

# Ridiculously Extraordinary Black Book #001

How To Travel Anywhere In The World, Live  
With Locals, and Enjoy Outstanding  
Experiences By CouchSurfing!

By Karol Gajda

<http://www.RidiculouslyExtraordinary.com>

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Selling it goes against the spirit of the information.  
*Karma's a bitch.*

That said, as with my blog posts, **you can do what you want**. Read more at [Steal This Blog](#).

To download the latest version go to  
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*Black Book #001 is NOT authorized by CouchSurfing.org.  
I just love CouchSurfing like a fat kid loves cake.*

# About Me

Hey!

Thanks for checking out this here Ridiculously Extraordinary Black Book #001.

I'm Karol. That's Karl, not Carol. Born in Poland in '81, grew up in the USA (Michigan), moved to Florida after Uni because I hate cold weather, sold all my stuff in 2009, and I'm now [traveling in a 32 litre backpack](#) for an indeterminate amount of time.

I've been working for myself since age 19, but I never took advantage of that Ridiculously Extraordinary Freedom until recently.

My goal in life is to help 100 other people achieve Ridiculously Extraordinary Freedom.

To connect with me visit [RidiculouslyExtraordinary.com](#), subscribe to the RSS feed by [clicking here](#), and follow me on [Twitter.com/KarolGajda](#).

Cheers!

Karol

# About Ridiculously Extraordinary Black Books

RE Black Books are Special Ops guides on unique topics.

Classified information for Ridiculously Extraordinary People.

No unnecessary photos.

No unnecessary designs.

No bullshit.

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# Introduction

Let's get it started: This Ridiculously Extraordinary Black Book is about CouchSurfing.

If you've never heard about CouchSurfing stick with me for a minute because ...

## CouchSurfing changed my life.

No exaggeration.

Before I joined CouchSurfing I was, for the most part, an introverted anti-social pansy.

Now, although I love (crave, you could say) being alone, I can talk to anybody and do anything.

*Quick Side Note: I'm working on a Black Book called "How To Be Alone" because being alone is a lot more enjoyable than most people can imagine.*

## What CouchSurfing Is Not

Before I explain anything else I need to get this out of the way.

*CouchSurfing is not about using people for free places to stay. If you want a cheap place to stay, get a*

hostel.

While CouchSurfing is technically free, the point is to meet new people and experience new things. More on this later.

## **What Is CouchSurfing?**

When I refer to CouchSurfing (CS) I'm specifically talking about the Web site at [www.CouchSurfing.org](http://www.CouchSurfing.org), and not crashing on your friends' couches.

CouchSurfing, a non-profit organization, connects travelers all around the world with local communities/people.

At the core, CS is a social network with more than 1,000,000 members around the world who offer up free places to stay for travelers. Travel is fun any way you do it, but isn't getting a local perspective of the area usually the goal?

It takes a strong, open-minded individual to be a CouchSurfer (CSer). As a surfer you go into new environments and stay the night with people you've only interacted with through a Web site. As a host you allow random people who you've never met stay in your home.

To some people that sounds unbelievable.

Results of an informal survey:

- 80% of my friends/family/acquaintances think CouchSurfing is unsafe, awkward, or too far out of their comfort zones.
- 15% think it's awesome, but are afraid or otherwise unwilling to do it.
- 5% think it's the coolest idea they've ever heard and want to know how to get started right away.

**If you're in the 5% I'm writing this for you.**

If you're in the 15% *hopefully* I can allay some of your fears.

If you're in the 80% **I'm not here to convince you otherwise.** You're probably better off sticking to the ordinary way of traveling (hotels/tour groups/etc).

There is **absolutely nothing wrong** with being an ordinary traveler and I mean that wholeheartedly. If you like tours and nice hotels more power to you. (Although you should probably save your time and stop reading this Black Book.)



