



Hail the grandparent aupairs

Aupairs are usually envisaged as young and callow, but grandparents are great at the job because of their experience, says **Michaela Hansen**, founder of the Granny Aupair Agency

GRANDPARENTS ARE often the first choice for parents looking for child care. Not only do they offer their services free of charge – which helps parents on a tight budget – the parents also appreciate the experience the older generation have when looking after their little ones.

This attitude was one of the sparks that

ignited the idea behind the Granny Aupair Agency which I founded in 2010.

The Granny Aupair is treated as a family member, has free room and board. In return she cares for the children, as only a grandmother can do (even if she is not related to them) and gets the chance to experience her host country and its culture in a direct way. Women over 50,



Granny Margret with Chloe and James

60 or 70 often yearn for something new. After bringing up their children and/or retirement, they wonder what to do with their time, their experience and enthusiasm, especially if there are no grandchildren on the horizon yet or these have grown up.

They want to try something new, be with young people, widen their horizons and their language skills.

One of the more than 1000 Grannies who has taken up the Granny Aupair challenge is Margret B, 62, from Germany, who managed to find a family in Wimbledon via the Granny Aupair platform last year and who arrived in England in January to help look after

ten-year-old Chloe and seven-year-old James. One of the Granny's jobs is to support the busy parents with the school run, which is done by train.

Margret says: "On three days a week I fetch the children from school, spend their free time with them and cook their evening meal. Sometimes I accompany them to guitar lessons and other group activities or look after the children in the evening, when the parents have a night out.

"I also help with the housework a bit on two days a week, but the other time I can spend as I like with exploring London and joining a choir and, thanks to the contacts in the choir, a weekly ladies' lunch circle."

The weekends are also often spent with the family and Margret has already joined them on several trips to Devon. Her husband and adult daughters have

also visited her several times. The stay with the family was such a success that the initially planned three months was extended to August.

Margret said: "Overall, I can only draw a very positive summary; I couldn't have had it better. It has always

"I'm carrying so many new streets, squares and people within me... part of me is still in London"

Granny Aupair Petra, 54, from Bavaria

been my wish to get to know England more, its people and the language.

"It is a very valuable and beautiful experience in my life, from which



I will certainly benefit for a long time." Another Granny who spent time in London was Petra, 54, from Bavaria, mother of four children aged between 17 and 37. Initially the choices on the Granny Aupair website seemed endless: Companion for a lonely widow in Washington DC or as a Granny-Nanny for a diplomat's family in Geneva, or in a family in Ireland, Dubai, Kuala Lumpur or Singapore were just a few of the choices.

Petra cast her net closer to home and chose to spend four months with a single mother and two teenage children in London. Petra's 'job' was mainly looking after the kids after school (German International School) and preparing the evening meal.

Making meals, she met several unexpected challenges such as looking for 'normal' flour for yeast dough (there is no self-raising flour in Germany) and searching for German 'Quark' (curd cheese) for making cheesecake – having ultimate success in Morrison's.

The time the family was on holiday Petra spent discovering London: "... walking through St James's Park, where the squirrels eat out of your hand, where dignified pensioners take their wives and Orthodox Jews take their children for a walk. I now know how to walk from there via Piccadilly and Leicester Square, past Admiral Nelson at Trafalgar Square, to the banks of the Thames. I know which tube stations have clean toilets and where, if you don't trust the old lift, you have to take 194 stairs to get back to the surface..."



Granny Petra at the Divali Festival in Trafalgar Square

Find out more

■ Since 2010 more than 1000 Granny Aupairs have been placed in families worldwide. You can get more information from the website: (www.granny-aupair.com).