

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN OUR SW PARTY ANIMAL EXCHANGED HOMES WITH A BEVERLY HILLS BABE?

Fulham girl gets an LA life swap

HOLIDAYS are usually synonymous with full-board hotel, self-catering apartments or, if you're really lucky, a villa with private pool. But there is a new craze: house swapping.

It's a simple concept — you stay in my place, I stay in yours — that saves thousands on hotel bills. Hundreds of websites have now been set up for potential swappers. There's even a movie based on it: Kate Winslet exchanged her British cottage for Cameron Diaz's sprawling Los Angeles pad in the comedy *The Holiday*.

Here, two reporters, from London and LA, swap using homeexchange.com, the site that inspired *The Holiday*.

Fulham girl goes to LA
Katie Hind, 25, is single and lives in a two-bedroom flat in Fulham. She stayed in a three-bedroom house in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles

WITH my love life in tatters and the weather in Britain utterly freezing, when I was offered a complete life swap with a counterpart in Hollywood, I jumped at the chance. Plus, I needed a suntan.

I used homeexchange.com to find my house. It's £30 subscription for a year. You put up a picture of your house with the dates it's free, and then choose from the amazing selection of 14,000 houses in 110 countries.

My swappée lived in a beautiful, quiet area in a sunny, tree-lined avenue, just around the corner from the gargantuan

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BY KATIE HIND

Beverly Center shopping mall. The house was great — airy, with a proper drive and a garage and two balconies — what a place for a party!

After dumping my bags I met up with an actor friend of mine for a few drinks. I soon found the men were nowhere to be seen and everyone was sober, mainly because the whole of LA drives. And there's no smoking inside — but at least you can puff outside in glorious weather.

The next day I met my friend Claire and we drove off to the trendy Mondrian hotel, where we dined next to none other than Victoria Beckham. She was eating a svelte salad with no croutons or dressing. I, on the other hand, had never seen anything like the burger I was handed. Little wonder America's obesity rate is so high.

Meanwhile, my love life wasn't looking up. In LA, you don't go out and drunkenly flirt. People only want to know you if you can help them out with work. It's all about networking.

Giving up any hope of a little LA romance — how Kate Winslet did it in *The Holiday* is beyond me — I decided to hit the Beverly Center hard. It was girls' heaven — everywhere I looked there were gorgeous shoes and bags.

But I couldn't leave without a visit to Rodeo Drive. I was a huge Beverly Hills 90210 fan when I was 11 so I had to see what it was all about.

Okay, so it would have been better if I had a Coutts bank account, but visiting all the designer stores was still so much fun. Feet hurting and laden with bags, I went to meet another friend, Dean, at the Châteaux Marmont, an über-cool hotel on Sunset Boulevard.

We got very drunk — very un-LA — before bumping into actress Brittan Murphy and her boyfriend and getting more hammered with them — can you imagine doing that in London?

With a hangover from hell, I boarded my plane and realised I might not have met him, but I'd developed a bit of a crush on LA. And I'd fallen in love with the idea of saving loads of dosh by house swapping.

Anyone with a place overlooking Sydney harbour fancy two weeks in Fulham?



Trading places: Katie Hind, left, exchanged homes with Hillary Atkin, above

LA lady comes to SWG

HILLARY ATKIN, 39, is single and lives in Los Angeles. She stayed in Katie's flat in Fulham

IT WAS an offer I couldn't refuse: swap my house and lifestyle in LA with someone's in London. I wouldn't be spending a holiday in my ideal English home — a charming cottage with Jude Law as a neighbour — but I was excited to be close to the city action in Katie's west London home.

Once inside her lovely little flat, I found helpful notes that Katie had left me suggesting places to visit. First stop was Harvey Nicks — the clothes and cosmetics were something else! And in the beautiful gourmet market on the top floor, everything from the chocolates to the prawns looked scrumptious.

A quick peek at the liquor section told

3 OTHER HOME-SWAPPING COMPANIES

● **HOMELINK INTERNATIONAL**
It's £115 for year-long access to the website of the world's largest home exchange organisation. 01962 886882, homelink.org.uk

● **INTERVAC**
Home-swapping since 1953, Intervac has 10,000 properties from the Caribbean to New Zealand. Register online for £65. 0845 260 5776, intervac.co.uk

● **HOME BASE HOLIDAYS**
All kinds of homes in the US, Australia and Canada, including boats: £29 for a year's database access. 020 8886 8752, homebase-hols.com

me that good Californian wines were hard to find here — perhaps I should have brought more than the one bottle of De Loach Sonoma County 2002 Pinot Noir to leave as a house gift.

Next stop was the Tate Modern, where I was reprimanded for trying to sneak a quick pic of Monet's *Water Lilies*, and then again for taking a sip from a bottle of water in my purse.

Before embarrassing myself any further, I left for a quick look at the shops on Bond Street. Dinner took me to Katie's tip of the fish and chips at The

Golden Hind in Marylebone. At first I balked at the fried food, but I ended up eating almost the whole thing. Then it was on to the Wax Bar, Katie's key recommendation. By the time I arrived, everyone was already toasted. I fought my way through crowds of tipsy men of every conceivable nationality before I met the quintessential Brit I'd been looking for. It wasn't Jude Law, but he did look a lot like Colin Firth.

● *The Holiday* is available on DVD from 26 March from Universal Pictures UK