Preparing your Home

Give it a chew toy and tell it you'll be home real soon. Just kidding. But there are some helpful - and important - things you can do in and around your home to make sure it stays happy while you're away.

1. Make sure someone is taking care of the pets. Get a friend or neighbor to feed the fish, walk the dog and water your plants. Then they'll be tip-top when you return.

2. Put your lights and/or radio on a timer. People shouldn't be able to tell you're away just by looking at your house. A simple timer can turn the lights and a radio or TV on after dark.

3. Make sure someone gets your mail/newspapers. Same reason as #2. Plus, there's only so much mail the carrier will jam into your mailbox. You could also have the post office hold your mail from 3 to 30 days.

4. Check your thermostat settings. If there's no one home to enjoy the heat or a/c, turn it off before you go or set your thermostat to its recommended temperatures.

5. Change the settings on your answering machine. A constantly ringing phone could annoy your neighbors and let strangers know you're away.

6. Make sure everything that needs to be off is off. Your vacation should be worry-free, and that includes thoughts like "did I leave the stove on?" Double-check before you go. You can even unplug non-essential appliances like your computer, TV and other electronics.

7. Get rid of perishable items and leftovers. No one wants to come home to fuzzy things in the fridge. If it's uneaten the night before you go, just toss it.

8. Turn the water off. Close the water valves for your sinks, dishwasher and clothes washer. That way nothing can leak and make a mess while you're not home.

9. Keep track of your house keys. When you don't use them for a week or more, it's easy to forget where you stuck them. Find a spot in your carry-on luggage where they'll be safe for the duration of your trip.

-Courtesy of Royal Caribbean Cruise Line