Food, petrol and flights our only outlays, we spent around £2,200 in the three months we were there.

When not working or walking the dogs, we went out for sumptuous meals in the dozens of wonderfully romantic restaurants dotting the surrounding countryside, many serving the local speciality of raw seafood antipasti: peeled prawns dressed only with olive oil and sweet red peppercorns; *nocci* (small clams) served on the half-shell with a squeeze of lemon; finely sliced carpaccio of octopus.

We were also introduced to various friends of Leonie and Paolo's in the days before their departure, who invited us to dinners and parties, and advised us on the best places to eat, shop and visit. Getting to know these kind and generous people meant that we left Puglia with a much more complete impression of southern Italian life than we would have had otherwise.

Of course, there were moments of stress and tedium. No extended period spent living in someone else's home will ever be completely free from issues such as internet problems or minor car repairs, but we were left with a list of emergency phone numbers and a supply of cash so no problem that arose ever felt insurmountable.

The only major trouble we had concerned the animals. Just a few weeks into the sit - and two days before the electricity board put us under house arrest - we had to rush the usually very healthy Rudy to the vet. The boxer was suffering from a severe stomach infection that required immediate intervention. He wasn't

What a contrast to wintry, grey London. We may have been working, but it felt like a holiday

h God, we're locked in."

"What are you talking about?" Having just taken his first slurp of carefully prepared homemade

my boyfriend's tone was that of a man not wishing to be locked in.

It's locked. It must be a power grid as the rest of London can't get the car out." The grip of a power cut, only by a sheet of poorly taped to a tree at the track leading to the were trapped.

Summer 2008, my and I decided it was time to leave London for a while. A couple of potentially tricky situations, however: I needed to find a new home, and my musician friend had moved somewhere isolated to practise the trumpet without disturbing anyone. Money

was also an issue: we couldn't afford a short-term rental contract on any accommodation suitable for our needs.

Some friends suggested house-sitting, so we registered our details with housecarers.com, one of a number of websites that put property owners in touch with potential sitters. A few months passed without anything suitable coming up, but in the autumn we found our dream scenario: three months looking after a rural B&B in Puglia, southern Italy, that was closed for the winter while its owners, Leonie and Paolo, visited family in Australia. We would be working, but it all looked suspiciously like a very extended, yet inexpensive, holiday.

Emails were exchanged, references provided, a couple of Skype conversations took place, and a month later, at the end of November 2008, we were being shown around our new home, the beautiful *Masseria La Rascina*.

The B&B - a rather modest title for the luxurious six-bedroom *masseria* (farmhouse), complete with annexe

of four self-catering apartments, swimming pool and lush gardens set in the middle of a 1,000-year-old olive grove - is a 20-minute drive from Ostuni, the medieval Pugliese hill town known as *La Città Bianca* (White City) for its brilliant whitewashed buildings. Travel 10 minutes in the other direction and you reach the beaches of Puglia's Adriatic coast, deserted and unkempt off-season but picturesque nonetheless.

Set out on foot, and you are immediately surrounded by gnarled, ancient olive trees that provide greener and more deliciously peppery oil than any we'd ever tasted. Bone dry in the fiercely hot summer months, the fields around *La Rascina* are transformed into lush green wildflower meadows in the winter. As a contrast to wintry, grey London, our location didn't leave much to be desired. Working we may have been, but almost every day felt like a holiday.

As well as keeping watch over the B&B, we were charged with looking after the family pets: two dogs, Rudy, an elderly but enthusiastic boxer, and Doris, a former stray; and two extremely independent cats. Most household tasks, including all cleaning and laundry, were taken care of by *La Rascina's* dedicated housekeeper, Irene. Left the keys of Leonie and

home



Paolo's battered white Renault Twingo, we were able to take day trips to places such as Gallipoli, Lecce and Alberobello, the nearby town famous for its typical Pugliese cone-shaped *trulli* houses.

We did all our shopping in Ostuni, using the local shops as well as the couple of smallish supermarkets. The abundance of local and regional delicacies such as *burrata* - mozzarella blended with cream and encased in more mozzarella - fresh orecchiette pasta, and fruity primitivo red wine turned us into unashamed gluttons, and over-excited meal-planning came to take up more and more of our time. Although food in Puglia isn't especially cheap, the fresh produce and delicatessen treats we were buying were of a far higher quality than those available for the same price in the UK. Food, petrol and flights our only outlays, we spent around £2,200 in the three months we were there.

When not working or walking the dogs, we went out for sumptuous meals in the dozens of wonderfully romantic restaurants dotting the surrounding countryside, many serving the local speciality of raw seafood antipasti: peeled prawns dressed only with olive oil and sweet red peppercorns; *nocci* (small clams) served on the half-shell with a squeeze of lemon; finely sliced carpaccio of octopus.

