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OCTOBER 2006

TIME
BONUS SECTION

Generations



Richard and Wendy Ashworth, with their aged terrier Ferdie, take in the beauty of the Welsh coast near their rental cottage in St. Davids

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Short-term
vacation rentals
provide more
space and privacy
than a hotel
room—and let
travelers explore
at their own pace

Taking the Slow Road

CARTREFLE

Wendy and Richard Ashworth have taken temporary leases—with ample room for visitors—all over Europe. Their most recent one is a cottage in St. Davids, Wales



By **ELIZABETH POPE**

VACATIONS WERE SHORT AND SIMPLE FOR MARY KAY CONLON and Chip Plumb in their fast-track corporate days. "One phone call, no planning, never more than a week," says Conlon. "We'd just plop on the beach somewhere." But to celebrate their early retirement last year, the Evanston, Ill., couple rented a spacious Paris apartment for six months. "We always regretted that

neither of us had done a junior year abroad," says Conlon, 48, a former health-care-industry executive who was eager to immerse herself in another language and culture.

Shopping in local markets, picnicking in the Luxembourg Gardens and jogging around the nearby botanical park, they soon felt at home in the Left Bank apartment they rented for \$4,500 a month. As Conlon became a familiar face, butchers shared culinary tips and cheesemongers gave her extra samples. Plumb, 49, became a habitu  of a hole-in-the-wall caf  frequented by local tradesmen and accompanied Conlon on explorations around the city. "Chip discovered

walks through Paris were even better than walks around a golf course," says Conlon.

Homesickness wasn't a problem either. The three-bedroom, two-bath flat overlooking a Roman amphitheater was a powerful draw for visitors. A high-speed Internet connection simplified paying bills, e-mailing friends and maintaining the monthly investment e-newsletter Plumb had started writing after retiring as a managing director of a financial-advisory firm. "It was like living a dream," says Plumb. "We finally got our semester abroad."

Settling down in a short-term rental—rather than dashing around from hotel to hotel—is gaining ground as a style of

travel, says Pauline Kenny, who trademarked the term Slow Travel and runs *slowtrav.com*, a website of classified listings and rental reviews.

Midlife and older adults don't want to race through six countries in two weeks, checking off a list of must-see sites, says Kenny, 51, who is based in Santa Fe, N.M. Experiencing a country as its residents do offers an attractive alternative.

That more relaxed approach to travel grew out of Italy's slow food movement, which emphasizes home-cooked, authentic cuisine to counter the proliferation of fast-food restaurants. Slow travelers, says Kenny, prefer a "concentric circle" approach to tourism: go out the front door and explore the neighborhood and nearby towns, get to know the locals instead of slavishly following guidebook itineraries. Kenny and her husband Steve Cohen, 59, were in a Munich art

An English interlude for Pauline Kenny and Steve Cohen included, clockwise from top left, seeing Bradford-on-Avon, boating on the Grand Union Canal, lunch at Wello's Fox and Badger pub and a cow walk in Evenlode

gallery filled with Rubenses when it struck her that seeing all the standard tourist highlights was exhausting and there must be a better way to get to know a foreign city. "I hit the wall—I couldn't look at one more painting," she says. To make their travels more manageable and enjoyable, Kenny and Cohen now focus their vacations on one subject—say, French tapestries or Renaissance church frescoes in small Italian towns.

Slow Travel is also gaining traction in other countries. "The global affliction of the hurry virus has afflicted every corner of the planet," says Carl Honoré, the London-based author of *In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed*. The Germans, he says, recently coined the term *Freizeitstress*, or free-time stress, to describe the tendency to race around with packed agendas, and are now even taking evening courses to learn how to relax when they go on vacation. The worldwide popularity of spa and yoga retreats and slow-poke barge cruises is also part of the trend, Honoré says. But the ultimate method of breaking away is to live in another country for a few weeks or months.

