

What Is Couchsurfing?

Although the term "couchsurfing" loosely refers simply to staying with hosts while you travel, over 4 million couchsurfers a year turn to couchsurfing.com for a safe way to find hosts who offer free accommodation. It's the online hub and premier social site for helping [budget travelers and backpackers](#) meet potential hosts all over the world.

Some hosts are often former travelers themselves or expatriates who moved to another country and want to stay in touch with the travel world. On the other hand, many hosts are locals who are interested in making friends from other countries or practicing English.

All agree to open their homes to strangers for free. The interaction often develops into lasting friendships!

"Couch surfing" has a catchy ring to it, but there is some good news: **you won't always be relegated to sleeping on couches.** Many hosts have spare bedrooms; you could even have your own bathroom.

On some glorious occasions, guest cottages are available!

Couchsurfing a few nights can dramatically lower expenses when traveling in places such as [Hong Kong](#), [South Korea](#), and [Singapore](#) where accommodation is notoriously pricey.

Tip: Free accommodation is great, but so are personal space and privacy. Don't plan to couch surf or [share hostel rooms](#) every night of your trip. Interacting with travelers from all over the world is great fun, but it also requires energy. Plan to treat yourself to private rooms every now and then for some personal time.

Is Couchsurfing Free?

Yes. Money shouldn't be exchanged, but bringing a host a thoughtful gift is good road karma. A trinket from your home country or bottle of wine will work, although neither are expected. If turning up empty handed, offer to cover a meal or the groceries to cook at home.

What *is* expected is a little interaction. Just as when hitchhiking, the recipient of a freebie should interact with hosts as much as they prefer. Don't remain aloof or so busy that your host winds up feeling used. Take advantage! **A big part of the couchsurfing experience is having a local to give advice and recommendations that can't be found in the guidebook.**

The Benefits of Couchsurfing

Aside from the obvious benefit of finding a free place to stay, couchsurfing can enhance your trip in other ways:

- You get a peek behind the tourism curtain. A good host will provide a deeper understanding of the place you are visiting.
- Your local friend will know the local hotspots and can offer money-saving advice for insider sights and activities. You'll learn about scams to avoid and where to find the best eats in town away from the tourist traps.
- You may have access to a kitchen. Grocery shopping and cooking meals at home are cheaper and healthier than eating out in restaurants every day as travelers often do.
- Even if you already have accommodation, you can use the couchsurfing website to find traveler meetups and hangouts.
- Lasting friendships are often formed through couchsurfing.

Couchsurfing isn't just for solo backpackers! Couples and families with children regularly find hosts who share the same interests.

Is Couchsurfing Safe?

Although staying with complete strangers seem inherently dangerous, particularly if you watch the nightly news, the social-network system on couchsurfing.com is designed to weed out bad hosts and guests. A lot of emphasis (tips, suggestions, etc) is placed on safety, for obvious reasons.

First, you can choose what type of host you wish to stay (e.g., male, female, couple, etc) and can get a feel for their personalities and interests based on their public profiles. The more time and information put into your own profile, the better.

Before choosing a host, you can see reviews left by other travelers who stayed before you. If the public reviews don't give you enough confidence, you can even contact those travelers to see if they had a good experience and would stay with a particular host again.

The couchsurfing.com website once made use of a vouching system to increase safety. Vouching was retired in 2014. But you can still clearly see how much experience someone has hosting travelers.

Hosts know that acting poorly toward guests will result in negative ratings and reviews, effectively eliminating their chances of hosting travelers in the future. This is usually enough to keep members of the couchsurfing community in check.

Don't worry: a multi-level account verification system prevents people from dumping old profiles and starting new ones if they get a bad review. Sticking to verified, experienced hosts is one way to increase safety.

As with any social network that has millions of members, you are ultimately responsible for your own personal safety when making contact with strangers.

How to Be a Good CouchSurfer

Although couchsurfing is completely free, remember that your hosts aren't compensated for offering up their homes and time — they are doing so to meet people and form new friendships.

Be a good couchsurfer by getting to know your host; plan to spend a little time with them rather than just turning up when it is time to sleep. Bringing a small gift is optional, but always plan to interact a bit. After departing, leave a nice referral for them if the experience was positive.

Benjamin Franklin said "guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days." No matter how positive the interaction, heed that sage advice and *never* overstay a welcome!