# CouchSurfing is the Ridiculously Extraordinary way to travel.

By connecting with amazing people from CouchSurfing I've had the opportunity to:

- [Sandboard and 4 wheel drive the largest moving sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere](#) (including a fantastic vegan lunch made by my CouchSurfing host!).
- Explore rainforest fragments on the east Australian coast with a Phd student from England.
- [Go down huge hills at up to 40mph \(64kph\) on a plastic children's tricycle](#) (known in The States as a Big Wheel).
- Build a raft out of barrels and wood and spend a night on it in the middle of a lake. (Our paddle wheel broke so we had to paddle like [this](#).)
- Motorcycle at high speeds over the Sydney Harbour Bridge at night.
- Join 100 people in canoes in a moving "tent city" down a river for 3 days.
- Make lifelong friends. <-- Most important reason to be a CouchSurfer.

You get the point. I've had lots of great experiences. Many of them impossible to do via traditional methods of travel (i.e. tours).

## Disadvantages

Before I get to the nitty gritty, let's cover some of the disadvantages of CouchSurfing.

**The most glaring disadvantage is you've got to plan ahead.** Popping into a city and finding a place to stay that day is *possible* on CouchSurfing, but it's not easy.

So in that respect hostels (and hotels) win out. I have stayed in many hostels while traveling just because I didn't have time to plan or search for CouchSurfers.

But in every other possible way, CouchSurfing wins. Hands down. No question.

Moving on ...

# Safety

*"Everything is just an impression."*

*Monimus the Cynic*

Whenever I explain CouchSurfing to somebody who has never heard about it before the first question I always get is:

## **How Can CouchSurfing Possibly Be Safe?**

It's completely natural to fear the unknown. Don't let that fear stop you from accomplishing extraordinary things.

From the outside looking in *your impression* may be that CouchSurfing is unsafe.

Wouldn't you agree that no matter what you're doing safety is never guaranteed?

CouchSurfing *can be* unsafe. As can staying in hostels or hotels. Or camping. Or driving your car. Or walking your dog. Or eating.

## **Friends and Reference System**

To help you look out for your safety CS has a system of Friends, References, and Vouches.

*How the friends and references system works:*

Just like any social networking site you can become friends with anybody on CouchSurfing. That includes real life friends and family, but also people you've never met.

Someone who has a lot of friends on CouchSurfing may have a lot of friends in real life, or they may simply befriend lots of people they don't know.

*The number of friends a CSer has is not an indication of the type of person they are or if staying with them is safe.*

So the Friends system **isn't** much of a safety net on its own.

## **References, Your Safety Net**

References are where you begin to get a true picture of your possible host. The CouchSurfing Web site allows Positive, Neutral, and Negative references, along with accompanying descriptions.

References can be left by anybody for anybody. So yes, it is possible that someone could set up dozens of fake profiles and leave positive references as a big plot to scam people.

Does it happen? Maybe.

But, for the most part, you will easily be able to see if something doesn't seem quite right.

How?

## **Read the references of your prospective hosts.**

Let me repeat that: read the references of your prospective hosts. Scan the whole list and read a few at random.

A sample positive reference that was left for me by one of my guests:

*"Karol is an awesome host! He was very entertaining and accommodating during my last minute 3 day trip at his house. He took care of us (there were other CS'ers in the house) and showed us around with other local Orlando area CS'ers. I highly recommend Karol as a CS host as long as you enjoy laughing and having a good time!!!"*

When you see a few positive references like that you can't help but feel good about your host.

On the other end of the spectrum, some hosts get negative references.

**If you see a negative reference do not bother staying with the person. It's just not worth it.**

If you see a neutral reference it may be for any number of reasons so use your gut.

20 glowing positive references and 1 neutral?

It *may* be OK. The 1 blemish reference may be for other reasons than a bad host.

That said, **your safety is more important than saving money**. So even if you don't have much, when in doubt, pay for a room somewhere.

## Verification Levels

CouchSurfing has a system of verifying that people are who they say they are.

They recently updated this system and here is how it works now.

