

6 dream tours

NOT READY TO TRAVEL YET? PERHAPS THIS IS YOUR YEAR TO BE A VIRTUAL VAGABOND. A HALF-DOZEN OF THE WORLD'S UNFORGETTABLE ATTRACTIONS ARE AS CLOSE AS YOUR COMPUTER SCREEN.

In this coronavirus era, some travelers have understandably chosen to postpone major trips out of an abundance of caution. For them—and maybe for you—it's a perfect time to plan ahead instead, to take a break and check out destinations for possible future journeys. Happily, the Internet is eager to help.

No one claims that screen images are the equal of being present in the flesh, but they're great for inspiration. And you may be surprised how dramatically and intimately an online virtual tour can show you a travel destination you've always dreamed of seeing. That you can take such a trip in your pajamas is just one of those small pandemic pluses we've all learned to find.

Here are a half-dozen virtual tours we recommend for travelers who have temporarily become the armchair kind:

CLIFFS OF MOHER, COUNTY CLARE, IRELAND

This spectacular site is one of the Emerald Isle's most visited tourist attractions—and the most visited natural one. You've seen it if you've caught the movies *The Princess Bride*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* or *Leap Year*. The cliffs span nine miles across Ireland's beautiful west coast, also known as the Wild Atlantic Way, rising as high as 700 feet over the ocean. They've been noted in records as far back as the first century A.D. The virtual tour provides the full Cliffs of Moher experience, offering a glimpse of the shimmering Atlantic as well as the fields back inland from all the most popular vantage points, including O'Brien's Tower, a round stone structure near the midpoint of the cliffs that was built in 1835, and the dome of the Visitor Center (that's "Centre" if you're Irish). Where to watch: cliffsofmoher.ie/virtual-visit-tour/

THE DOGE'S PALACE, VENICE, ITALY

The elected leaders (or doges) of the Venetian republic lived in this Gothic-style castle and ruled there for more than 1,000 years, and it has long been one of Venice's most notable landmarks. Also known as Palazzo Ducale, it has now been a public museum for almost a century. The online tour is just as extensive as one on foot would be (though undoubtedly less exhausting), as you'll begin in the sprawling interior courtyard through the Porta del Frumento and make your way to the Institutional Chambers, the New Prisons of the Palace and the Chamber of the Council of the Ten. Along the way, you'll marvel at the architecture and paintings adorning the walls and ceilings from Tintoretto, Veronese, Tiziano and more. Where to watch: palazzoducale.visitmuve.it/en/virtual-tour/

CARLSBAD CAVERNS NATIONAL PARK, NEW MEXICO, U.S.A.

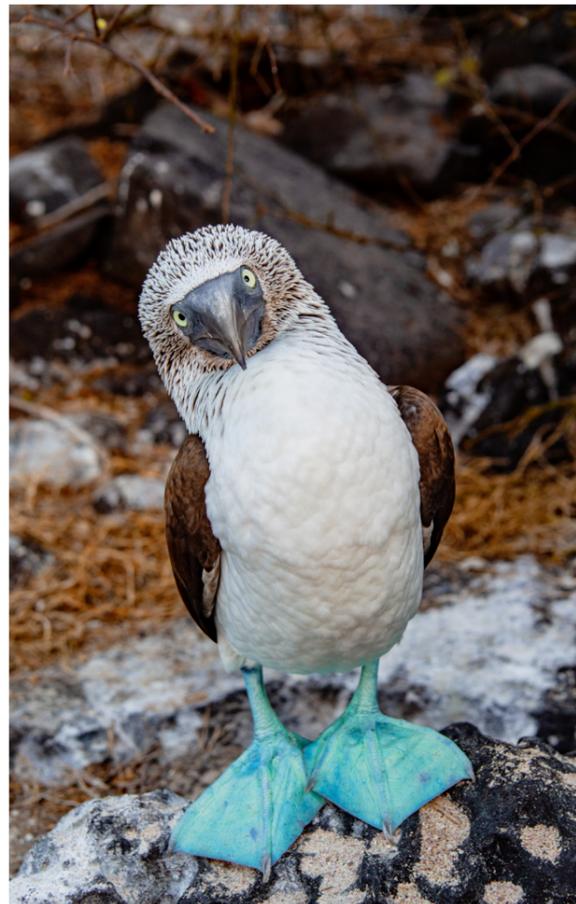
Stalactites hold "tite" to a cave ceiling, while stalagmites are on the ground where you "mite" trip over them. Got them straight now? You'll see these and much more when you virtually visit this national park, located in southeastern New Mexico's Guadalupe Mountains. The park contains more than 100 caves or limestone chambers, including the well-known Carlsbad Cavern, featuring paved walking trails, elevators and lights. The virtual tour takes you into the cavern's Big Room, which is about 4,000 feet wide, and along for the ride with a tour guided by a park ranger. It even lets you soar through the calcite formations as if you were a bat. (Seventeen species of bats call the park home.) Those on foot can't do that. Of course, there are 61 other U.S. National Parks waiting to be virtually toured too, from Hawaii Volcanoes (with an up-close look at the lava tubes in the Kilauea and Mauna Loa active volcanoes shown here) to Yosemite to the Great Smoky Mountains. Where to watch: artsandculture.google.com/project/national-park-service





MUSEUM OF UNDERWATER ART, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

Ever think you'd find a work of art under—or just above—the deep blue sea? This recently opened museum on the famous Great Barrier Reef, three years in the making, seeks to entice divers and snorkelers, draw in sea creatures and inspire ocean conservation. Above sea level sits Ocean Siren, a sculpture of a young native girl that changes color according to the ocean's temperature using data collected by the Davies Reef weather station. Submerged under water are three more exhibits, including the expansive Coral Greenhouse, which has 20 sculptures within it designed to withstand waves. More exhibits are coming in 2021. While taking your virtual swim of MOUA, feel free to wear flippers to make the on-screen experience feel more authentic, and humming that catchy "Under the Sea" tune from *The Little Mermaid* is OK too. Where to watch: moua.com.au



GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS, ECUADOR

Fun fact: Charles Darwin's visit to the Galápagos Islands at age 26 reportedly helped inspired his theory of evolution by natural selection. Who knows what theories you'll discover when you pay an (online) visit to this international treasure of 20 or so islands, located 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador? It's where wildlife and sea creatures, many of them found only here, take center stage, and where human visitors can get up close and personal. Diving, snorkeling, hiking and kayaking are popular activities on these Islands as well. The virtual tour won't allow for any of that, of course, but you'll still get an underwater look at the Islands and an up-close glimpse of these creatures in their natural habitats. Where to watch: google.com/maps/about/behind-the-scenes/streetview/treks/galapagos-islands/



GREAT WALL OF CHINA, HUIAROU DISTRICT, CHINA

One of the seven wonders of the world, this is a fortified structure in the northern part of the country that, with all of its branches, runs more than 13,000 miles. Its original use some 2,000 years ago was as a military defensive system, but now it is China's most popular tourist spot and one recognized the world over. Spectators come to admire its scenic views and magnificent architecture. The most visited section of the Wall is Mutianyu, which is fully restored, but more adventurous folk may prefer the hiking trails of Jinshanling. You don't have to choose if you go the virtual route, as the 360-degree online tour gives you a first-person view of the whole thing. Where to watch: youvisit.com/tour/doian