We were also introduced to various



More fanta

Feel at home on the range
Rusty is an all-American, 8 cowboy with a trail-riding the desert near Lake Pleasant. He and his wife need help hay bales and doing maintenance in the stables. In return for a work per day, volunteers use international Workaway so horseride, swim in the lake with meals and camping in

Other Workaway placements are dozens available around include an "off-grid" creative in the mountains of Almeria where volunteers help with language practice, cooking, art projects; and looking after and farming at an eco-hostel in the Virgin Islands in the Caribbean. workaway.info. To contact must pay €18 for two years' r

Be a host in South America
Fancy living in a cute house in Rica with a pool and a veranda in the mountains of Heredia? All yours (temporarily) if you sit this house-sit. Responsibilities include cleaning and maintenance, and hosting guests from time to time (the owner is turning the house into a B&B). You can revel in the view of San Jose, and even have your mates to stay (on approval). [Available for variable periods through mindmyhouse.com.](http://mindmyhouse.com)

Escape to the South Pacific
If you thought Wwoofing (volunteering) with World Wide Opportunities

...a 20-minute drive from
 ...the medieval Pugliese hill town
 ...known as La Città Bianca (White City)
 ...for its brilliant whitewashed buildings.
 ...Travel 10 minutes in the other direction
 ...and you reach the beaches of Puglia's
 ...Adriatic coast, deserted and unkempt
 ...off-season but picturesque nonetheless.

Set out on foot, and you are
 immediately surrounded by gnarled,
 ancient olive trees that provide greener
 and more deliciously peppery oil than
 any we'd ever tasted. Bone dry in the
 fiercely hot summer months, the fields
 around La Rascina are transformed
 into lush green wildflower meadows
 in the winter. As a contrast to wintry,
 grey London, our location didn't leave
 much to be desired. Working we may
 have been, but almost every day felt
 like a holiday.

As well as keeping watch over the
 B&B, we were charged with looking
 after the family pets: two dogs, Rudy,
 an elderly but enthusiastic boxer,
 and Doris, a former stray; and two
 extremely independent cats. Most
 household tasks, including all cleaning
 and laundry, were taken care of by
 La Rascina's dedicated housekeeper,
 Irene. Left the keys of Leonie and

Of course there were moments of
 stress and tedium. No extended period
 spent living in someone else's home
 will ever be completely free from
 issues such as internet problems or
 minor car repairs, but we were left with
 a list of emergency phone numbers and
 a supply of cash so no problem that
 arose ever felt insurmountable.

The only major trouble we had
 concerned the animals. Just a few
 weeks into the sit - and two days
 before the electricity board put us
 under house arrest - we had to rush
 the usually very healthy Rudy to the
 vet. The boxer was suffering from a
 severe stomach infection that required
 immediate intervention. He wasn't

**What a contrast
 to wintry, grey
 London. We may
 have been
 working, but it
 felt like a holiday**

(top) with its traditional trulli houses,
 looking after Rudy (above) and three
 other pets was one of Jo's few 'jobs'

a pretty sight. Knowing how much
 Rudy meant to Leonie and Paolo, we
 experienced a decidedly worrying
 couple of days.

My boyfriend speaks no Italian,
 so all issues of communication -
 including detailed discussions with
 the vet - were left to me. Competency
 in the local language is a good idea for
 most house-sitting jobs, particularly
 in cases like ours: a rural location
 in southern Italy where very little
 English is spoken. I'd spoken fairly
 good Italian before the trip, but the
 types of situation we found ourselves
 in - from ordering blood tests for the
 dog to discussing boiler problems with
 the plumber - provided me with a
 refresher course unlike any offered by
 a school or online course.

When we were at last reconnected
 to the power grid and able to leave the
 property to return to the vet, we were
 relieved to find that the dog had made
 a 100% recovery. As we arrived back
 home with a patched-up Rudy, the

How to do it

Registration with housecarers.com,
 which allows you to receive
 notification of suitable house-sits, is
 free. To apply for sits or contact
 property owners costs US\$45 per year.
 Similar sites include mindmyhouse.
 com and luxuryhousesitting.com. Most
 property owners require house-sitting
 experience and/or character references
 and wish to interview potential sitters,
 either in person or via Skype, and some
 choose not to list their house but
 contact registered housesitters
 directly. House-sits are available all
 over the world and for periods from a
 few days to a year or more. As a sitter
 you will probably be expected to pay
 for your travel, but this - as with all
 other expenses incurred - is negotiable
 and varies from house to house. Some
 house-sits are paid, although this, too,
 depends on each specific situation. JC

hard to imagine a better place to be.
 ● **Masseria La Rascina** (+39 338 433
 1573, larascina.it) is open from Easter to
 the end of October. **La Taverna da
 Maurizio** (latavernadamaurizio.it),
 in nearby Rosa Marina, specialises in
 Pugliese raw seafood antipasti.
Ryanair (ryanair.com) flies to
 Brindisi and Bari from Stansted
 twice a week during autumn and
 winter, and more frequently during
 spring and summer.

**More
 places
 to flee
 the cold
 Tomorrow
 in Observer
 Escape**

Single Travellers

Enjoy holiday freedom!



