



Visit Vacation Hot Spots Without Leaving Your Desk

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Seeing a place beats reading about it, anytime.

Whether you'll be traveling this summer or only daydreaming about it while shackled to a desk, sites are popping up on the Web where you can explore destinations without leaving home.

Among the most interesting is TurnHere.com, which produces short, professional videos designed to help travelers and locals alike in exploring cities, neighborhoods and destinations.

A glance at the home page could leave the impression that TurnHere features only short films about San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles, but the site is much deeper.

Clicking the "Locations" link takes you to a page where you'll find videos on places ranging from Albuquerque, N.M., to Woodstock, Vt.

There also are videos about some international destinations, including Reykjavik, Iceland, Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Tokyo.

Larger cities often have multiple videos. There are eight mini-movies about Chicago, including a look at the colorful characters hanging around outside Wrigley Field on game day.

Most videos run less than 5 minutes and can be viewed online or downloaded to a video-capable iPod or other handheld device.

Part of what makes the videos interesting is TurnHere doesn't impose a cookie-cutter formula on its filmmakers. Rather than seeing the same film over and over again where only the location changes, each video is different.

Expect more of these types of sites as the number of people using the Web for travel information continues to grow.

According to the Travel Industry Association of America, 78 percent of wired Americans - about 79 million people - turned to the Internet for travel or destination information last year, up from 65 percent in 2004.

Be Your Own Boss

If you have an entrepreneurial bent but don't know where to start - or maybe you already have a business you're itching to build - stop by StartupNation.com.

It's a bit like MySpace for entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs, who can create individual profiles, post to forums and cultivate business ideas.

"With over half of all businesses being run from home today, entrepreneurs are more isolated from each other than ever," says Rich Sloan, a StartupNation co-founder. "We've addressed that problem by giving entrepreneurs real-time access to a thriving online community of peers, experts, mentors and discussions on issues that confront them."

Other features of the site include podcasts and on-demand seminars ranging from "How to Start and Grow an eBay Business" to "Is Franchising for Me?"

Not Your Father's Boob Tube

The Participatory Culture Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Massachusetts, has set its sights on keeping Big Media from owning the blossoming revolution in Internet television.

"Television is moving online," the foundation says. "Will it be the same narrow, top-down cultural stagnation that we see on traditional television? All the major media and computer companies are clamoring to control video online. If they succeed, it will be a disaster."

Yes, these renegades have an agenda. To accomplish their goal, they have created the free and open-source Democracy Internet platform for watching, sharing and broadcasting video on the Net.

The centerpiece of the platform, the Democracy player, is a desktop application for finding, downloading and watching Internet video. Although it's not finished yet, a recent test release was impressive.

You can get the Democracy player, appropriately enough, at getdemocracy.com.

Keyword: Tech, to read past columns by Doug Stanley.

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