

Five Dollar Traveller

Maximum Adventure, Minimum Budget.



Ultimate Guide to CouchSurfing

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What is CouchSurfing???

If you haven't already heard about the purpose of CouchSurfing, prepare to get your mind blown! Otherwise, skip to page 2... In the travel world, CouchSurfing.org is an online network of individuals offering up there couch, spare room, or sometimes even just a floor space, for free! If you find hotel bills kill your budget when travelling, here is the solution. Millions of people worldwide, in almost every country, are either offering



accommodation or looking for a room. Not only can you get a free room, but often free food and many other little bonuses such as a lift to the airport. **Expect nothing, but be grateful for everything!**

However, CouchSurfing is not intended as a free hotel service... It is a cultural exchange and support programme, a community of open minded travellers spreading ideas, opinions and good times around the world. Its a way to make great new friends and experience the places you visit in a way that the average tourist never will - there is nothing like the benefit of local knowledge!

When you stay with or meet other CouchSurfers you can leave references on their profile pages and over time people who participate become better rated and hence will find it easier to find a couch as the community deems them reliable and trustworthy. If you feel slightly unsafe about trying this for the first time its best to only accept/stay with people with a lot of positive references. Although it is always possible to have a negative experience, if you check someone's profile before choosing to stay with them the chances are minimal.

Why should I CouchSurf?

You get free accommodation, right? Sure you do, but if that is the only reason you want to CouchSurf then get ready to become very disappointed when you **a)** get few positive responses to your couch requests, and **b)** start getting negative reviews from hosts and then find it even harder to get a host.

If someone said to you “I’m going to send free-loaders round to your home, they’ll treat it like a hotel, eat your food and steal your towels whilst you are at work” how would you feel? Well, you wouldn’t be signing up to the website and inviting people round!!!

Couchsurfing is a community, that is the point. Its about having new shared experiences with people all over the world, sometimes cultural, sometimes homely whilst away from home. Everyone on the network has one major thing in common, an interest in travel. That is where the similarities might stop, but the next very common trait is an open mind. Having a genuine interest in making your CouchSurfing experiences about meeting new friends and sharing in their way of life for just a short time is the single most important thing that will not only lead to success in CouchSurfing, but that will give you a rewarding experience.

You could use the tips I’ll present to cheat your way to free accommodation in the short term, but if you are not genuine in your intentions then don’t expect this guide to be a quick fix, eventually you’ll get caught out! If you don’t want to use CouchSurfing for its intended purpose then there are plenty of cheap hostels...

If you *are* genuine then this guide will help you get better results and experiences as an **A1 CouchSurfer!**

Tips for getting a couch (hosted).

1. Your Profile Page

Before you even start applying to hosts, sort out your profile page. Most people you ask to host you will take a look at you profile before accepting you to check they will get on with you and if you have references. Include quality up-to-date content talking about your personality and interests and multiple photos including an eye catching profile photo that features you. Sell yourself!

2. Get references and friends

The chances are you know someone who is already on CouchSurfing, even if you don't realise you do. Put a shout out on facebook/twitter etc. asking who is on CouchSurfing (there is also a search function to find FB friends on CS, its not full-proof, but its a start), find them, add them as a friend, write a reference for them and ask them to reciprocate. If you genuinely don't have any friends on CS already, invite some! [Search for friends on CS](#)

3. Read other people's profiles.

When you do a couch search, read the profile of the person you want to request to, make sure they are someone you will get on with or find interesting. If they have a cat and you are allergic, no point in requesting... If they say they can only host at the weekends, don't email them asking to stay on a Tuesday. Often they will have a picture of where you will be sleeping so you can decide in advance if it is acceptable to you - it'll be better than in this picture! But you won't know what to expect if you don't check. Information like this is normally on their profile page, if you haven't read it, which can be pretty obvious to the host when you put in a request, if not to you, then people are more likely to dismiss your request.



Tips for getting a couch (hosted).

4. Write a personal response.

Mention things about your intended host that are of interest and why you would like to meet them. Saying you would like to stay with them because you “always wanted to visit London” will not go down well, but saying “We both enjoy red wine and politics” if you both do, will be a lot more compelling of a reason for them to even click on your profile. If its obvious you have sent a bulk email to anyone in a certain zip code, rather than a personal message, expect a “sorry, I’m working that weekend” or similar polite excuse, or no response at all!

5. Honesty: Mean what you say

As I mentioned earlier, people who value this community do so because of the value of new connections and new experiences. If you pretend to be someone you are not just to get a free room, it will work out badly. The people you will meet offer out their couch with good intentions, be selective and

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look to stay with them only if you genuinely think it will be a positive experience for you. If you actually take the time to read more than a couple of profiles



you will probably find someone who you actually like the sound of, this common ground will also seriously increase your chances of being invited as well as getting a positive reference after your stay.

6. Make requests at appropriate times

Hosts have lives and you have to work around them, don't contact them 6 months in advance as it is way too early to know if they'll be able to host, contacting people the night before, if they even see your message in time, is creating an unfair burden. Between 30 days and 10 days before arriving is ideal, but last minute could be acceptable only if you have been let down by someone else.