**Unverified:** Indicated by this image:



Unverified doesn't mean it's unsafe. **I've stayed with many unverified hosts**. Again, read references and use your gut.

That said, if it's your first time CouchSurfing don't stay with someone who is Unverified. Get a feel for

CouchSurfing a bit by staying with Verified hosts.

**Location Pending:** Indicated by this image:



Location Pending means the person has proven their name with a credit card via donation to CouchSurfing (they're a non-profit). The name on their profile matches the name on file with their credit card company.

In an unfortunate emergency CouchSurfing.org will have your host's full name.

**Location Verified (also known as Level 3):** The highest level of verification, indicated by this image:



**This means that both name and address have been verified.** When you donate to CouchSurfing they send you a letter/postcard with a code. You have to log into your CS account and type in that code to get the Location Verified image on your profile.

*Additional note about Verification:* anybody who is Location Pending or Location Verified has donated to CouchSurfing. These are the people that keep the organization running and are committed to spreading the love.

*Getting Location Verified was one of the first things I did when I joined. I actually didn't use the site for another 5 months after getting Location Verified!*

## **Why you should get Location Verified:**


**1) Donating to the community shows you're interested in giving, not just taking.**

When you think about it, even a small \$25 donation is absolutely nothing compared to the value the site provides. You can't get many nights in a hostel for \$25 and you will probably never stay in a hotel for \$25.

So, make a \$25 donation if you intend to use the site. And if you end up CouchSurfing through Europe (or anywhere else), an additional donation would be great too. (You'd think I was employed by CouchSurfing!)

**2) If you're Location Verified your host knows you're serious and is more likely to let you stay at their place.** Some hosts will only host travelers who are Location Verified so it opens up your couch possibilities.

## **Vouches, A Safety Net With An Extra Level Of Protection**

Vouches are indicated by this image: 



To the right of that image will be a number indicating the number of vouches that person has. This will be under the Personal Designations section of any CouchSurfers profile. (upper left of the profile)

Most CouchSurfers do not have *any* vouches.

You can only get a Vouch from someone who already has 3 Vouches. At the time of this writing I have 14 Vouches. That means 14 different people with at least 3 Vouches each have Vouched for my character.

**To scam the Vouch system is not impossible, but it would be very difficult and time consuming.**

Most people you stay with will not Vouch for you. They may leave you a Reference, but Vouches are not handed out easily.

## **CouchSurfing Safety Simplified**

Read references and use your gut. If you feel uncomfortable with someone's profile for any reason do not request to surf their couch.

## **How To Construct A CS Profile That Magically Entices People To Host You**

Safety is covered. Still interested in CouchSurfing? Sweet.

Before we get into actually searching for couches to surf, we've got to spend some time building a quality profile.

If you have a sparse, barely filled out profile you will probably get mostly "No" responses to any CouchSurfing Requests you send.

If you want a higher likelihood of finding couches to surf do the following:

### **1) Upload A Good Profile Picture**

By "good" I mean a picture that clearly shows your face. Preferably your happy face. Even more preferably your happy face doing something fun. :)

### **2) Upload At Least 3 More Pictures**

One picture is good, but more pictures are better.

Upload pictures of yourself in fun destinations, even if that destination is your backyard or a local park. Pictures of you drinking are not recommended unless it's in a place like Germany, drinking German beer.

Why no drinking pictures? Being a drunk doesn't give off the best vibe. :)

Be sure to provide a descriptive caption to each picture.

They say a picture is worth 1,000 words. When you're dealing with strangers these "words" are especially important. Your pictures convey a lot about you and your personality that your writing never will.

### **3) Include A Completely Filled Out Description**

Most importantly, make sure to convey your personality in your description. My full description takes 3-5 minutes to read. It's paragraphs, not sentences. Your potential hosts WILL read your description before deciding whether to host you.

Yes, this does take time. If you want to actually use CouchSurfing in your travels it's worth the 30-60 minutes it will take you to complete a nice profile.

