

[Journalist]

Low Cost trips...a different way to travel. We have a lot of different possibilities to spend our holidays in different ways, "looking to save some money" due to the Global Crisis. Travelling becomes more expensive but there are some possibilities to travel in a different way, outside of the "common travel organization and Tour Operators". We talk about it with Maurizio Mangano, from Milano, member of CouchSurfing Organization. Good morning Maurizio.

Maurizio

Good morning, good morning to all of you!

[Journalist]

Worldwide hospitality Exchange, and this is possible using Internet. CouchSurfing: a "Non Profit" Organization, a "Net community" for vacation but NOT only for this. Mangano, which is the Philosophy of the hospitality?

Maurizio

The philosophy of the hospitality? It is "sharing", it is "life Sharing", it is "to give the availability of our time to our guests", it is "to break the cultural differences", it is "Knowledge", it is "Knowledge and to be OPEN MIND" with "unknown" people. These days, mostly in Italy, you can read a lot on the newspapers and in the media, about the "problem" as the [Journalist] call it, to be Open with the unknown people. A lot of people are scared to keep in touch with "the others", with the "unknown". Using CS you can know a lot of people, you can keep in touch with a lot of people, most of them are coming from other countries but also from the same country, during a "week-end trip", for example, or for some "job's trip". In few words is "sharing, cultural Exchange, is Knowledge of different Cultures and different way of life.

[Journalist]

Let's review some details of this organization. How "big" is this Community. You are a Country Ambassador. Can you explain something more?

Maurizio

Well... until now we are more or less 700.000 members in whole world, representing more then 230 countries. There is a supporting/volunteering structure within the organization in CS. We call them "Ambassadors". They are, from the top to the bottom: the Global Ambassadors, in each country there is one or more then one Country Ambassadors, and, in each city, there are one or more then one City Ambassadors. The Role of the Ambassador is, mostly, coordination between the local members. The Ambassador knows almost all the members, for sure the active ones. Obviously this role is played FOR FREE, without any kind of compensation. Also to be a guest you do not need to pay anything.

[Journalist]

The web site is your global "dashboard", but I need to make you a question about the probability to have some "not-perfect Guests". How do you verify the member's reliability and trustworthiness??

Maurizio

Well.. we can affirm, at least for 99,99% experiences are POSITIVE, as a guest or as a host, and almost no problems at all! Obviously, as we use to say, the CS web site is a transposition from the REAL world into the net. That means, same as in the real life there can be some problems, even in the NET there can be, theoretically, some difficult situations. By the way, there are some "features" to prevent this possible issues between guests and hosts. The main features are: The references. Each member has a profile. When you join the CS web site, you have to write something about you, upload some pictures, you can compile some sections there, about your Interests, and so on. Every time, when we are hosted or when we are hosting someone, or when we meet some other members during the meetings, and to become a MEMBER of CS does not mean that you have necessarily TO HOST. There is NO obligation to Host or Exchange hospitability. That means I can host and not be hosted by the same person and vice versa. There is NOT any reciprocity obliged. Let's talk again

about the References. When we Couchsurf (are hosted) or when we host someone, at the end of this sharing time there is the possibility to leave a reference. For example, if I host you, when you go away, you can leave a reference for me. Of course I will not be able to modify your reference. This way, reading the references, like the EBay feedback, I can have a first impression, or a deep information, (it depends of how many references the person has), from my guest or host. So, the first feature is the REFERENCES. Another feature is the "verified level" of the member. There is a form in the web site, where you can write your home address and some more data. After this, the CS organization will send you a normal mail to your address. In this mail there is a CODE. With this code you have to go back in the form, previously compiled, and write it down. In this way, at LEAST, for example, the member Maurizio Mangano who wrote into the form, is living in that street, at least, HE REALLY LIVES there. Another feature is the "vouch". It works in this way: I am not able to give any vouch until I have, at least, 3 vouches from the other members. As soon as I will have 3 Vouches, I can be able to give my "vouch" to the other members. In few words this is a kind of "trustworthiness circle of high reliability", or just.. "circle of trust"

[Journalist]

In few words a "Trustworthy NET". Another question: You have to be Young and adventurous to travel using CS? Can u describe us the "average CouchSurfer profile"?

Maurizio

Well... It is not necessary to be Young and adventurous. As you can see, I am, almost, 50 years old. So I am not anymore that "young". The age average is, more or less 27 years old, the Italian age average is little bit more, 29 years old. Most of them are Students or just graduated with a trolley or rucksack "ready-for trip".

[Journalist]

Do you have also a "international structured organization"?, any "collective meeting"?

Maurizio

Yes. We have some meetings. Obviously, we are 700.000 members all around the world. That's mean that is NOT so easy to have "face to face meetings". We use daily the "groups" in our website for the regular meetings and the discussion exchange. There are also some regular meetings. We call it "collective". The previous one was, some months ago in Thailand, the last one was in Alaska, and there are, also, some other meetings, local meetings or, for us who are speaking from Italy, some European meetings. The last one, in Europe, was in Switzerland from 5 till 7 July. We were more then 150 members. A lot of Global, Country and City Ambassadors, and, also, a LOT of members without any "official role" in the Organization, but they are the REAL HEART and the REAL ENGINE of the CS Community.

[Journalist]

Tks to Maurizio Mangano, Country Ambassador, Italian member of CouchSurfing.com