

Are We There Yet?

by Steve Macone

Thanks to the Internet, vacationing students can travel the world without leaving their rooms.

Whether it's that once-in-a-lifetime visit to see Egypt's pyramids or the annual road trip three states over, summer vacations offer young people grist for the mill of their minds. Even with gas prices up and the economy down, there's a justification for traveling educationally, especially when entrance fees to museums are typically less expensive than theme-park tickets. The sites below allow students who aren't able to get out of town a chance to still "see" what's out there. Come September, it could mean a world of difference.

Travel Channel: Travel Ideas: Museums and Culture

www.travelchannel.com/Travel_Ideas/ch.Museums_and_Culture.artTravelIdeasFmt?vgnextfmt=artTravelIdeasFmt



Students can watch videos about the art scene in Berlin or view snapshots of the culture, architecture, and history of New York City. They also can visit America's national parks (www.travelchannel.com/Travel_Ideas/America's_National_Parks) by watching streaming videos about their history and ecosystems, which include discussions of the grizzly population in Glacier National Park, traditional Alaskan cultures, and more.

History.com: The States

www.history.com/states.do

Children can explore the U.S. state by state with image galleries, historical maps, and featured videos on topics relating to each state. After, they can play Place the State and see how good they are with the tricky geography of our nation.

National Geographic: MapMachine

plasma.nationalgeographic.com/mapmachine

These interactive maps are based on themes such as global-warming effects, the movement of the human species as traced through our genes, and country profiles, complete with videos and music samples.



The Weather Channel Kids

www.theweatherchannelkids.com

Discover what *instability* and *wind shear* mean in the Weather Encyclopedia, then pass through Tornado Alley to learn how they create tornados. Epic Conditions videos show the science behind what makes many spots vacation destinations, such as the melting snow that makes the Lochsa River in Idaho a whitewater-rafting hotspot. The site also offers printable activities to help kids remember how to stay safe in the sun. And, of course, they can figure out what clothes to pack using the Forecast Center.



Discovery Atlas

dsc.discovery.com/convergence/atlas/atlas.html



Discovery Atlas is an inspiring, high-energy survey of people across the world, where students can explore video footage and photo galleries of China, Italy, Brazil, and Australia or click themselves along the Discovery Atlas tour layer on Google Earth. They can play Atlas Quest, where they have to answer questions correctly to travel through these countries. The site also allows students to get a glimpse of people's lives, such as Clarissa, one of three female helicopter pilots in São Paulo, Brazil. The brief interviews touch on unique aspects of the subjects' homelands, such as the traffic and crime that has Clarissa shuttling rich commuters as they take to the air.

Steve Macone is a contributing editor for Cable in the Classroom Magazine.

Know Before You Go

By visiting the right websites, students can make the most out of their summer travel plans. Ayaz Nanji, interactive editorial director for Travel Channel Media, talks about using the Internet for trip preparation.

Is online trip preparation something that students should do more often?

There are amazing interactive tools available online that make planning and researching a trip a more rewarding experience. Take, for example, the Google Earth application. If you know the address of a place you will be visiting, you can zoom in and see exactly what it will look like and the surroundings. That sort of experience can bring to life the abstract idea of travel.

What do online tools offer students?

Interactivity is key, as well as the compelling nature of video and other multimedia. Also, online tools can really help with specific interests. For example, if a student is interested in environmental issues, a number of sites, such as Terrapass (www.terrapass.com/flight/flightcalc.php), now allow you to calculate the carbon impact of your flight.

Are there certain websites or applications that are particularly helpful?

One category that is expanding rapidly is community-created content. Several sites, including the Travel Channel website, now showcase photos, videos, and reviews by real travelers. Often, these provide nuanced portraits of places that counterbalance the expert opinions. A number of sites out there, such as IgoUgo (igougo.com), allow you to read journals and see photos from other travelers.

Any suggestions for children who are not going out of town this summer?

The Olympics this summer in Beijing could be a great chance to check news sites to learn about current events, watch videos, and see maps of China, or to do some research on Chinese culture in their hometowns.

Virtual travel can be incredible, but I'd still encourage them to explore the real world as much as possible, even if that means going to the local park.