### **What To Do When You Have Zero References**

We covered your potential host's References, but now let's cover YOUR references.

**When you join CouchSurfing you'll have no positive references.** This makes it very difficult to find people to host you. Most hosts don't want to be the guinea pig for your first Surfing experience.

Kind of a catch-22, huh?

Here is how to get around it: **before you start on your Surfing adventures** meet up regularly with the local CSers in your area. Check the message board for your city (called a CouchSurfing Group) for events happening in your area.

After you hang out with the locals a few times some of them will leave you positive references.

I don't leave a positive reference for someone I've only hung out with once and you shouldn't expect anything else.

It's hard to get to know someone in one night.

After you've hung out with the same people a few times you should go ahead and leave them a reference. Many of them will then leave you references if they haven't done so already.

That all said, **don't feel obligated to give anybody a reference just because they've given you one.** If you don't feel you know someone well enough to give them a positive reference, just leave it alone.

## **Constructing An Extraordinary CS Profile Simplified**

Upload at least 4 pictures (with 1 good head shot) that convey your personality. Take the time to fill out your profile in a way that does the same. And meet up with local CouchSurfers to make some amazing friends...and to build up your References.

# Finding The Perfect Couch To Surf

CouchSurfing makes finding a couch simple.

1) Go to [CouchSurfing.org](http://CouchSurfing.org), hover your mouse over the Surf/Host header and click on CouchSearch.

2) Next to "Has Couch?" click on Yes or Definitely. In medium to large cities this should give you more than enough Couch choices for your needs.

If you don't find any couches then add the "Maybe has couch" option to your search. I've stayed with quite a few people who were "Maybes" because they loved my awesome profile. :) *It pays to take the time to construct a great profile.*

3) Go down to "Order By" and select "Last Login Date." This sorts your results by the time of last login.

If somebody doesn't log in to CouchSurfing regularly they may not be regular hosts and you might not get a response.

4) Select your location and click "List Surfers On Next Page."

Then, following the safety advice I've already mentioned, and select a few hosts you'd like to stay with.

I bookmark each prospective host's profile page in my Web browser (Firefox, of course), then go back and begin sending Couch requests once I have a few good possibilities. (More on that in a bit.)

Keep in mind that most hosts don't want surfers for more than 2-4 nights at a time. So if you're planning on staying somewhere for longer than that you will need to find additional hosts.

*The longest I've stayed with a single host is 5 nights.*

When reading a host's profile be sure to read the references and the rest of the profile to see if you have anything in common. If you don't have anything in common with your host it might not be the best experience.

CouchSurfing hosts are usually big on taking their guests out, so if you don't enjoy the same things you may not have a good time. That said, staying with a host who is your complete opposite might open both of you up to awesome new experiences. (*This is where your personal preference kicks in.*)

I'm not too picky with my hosts as I enjoy trying new things, so as long as they seem like fun people that's enough for me. Although, to be fair, I always do a keyword search for vegan or vegetarian before I do the general search mentioned above. :)

## **How Early Should You Start Sending CouchSurfing Requests?**

A good rule of thumb is 2 weeks before you need the couch.

If you're traveling to a big event then you'll need to request a couch months ahead of time. For example, South by Southwest (SXSW) in Austin, TX is held every year in March. Most couches are booked up by December, a full 3-4 months early. You may find a couch in the weeks leading up to an event like that, but it'll take more work on your part. (i.e. You'll have to send a lot of Couch Requests.)

In big cities like NYC, Tokyo, and Sydney you should send CouchSurfing requests a little earlier, up to 3-4 weeks before your intended travels.

## **How Many Couch Requests Should You Send?**

To give you an idea of how many Couch requests you might have to send, I sent out 20 requests for my first 18 days in Sydney, Australia. I stayed with 5 hosts during that time. 14 hosts replied with "no, can't host you" and 1 never replied.

