

Virtual Tourism: Jetsetting without the Plane Rides



There are people gifted with excessive amounts of riches that they can afford to go and visit all the exciting destinations in the world. A few select people have jobs which allow them to live in airports figuratively because they have to go on various locations for business purposes. But well not everyone has that luxury.

With the current state of the global recession, luxury and leisurely trips are cut down to a minimum. Companies are cost-cutting on travel expenses. Moreover, jet planes can have strong emissions of carbon which is harmful for the environment. So with all these mean world syndrome symptoms, what will happen to tourism?

Enter virtual tourism. This is one of the perks that can be provided by commercial and free virtual worlds. Virtual tourism, fondly called 3DVT, uses the technology of the New Media, particularly the World Wide Web, to let people experience different parts of the world in the comfort of one's seat. Call it armchair tourism if you want. This is another interesting aspect of virtual worlds which are only being explored recently.



Virtual tourism employs satellite technology in order to render locations anywhere in the world in full three-dimensional glory. It enables people to have a walkthrough of the place only through their personal computer. Google Maps is one of the more popular Web 2.0 applications using this technology. Name any place in the map and virtual tourism just might take you there (with a few exceptions such as the Bermuda Triangle, for instance)

So what types of scenarios and situations have been applying virtual tourism? Foremost of these would be the real estate industry. Because the time of buyers may be crucial for real estate agents, they can give a glimpse of the home through virtual tours. This is more useful especially for buyers looking for an

attractive location for their families to settle in. Virtual tours can be used to show the environment of the place and how accessible it is to major thoroughfares and vital establishments. Some even dress up their virtual tours by putting in music and narration to the presentations.

However, virtual tours are like animations in that the possibilities are endless. Because there is not much consideration for logistics, virtual tours can extend to far-off places such as the moon and the planet Mars. With these applications one can experience how the soil can possibly look in these places. Google Moon was launched during the 36th anniversary of the moon landing of Neil Armstrong and Apollo 11 while the data from Mars were retrieved from the NASA missions of the Mars Global Surveyor and 2001 Mars Odyssey.

There are more Google applications associated with virtual tourism: Google Ride Finder, Google Transit, Google My Maps, Google Street View and Google Latitude. Different purposes altogether, yes, but they strengthen the potential of virtual technologies and their integration with real life.



This virtual aspect is a bit different from usual virtual worlds which create its own community for real-life people to come in and interact. Virtual tourism uses the technology of virtual worlds for real-life applications. It can give the impression that the real world can be turned into a virtual world-like environment which can be explored in many perspectives – to even as close as street-level eye views.

Although it will never be able to take the place of actual travel, virtual tourism is an excellent alternative option to consider especially if travel costs are an issue.

By **Aldric Chang**

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