Tips for being more successful on CS.

1. Host first

This is not essential if you are not in a position to do so, but there are many benefits:

a) Your house, your rules: If they turn up and are a problem you can tell them to leave.

b) Get your ratings up: Its pretty easy to find surfers even if you have zero references because they benefit more from the arrangement than you do as a host. Providing you live somewhere vaguely within reach of a travel route there will be people looking for a couch periodically, if not a lot more often than you'd expect!

c) You choose: See who is looking for a place and wait until you find someone who you like the look of who has plenty of references. Don't wait for people to email you, get online and search for surfers looking for a host. If no one piques your interest, then don't host until someone does!

d) Time is on your side: You can host whenever you want, if that means only once a month, no problem! When you go surfing you'll want to get a lot of hosts in a short amount of time and may have to take a plan B if your plan A is too busy to host, so get some positive experience whilst you are more flexible.

2. Build your references and friends

Participating is the best way to do this, friending your mates is a good start, but not a long term solution. Hosting is easier to get results, but not always practical. If you are not currently travelling and you can't host, then go to the CouchSurfer meetings. Most cities have them, some more regularly than others, get to know people in your local community. Also, people on CS are often just looking to meet up for coffee or a beer - so do it! Don't wait for people to invite you, be proactive and you will get faster, more rewarding results.

Tips for being more successful on CS.

3. Get Verified and vouched

Getting verified is easy and proves that you are a real person. It also help to fund the CouchSurfing project, which will lead to improvement of the website and the ongoing success of the project. For a small donation they will send you a postcard which confirms your address, and they will verify your identity using your credit card. You then get a big

green tick on your account to let other users know that you are who you say you are.



This process makes you legally accountable for your actions (or traceable at least), and hence a safer bet for people hosting you to know they can trace you if you were to steal their laptop or something!

Getting vouched is harder. You have to have been vouched by at least 3 people before you can vouch other people, so new members will not be able to vouch you, only experienced members who have demonstrated how reliable and trustworthy they are within the community. However, once vouched you will find it a lot easier to get hosted, a great benefit. The easiest way to get vouched is to host or be hosted by people that have already been vouched 3 times. Do not expect to be vouched simply for turning up though! You will need to prove that you deserve their trust, the system only works if people are honest, so be honest. You could choose to manipulate people to get them to vouch for you? But what is the point?

4. Don't host/surf with people because you want to try and hook up with them.

OK, you are God's gift to the opposite sex... We get it. There are plenty of dating sites, and pubs/clubs

Tips for being more successful on CS.

where you can go to hook up, CouchSurfing is not designed for that!

You are not being invited around by hosts for sexual encounters, their being friendly is not necessarily because they want to get in your pants! I've met people who have got together through CouchSurfing, which is great, but forcing yourself on hosts is the best way to get banned and possibly arrested.

5. Don't take the piss...

a) No Overstays: If you agree to stay for 3 nights, don't ask for an extra 2 nights once you have settled in, it puts the host in an unfairly awkward position. If something happens like your flights get cancelled, tell your host about it and they will probably offer if they feel able to do so, but don't expect them to, it's not their fault or responsibility.

b) Keep it tidy: If you use the kitchen, do the washing up, if you use towels hang them to dry after, etc.

c) Respect property: Don't use or eat your host's stuff without permission, ever!

6. Be Awesome! - Give back to your hosts

What can I say? Being awesome, respectful and open minded is the best way to be successful, then you don't even have to try! We had two CouchSurfers from Korea stay with us and they cooked us up a Korean BBQ - our first time eating such food. Its experiences like this that make CouchSurfing such a



fantastic community to participate in! Thinking of ways like this to show your appreciation to your hosts is a great way of making life long

friends and getting awesome positive references! If you can't cook, you could bring a small gift that is culturally specific to your heritage? Be creative!

Frequently asked questions?

1. I Don't have a couch?

Doesn't matter. It will reduce the likelihood of surfers staying with you, but not completely. People travelling on a budget will often settle for what they can get, as I've said before its more about the experience than the comfort! Even a space on the floor in your room is ok, so long as you are very specific that is all you can offer when you arrange for a surfer to stay.

Just being a surfer and never hosting is ok, its nice to give back to the community, but being an awesome surfer is in itself an important contribution.

2. I have too many negative references

OK, firstly, douche bag! You only get negatives if you are dishonest, rude, or taking advantage of people. It is possible on very rare occasions you may have a personality clash with someone, but to end up with more negs than positives means: IT's YOU.

3. Is it safe?

In general its very safe. Bad things can and do happen in any travel situation, be vigilant and always check profiles and references, if you arrive and don't feel safe then make an excuse and leave.

4. What if my host is at work all day, how do I get in?

You probably don't. Every host is different, some will trust you with the keys, some will not let you be in the house unless they are there. Respect the rules and make your plans around the host.

If you don't agree with the house rules of your host then you don't have to stay with them.



**Now, stop reading
and get surfing!**

www.CouchSurfing.org