
Kate: Hello, I'm Kate Colin and this is 6 Minute English. Today I'm joined by Rebecca Byrne and we're discussing **couch surfing**. Have you heard of this before Rebecca?

Jackie: Hi Kate, well no....I'm afraid I've never heard of **couch surfing** but let me try to work it out.....A **couch** is another word for a sofa or long soft seat on which more than one person can sit, and **surfing** (when not used in the sporting sense) can mean the act of visiting lots of different places. For example **surfing the web** is when you visit lots of different websites. So, I assume **couch surfing** has something to do with visiting lots of different people's couches or sofas....?

Kate: Good guess work! **Couch surfing** is a relatively new term used to describe an internet-based hospitality service - the practice of either offering your sofa to a stranger to sleep on or staying with someone you've never met before. This accommodation system has become a world wide success in the last two or three years providing people all over the world with a couch or a floor to sleep on absolutely free.

Rebecca: Well, it sounds like a great idea and is certainly a cheap way of finding accommodation in a strange country, but it doesn't sound very luxurious to me! I think I'd rather have a bed in a hotel than somebody's sofabut I can see there must be some benefits....

Kate: And we'll be finding out about them later in the programme, but before we go any further, here's my question for this week. Which city is currently the most popular destination for couch surfing. Is it:

- a) London
- b) New York
- c) Paris

Rebecca: Answers

Kate: We'll check your answer at the end of the programme. But first, let's find out a bit more about how couch surfing works. There are various websites which contain databases of people willing to offer their couch to strangers to sleep on. So if you are looking for somewhere to stay, you simply look up the area where you're going and see if there is anyone there willing to give you a bed or couch and then you contact them.

Rebecca: But why would someone let people come and stay with them – people who they've never even met before?!!

Kate: Well, hopefully we're going to find out. We're going to hear from a journalist called Fleur Britain who was so interested in the system of couch surfing that she decided to use it during a ten week journey across Russia, China, Kazakhstan and Mongolia only staying with people who offered her a couch. In the following extract she uses the word **motives**. What does this mean Rebecca?

Rebecca: Well, a **motive** is a reason for doing something.

Kate: And **worldly views**?

Rebecca: Well, this means the experiences of people who have travelled a lot or had experience of many different places.

Kate: Let's listen. Can you hear the reasons or **motives** why people are willing to offer their houses (or couches) to strangers for free and volunteer to be **hosts**? **Hosts** are what we call people who have guests in their house, for eg. if you came to stay in my house for a night or two, I would be your **host**.

Extract 1

Actually you'll find that lots of hosts have many **motives**, maybe they want to practise their English, maybe they live in a country where it's difficult for them to get a visa, or actually to afford to travel. Sometimes people want their children to experience the **worldly views** of travellers. Some people are just instinctive **hosts** and they just love having people in their house.

Rebecca: She said that people have a range of **motives**. That maybe they want to practise their English, that maybe they want their children to experience the **worldly views** of travellers. Or maybe they just like having people in their houses. She called them '**instinctive hosts**' which means they don't have any other reason for wanting people to stay with them other than just enjoying the experience.

Kate: So we've heard about why people might want to offer their house to strangers, but what are the benefits to the people who are sleeping on the couches – the travellers? We're going to hear the word '**compelling**'. What does this mean?

Rebecca: **Compelling** is used to describe something which is very exciting or interesting and it makes you want to do it.

Kate: And '**inside track**'?

Rebecca: **Inside track** means getting access to something which only certain people have. So if I had **an inside track** on something, I would have a special position or relationship with a person that gives you advantages that other people do not have.

Kate: Let's listen. What unique experiences did she have through couch surfing?

Extract 2

There are so many **compelling** things to the idea of couch surfing in that you get amazing access to the inside story. So we would start off by looking at our guidebooks, you know, instead we got the **inside track**, and were taken to things that weren't in the guidebook, taken to their friend's houses, went to house parties....

Rebecca: She said she was taken to friend's houses and parties. You can really see why you can get the '**inside track**' to a country and how **couch surfing** can help you to meet people to see the real side of a country rather than just being a tourist.

Kate: So would you ever like to try couch surfing?

Rebecca: answers

Kate: And finally to the question I asked you earlier....Which city is currently the most popular for couch surfing?

The answer is in fact Paris with 22,000 surfers visiting the city.

Kate: That's all we have time for. Until next week. Goodbye.