25% of the hosts I contacted were available to host me and 75% were not. Not bad odds, but if you're a girl



you'll have a higher than 25% success rate.

*The odds are in your favor if you're a female for the simple fact that both male and female hosts are more likely to accept a CouchSurfing request from a female.*

That's a whole issue of psychology and life that we just don't have time to get into. :)

## **How To Write A Proper CouchSurfing Request**

Once you've found a few prospective couches for your intended dates it's time to click the "CouchSurf with [username]!" link for each host under the Couch Information section and fill out the request page in detail.

As I mentioned early on in this report, CouchSurfing is not about a free place to stay, so if your couch requests are impersonal you will have a lot less success.

**From the get-go you can stand out from the crowd by changing the subject line of the request.** CouchSurfing makes the default boring: "Request to Surf your Couch in [CityName]!"

I recommend something simple like: "Hey [CouchSurfer's name], couchsurfing request for [Dates you need a couch]"

Some hosts also request that you enter a certain word or phrase in the subject line. *You'll know this if you read their profile like you should be doing anyway. :)*

In the Message Details section get a bit more personal.

Example:

"Hey [CSer's name],

That picture of The Crossroads is awesome. I've been wanting to go there for years! [Note: obviously this bit is customized so DO NOT use it.]

I'm coming into your town soon and was hoping you could host me on [Enter dates you need a couch, no more than 2-3 nights usually].

Details: [Enter all relevant details of your trip]

Thanks!

[Your Name]

[Your Phone #]"

*As far as relevant details of your trip:* write them all out once and just copy and paste for every request you send.

Include the dates of your visit to the host's city, not just the dates you're requesting their couch. If your host can't host you for your requested dates they may offer to host you on some of the other dates you're in town so it's good to throw that information in there.

## **Be Prepared For The Unexpected**

Every CouchSurfing experience I've had has been positive. Except one.

I sent a request to a CSer in Australia. This person had a lot of positive references and was a City Ambassador for their city.

### **A Note About City Ambassadors:**

Every city in the world can have City Ambassadors, but you have to be an experienced CSer and apply for the position. It's a volunteer position and you're supposed to organize regular events in your city and be a good go-to for travelers.

Additionally, large cities will usually have more than one Ambassador.

This particular City Ambassador responded that they could host me for 4 nights and I thought everything would be awesome. They had a good profile and well, Ambassadors are usually great.

**Things are not always as they seem.**

At 10pm the first night I was to Surf with them I **walked into the filthiest place I've ever seen.**

I've found a lot of people are messy. Messes are fine. But *some* people (in general, not specifically CSers) are plain dirty.

As a CouchSurfing host you're supposed to provide your guests with a decent place to crash. *It doesn't have to be extravagant, but it should be clean.*

I was provided with sheets that looked like they were picked up off the street. Instead of a couch or mattress, it was a horribly stained pad on the floor. The pillows were dirty, stained, small couch pillows with no covers.

To top it off, the temps dropped to about 8°C (46°F) at night, there was no heating, and the windows didn't fully close.

I was essentially sleeping outside in a large windbreaker. :)

I was tired and decided I'd make it through the night instead of finding other accommodations.

It was the most horrible "sleep" I've ever experienced. I didn't want to touch anything for fear of the dust

and dirt I might disturb. I woke up constantly because it was so cold and uncomfortable.

In the morning I gathered my things, headed to the nearest WiFi hotspot (my host didn't have WiFi, which is fine, although most hosts do), and found the nicest available hostel.

Crappy experiences are part of travel and part of life and I include this story just to let you know that CouchSurfing is not always perfect.

## **Other "Funny" Experiences**

**Twice**, potential hosts have responded to my Couch Requests with "yes, I can host you, but I only have room in my bed so you'll have to share."

And both times it was from men.

Obviously I declined to stay with those hosts. :)

# Payments

CouchSurfing is free, but that doesn't mean it won't cost you anything.

