

HOW TO USE COUCHSURFING TO TRAVEL THE WORLD

Picture this... You arrive at a city you have never been before and enjoy your day sightseeing and having fun. Then, you head to someone's house, someone you've never met before in person, and stay at his or her house as a guest. Sounds crazy, eh? Well, it's not as crazy as it sounds. It's usually called CouchSurfing; a way to travel on a budget and with a more local perspective.

Here are some of the most common questions regarding the whole CouchSurfing experience.

A.....

Couchsurfing is technically a social networking site that focuses on connecting like-minded travelers. It is a platform that allows you to meet and even host other travelers.

According to the site, it is "a worldwide network for making connections between travelers and the local communities they visit." In other words, it is a way to see the world with a local perspective by staying at a local host house/apartment as a guest and in some cases having them as travel companions during your stay. It's a way to intimately experience the real culture of your destination's everyday life.

And, did I mention it is free?!

B.....

There are dozens of reasons! First and foremost it's a free place to stay during your trip. But, even when that is a big deal for budget travelers, it is not the main reason to CouchSurf. It is an incredible way to experience the hospitality of a new destination with the inevitable local touch provided by your host. It's a way to make friends on the road to experience the local culture from a local perspective, to escape typical tourist traps, and more.

C.....

In order to CouchSurf, you have to become a member (for free), and fill out a profile with certain personal information, hobbies, interests, and other information you're comfortable sharing and that gives a sense of who you are. This is basically the most important step to become a CouchSurfer. It will make or break your chances of being hosted or being considered as a host.

You should also set your preferences of the extent of your participation. (ie. willing to host, just give advice, meet for a drink, etc.).

Even though it's called couchsurfing, not all hosts do have a couch. Many have an extra bed, air mattress, sleeping bags, a separate private bedroom, and of course, a comfy couch, among others. It varies drastically by host and they usually state it on their profile.

D.....

Finding the ideal host is not as hard as it seems. It all starts by using their search tool to find matching profiles according to your destination.

Here are some tips that will help you find the best hosts.

- 1.Spend some time filling out your profile – Whatever you decide to include in your profile, it should be honest!** Let that other person know enough of you in order **to entice** them to make contact with you.
- 2.Upload many pictures of you, of your “couch” if you have one, and even of you with other CouchSurfers** – Putting a face to someone is part of establishing trust. Likewise, you should only look for hosts with pictures.
- 3.Be specific on how you filter your search** – The more specific you get, the most likely it is that you will find a host that will be a good fit. You can use many of the filters their search provides, like; gender, location, verification level, keywords, age, and others.
- 4.Read the full profile of potential hosts** – Once you narrow down your search, you should fully read their profiles before considering contacting them. Also read the location they're in. Is it close or far from where you want to be?
- 5.Request to “surf” with a personalized message** – Once you have a short list of potential hosts, it's time to message them with personalized messages. Include something that lets them know you've done your research. Do you share a hobby? Like something in particular? (often turns out into a good sharing experience with your host). Also, briefly describe yourself and why do you want to CouchSurf with them.
- 6.When you have your host, establish an additional contact method** – If possible, exchange phone numbers **to facilitate** communication. I personally like to add my hosts on facebook after we've agreed to CouchSurf or just meet for drinks. This is also a great way to know them, since most people have their “lives” publicly displayed there. Plus, it's the simplest way of getting to know “who I am”.

Can you trust these random strangers you're contacting online?

This is a concern most people have when considering to CouchSurf or not. And it's totally valid. You feel like you are going to stay at some **random** stranger's place, but think of this, that random stranger is opening his/her doors to an equally random stranger. This is a community of like-minded travelers looking for a different way to travel.

But still, there are some “security and verification features” the CouchSurfing community has adopted to build confidence among its users. Among those is the “official verification”, where the user donates a minimum of \$25 dollars to verify their name (through a credit/debit card) and address (by entering a code mailed on a postcard).

Another lever of confidence is achieved through references of previous hosts and surfers. The more detailed the reference, the more **genuine** it feels and it lets you know better how they interact with their host/guest. And, there is also the Vouching system. This started with the founders who vouched for the people whom they've met and trusted, eventually creating a “vouching” chain among active users that adds another layer of trust. As a user,

you can only **vouch** for others once you have been vouched three times. So, look for other CouchSurfers who have been vouched before.

E.....

Not really. But it is always appreciated to help with certain **chores** like cooking a meal, doing the dishes, or any other way to express your gratitude. But, in my opinion, a must is spending some time with your host. Share stories with them, explore things they might recommend, or whatever might come along the way. Remember, this is an exchange experience, not just a free stay.

Do I need to host or surf in order to be part of the network?

Even though hosting and surfing is a big part of the CouchSurfing experience, it is not the only way to be part of the community of over 2.5 million CouchSurfers worldwide. You can use the website to find locals willing to meet for dinner or take you around the city for a day. There are also many CouchSurfing groups per city that meet once a month or so. This is another great way to meet travelers while at home or on the road.

I've personally had great experiences with CouchSurfers whom I've hosted and whom I've surfed with, and whom I just met for a few drinks. Some of them have turned into real friendships. [...]

I honestly think this is a great and authentic way of travel.

INTERNET SOURCE: www.globotreks.com/accommodations/how-to-couchsurfing-travel-world

EXERCISES:

I. Do you know what CouchSurfing is? Have you ever tried it? Do you know anyone who has?

II. Check the meaning of CouchSurfing in the text.

II. Match the headings (1-5) to the paragraphs (A-E).

1. Why should you CouchSurf?

2. How to find a host?

3. So, what is Couchsurfing?

4. Once you're hosted, is there anything you should do to repay the favor?

5. How to CouchSurf?

III. Decide if the following statements are true(T) or false (F). Correct the false ones.

1. It is obligatory to pay your host for the accommodation.
2. In your profile you need to state how much you are going to participate.
3. You should never upload any photos of you in your profile.
4. You have to verify your identity the CouchSurfing community.
5. You can only vouch for others after you have been vouched twice.

IV. Try to guess the meaning of highlighted words from the context. Check with your dictionary.

V. Do you think CouchSurfing is a good idea? Why (not)?

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