Besides encouraging a leisurely approach to activities, vacation rentals provide more space and privacy than hotel rooms—a big advantage for multigenerational family holidays. For their travels in Europe, Wendy and Richard Ashworth of Surrey, England, often book properties with a spare bedroom and bath for drop-in visits from their two adult sons. "That way they have some privacy, and we can go our separate ways during the day but eat dinner together at night," says Wendy, 55, an education counselor. And, she notes, rented accommodations allow her and Richard to take along their aged Welsh terrier, Ferdie.

Short-term rentals also make a handy base for those contemplating retirement overseas. Art Skinner, 60, and his wife Barbara, 54, rented four different places during two years of house hunting in Tuscany and Umbria. "Playing house instead of playing tourist made us realize that we could really live in Italy and feel at home," says Skinner, a former postal worker in Louisville, Ky.

He and Barbara moved to San Venanzo, a small town in Umbria, in September 2003.

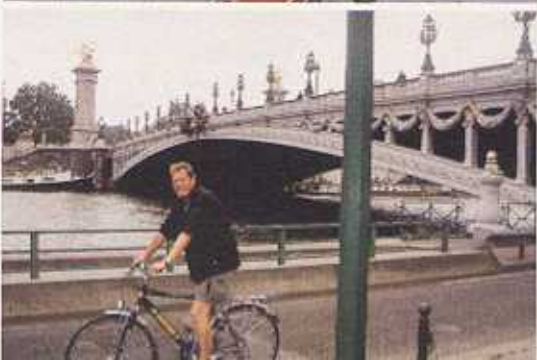
With more than a million European properties available to short-term renters, there are places to suit almost every need and budget, according to Markus Deutsch, president of RCI Global Vacation Network's Europe and Middle East region. "You can find a small cottage on a Norwegian fjord or a castle in Ireland that sleeps 20, at weekly prices ranging from \$500 to \$15,000," says Deutsch. They're easier to locate too. Inter-

“CHIP DISCOVERED walks through Paris were even better than walks around a golf course.” —Mary Kay Conlon

im leases were once a brochure, fax and word-of-mouth business, but the Internet has changed everything. Websites offer virtual tours, online booking and glowing descriptions of amenities and furnishings.

Still, *slowtrav.com*'s Kenny urges potential renters to be cautious. She says some agency sites may be run by large companies with huge databases and an office staff unfamiliar with the properties. "I look for an agency with a small number of quality listings that suit my needs and where I can get answers from someone who really knows the property." It

Paris pastimes, clockwise from top left: Mary Kay Conlon at the corner bakery; friends at her family's rental apartment; bike racing in Luxembourg Gardens; Conlon's husband Chip Plumb rides along the Seine



pays to be careful, because renters have little recourse if they are dissatisfied: the full fee is usually due before or on arrival, and refunds are rare, even if the trip must be canceled. A good agency will try to find another place if something serious, like a plumbing disaster, occurs—but not because the kitchen is too small or the bedroom too dark.

Last spring Kenny and her husband rented a furnished apartment in the center of Salisbury, England, over the Internet. Even though they are highly experienced at the rental game, they failed to ask enough questions and were stunned once they arrived to discover that the flat was above a noisy carpet shop, the patio looked out on a large parking lot, and the master-bedroom window had a too-close-for-comfort view of the bathroom in a neighboring bicycle-repair shop. "And this apartment was rated four stars by the English tourist board," says Kenny. "The location was good, but the setting was horrible."

Although both the location and the setting were perfect for Conlon and Plumb's Paris apartment, they faced some maintenance problems. Horrified when the hot-water heater shot flames and made booming sounds, they shut it off and boiled water on the stove for sponge baths for three days until French repairmen appeared. "The French have a different sense of urgency," Conlon says dryly. That hasn't deterred the couple from planning a regular sabbatical, however. Who can resist playing English cottager, Parisian apartment dweller or Tuscan farmhouse owner—if only for a short while? ■