You should make it a point to bring a small gift, make dinner, or take your host out for dinner/drinks. Since I travel really light and have no room for gifts of any size I usually go with the latter.

CouchSurfing sometimes ends up costing me more than staying in a hostel (dinner/drinks aren't always cheap), but I don't mind one bit.

You don't have to go crazy. **Any sign that you're grateful of your host is perfect.** CouchSurfers understand not everybody has extra money, and no payment of any sort is ever expected. So if you're seriously out of cash and can't even afford to make them a meal, a sincere thank you is enough.

# Using CS To Do Things Most Travelers Will Never Do

I mentioned in the Introduction a few of the things I've been able to do due to CouchSurfing.

The secret is Groups.

CouchSurfing Groups are where people in a city (locals and travelers alike) get together to schedule events. Even small events like dinner and drinks.

Without Groups I would not have had nearly as an enjoyable time as I've had CouchSurfing.

## How To Get Involved In CS Groups

1) Hover your mouse over the "Community" tab and click on Search Groups. Search for a group in the city (or cities) you're planning on visiting.

2) Click on Join to join the Group.

3) Under Subscription settings select either Instant or Daily so you can keep up to date on what is going on.

**Instant** means you get every single message to the Group e-mailed to you. **Daily** means you get a single e-mail every day with all the day's messages to the Group.

3b) On that note, after you leave a city, either leave the Group or change the updates to never. No sense in

getting e-mails about events in a city you may not visit again.

4) Participate! If there's an event you want to attend make it known that you'll attend by posting. If you aren't sure about attending don't post. It's rude to tell people you're going to be somewhere and then not show up, you know?

5) If nothing is happening make your own post in the Group asking if people want to hang out. If you already have plans, see if somebody wants to join you.

**Example #1:** While in Sydney, Australia I wanted to visit the Blue Mountains about 100km to the west. I decided I'd go for 3-4 days and posted a note in the Sydney Group asking if anybody would like to come along for all or part of it. 2 wonderful girls decided to join me for 2 days of the trip.

**Example #2:** I really wanted to see The Group Ocean Road between Melbourne and Adelaide in Australia on a multi-day journey in a campervan. This type of trip is better done with at least 1 or 2 other people. For me anyway, because I don't enjoy driving. Most vehicles aren't made for 6' 5" (195cm) tall people so driving is uncomfortable.

This time I posted in the Melbourne CouchSurfing Group asking if anybody would like to join me. I got a lot of responses and 1 guy from Holland wanted to go at the



exact same time as me. Lots of interesting things happened on that trip...

- We almost ran out of gas in the middle of nowhere and spent the night in someone's front yard. It was too dark to tell that there was a house on the lot!

- The next day we were tired and it was dark so we pulled over in a field with a seemingly abandoned building. It ended up being a very small city's still-in-use Fire House. ;)

- We took quite a few random detours. One to the [Princess Margaret Rose Cave](#) (which I absolutely loved) and another detour led us to a roadside attraction called The Big Lobster.



# 1 Minute

So there it is folks. CouchSurfing changed my life and I truly believe it can change yours.

If you loved reading Ridiculously Extraordinary Black Book #001 as much as I loved writing it **could you please help me by donating 1 minute of your time?**

**1) Share this Black Book on Twitter.**

*Want to travel for free? @[KarolGajda](#)'s CouchSurfing Black Book will help! Check it out here:  
<http://su.pr/1SbnYD>*

Copy/paste that or write your own.

**2) Write a review on your blog.**

**3) E-mail it to your friends.**

**4) Give it a Thumb Up on [StumbleUpon](#) <-- Click that**

*Anything you can do to spread the word would thrill me to no end.*

Thank you!

Karol Gajda

<http://www.RidiculouslyExtraordinary.com>

<http://www.Twitter.com/KarolGajda>

P.S. If you found misspellings, broken links, or other errors please e-mail me: KarolGajda AT Gmail.com

P.P.S. If you have questions or suggestions, please go to [www.RidiculouslyExtraordinary.com/blackbook001](http://www.RidiculouslyExtraordinary.com/blackbook001) and leave a comment with your question. This way, other readers will benefit. You can also download updated versions of this eBook on that page.