**NO SINGLE
 SUPPLEMENT**
 WITH A ROOM
 OF YOUR OWN

**5 DAYS FROM
 £349**
 WITH SO MUCH
 INCLUDED

We're the UK's no.1 choice for single
 travellers and it's easy to see why with a
 room of your own, no single supplement
 and so much more.

- ✓ Hassle-free holidays for single travellers
- ✓ Enjoy the fun of a shared experience
- ✓ A Tour Manager as your host and guide
- ✓ The opportunity to fly from your local airport
- ✓ Many meals and excursions included in the price
- ✓ Welcome drink and farewell get-together
- ✓ A community of fellow travellers at justyou.co.uk

WALKING IN THE
 AHR VALLEY
5 DAYS FROM £349

DISCOVER
 NORTHERN CYPRUS
8 DAYS FROM £649

HIGHLIGHTS OF
 TUSCANY
8 DAYS FROM £809

PYRAMIDS &
 NILE CRUISE
8 DAYS FROM £1299

THE WONDER OF CHINA
10 DAYS FROM £1399

TO BOOK,
 REQUEST A
 BROCHURE
 OR FIND
 OUT MORE

Call 0800 987 5179
 or visit justyou.co.uk

justyou

Just You is a fully bonded member of ABTA (V5874) and holds an ATOL License (1091)

30 YEARS
**PIONEERING TRAVEL
 TO LATIN AMERICA**

Whether it's a tailor-made escape or a small group tour, we
 know the places you'll love. **ONLY LATIN AMERICA SINCE 1980**

020 8622 8477
www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk

**JOURNEY
 LATIN
 AMERICA**

**Step to it:
 enter our
 photo
 competition
 - this
 month's
 theme is
 dance
 guardian.
 co.uk/
 beenthere**

COO

It's a n
 In Japan,
 everyday,
 you can be
 wrestlers
 Tokyo's ele
 of Tokyo
 traditional
 spa with vi
 sake while
 dances an
 samurai tim
 day is a ne

To enter
 a trip for
 the fantas
 visit www

2010 is Visi
 great time to



Feel at home on the range (pictured) Rusty is an all-American, 82-year-old cowboy with a trail-riding business in the desert near Lake Pleasant, Arizona. He and his wife need help shifting hay bales and doing maintenance in the stables. In return for a few hours' work per day, volunteers under the international Workaway scheme can horseride, swim in the lake and hike, with meals and camping included.

Other Workaway placements (there are dozens available around the world) include an "off-grid" creative retreat in the mountains of Almeria, Spain, where volunteers help with childcare, language practice, cooking, farming and art projects; and looking after tourists and farming at an eco-hostel in the US Virgin Islands in the Caribbean.

● workaway.info. To contact hosts, you must pay €18 for two years' membership.

Be a host in South America

Fancy living in a cute house in Costa Rica with a pool and a veranda in the mountains of Heredia? All this will be yours (temporarily) if you sign up to this house-sit. Responsibilities include cleaning and maintenance, paying bills and hosting guests from time to time (the owner is turning the house into a B&B). You can revel in the views, visit San Jose, and even have your own mates to stay (on approval).

● Available for variable periods, through mindmyhouse.com.

Escape to the South Pacific

If you thought Wwoofing (volunteering with World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) was all about planting mung beans in Wales, think again. On Tonga, in the South Pacific, a fishing



lodge with log cabins, bar and restaurant, cat boat trade needs help and kitchen. This place those who want to ser two hours to the near who needs clubs and kayaking, diving and the white sand beach

● wwoof.org. Host: TO

Run away to sea

A week on the Norfolk not be enough to que life on the waves, and a crew member is the to owning your own yacht. Sailing, engine qualifications and exp massively ease your



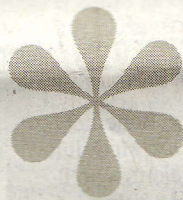
Nice work if you can get it . . . Masseria La Rascina (opposite), Jo's home for three months; nearby Alberobello (top) with its traditional trulli houses; looking after Rudy (above) and three other pets was one of Jo's few 'jobs'

a pretty sight. Knowing how much Rudy meant to Leonie and Paolo, we experienced a decidedly worrying couple of days.

My boyfriend speaks no Italian, so all issues of communication - including detailed discussions with the vet - were left to me. Competency in the local language is a good idea for most house-sitting jobs, particularly in cases like ours: a rural location in southern Italy where very little English is spoken. I'd spoken fairly good Italian before the trip, but the types of situation we found ourselves in - from ordering blood tests for the dog to discussing boiler problems with the plumber - provided me with a

afternoon sun glinting off the white walls of Ostuni in the distance and Doris barking excitedly to welcome us, it was hard to imagine a better place to be.

● Masseria La Rascina (+39 338 433 1573, larascina.it) is open from Easter to the end of October. La Taverna da Maurizio (latavernadamaurizio.it), in nearby Rosa Marina, specialises in Pugliese raw seafood antipasti. Ryanair (ryanair.com) flies to Brindisi and Bari from Stansted twice a week during autumn and winter, and more frequently during spring and summer.



More places to flee the cold Tomorrow in Observer Escape

Single Travellers Enjoy holiday freedom!