## Appendix

Information important enough to include in this Black Book, but not essential to your CouchSurfing experience. Therefore, it gets relegated to the mighty Appendix. :)

### A Day In The Life

To give you an idea of a typical CouchSurfing experience let me break it down:

- Most of my hosts have had 9-5 jobs or University classes so I meet up with them around 6pm (unless it's a weekend, of course). This is all established ahead of time (via e-mail/phone).
- If I'm arriving into a new city I ask them directions from the airport (or bus/train terminal if that's how I arrived). If I'm coming from a different host's place in the same city I just ask for their address so I can Google Map it.
- If they have something going on and don't invite me, I will ask for recommendations on places to go.

- If they have something going on and invite me along I **always say yes**. I've been to birthday parties (Austin, TX), burlesque parties (Austin, TX again!), and regular parties (lots of places!) without knowing ahead of time I'd be attending any of these glorious events.

- If they don't have anything going they usually offer to show me around the city. Sweet! This gives me an opportunity to buy dinner/drinks/cover charges as a thank you for hosting me.

That handles the first night.

Around this time it's also established whether I will get a key or not. Some hosts give you a key and let you come and go as you please. Some don't.

If they don't give me a key, that means I have to plan my day around only leaving the host's place once and coming back only when they're home. :)

If they give me a key I go explore the city and find a place to work for a few hours. When work is done I'll take my computer back to my host's place and leave again. This time to find non-work things to do until around 6pm.

Most of my hosts don't care if I stay at their place to work, but I much prefer working out in the city somewhere.

That's really it. It's not too different from a typical day of normal life. The only difference is that you're staying with someone you just met.

I liken it to staying with my Parents. CouchSurfing hosts usually give me free reign and make me feel quite comfortable.

Specific questions on the day-to-day? KarolGajda AT Gmail.com. I'll respond to your e-mail (of course), and possibly include your question in an updated version of this Black Book.

On the next page is the CouchSurfing QuickStart Guide...

# CouchSurfing Quick Start Guide

By Karol Gajda

<http://www.RidiculouslyExtraordinary.com>

- 1) **Sign up at CouchSurfing.org.**
- 2) **Fill out a complete profile.** Spend some time on it and make sure to convey your personality.
- 3) **Upload at least 4 pictures.** Your main picture should clearly show your face so your potential hosts know what you look like. Smiling pictures are best. :)
- 4) **Become Location Verified by donating \$25 or more.** Considering 1 night in a hostel costs \$25 or more, this is a steal. And being Location Verified opens up more couch possibilities for you. **This step is not necessary** but highly recommended. I donated to CouchSurfing.org the day I joined. I didn't meet another CouchSurfer or do anything on the site for another 6 months. (Ugh, fear!)
- 5) **Hang out with local CouchSurfers in your area to build up references.** To find local CouchSurfing events search the CouchSurfing Group (message board) for your city.
- 6) **Search for Couches!** Start at least 2 weeks before you intend to arrive in the city you're Surfing. This

isn't a hard and fast rule, but it makes it easier. Expect to only stay with each host for 2-4 nights so plan accordingly. You can expect about 3 "no" responses for every "yes." So send more than 1 request for each block of nights.

**7) Send unique Couch requests.** Show your potential host that you actually read their profile.

**8) When you stay with a host do something nice for them.** If you can, take them out for dinner or drinks. Or make them lunch or dinner. Anything you can do to show them you're appreciative is great.

**9) Have fun!**

Come on, you know I had to add that. It might be awkward when you first start spending time with strangers, but step outside your comfort zone and have fun. :)

I truly hope CouchSurfing provides you with as many Ridiculously Extraordinary Experiences for you as it has for me.

Thank you again for reading!

Karol Gajda

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