

Take a vacation at your desk with a destination Webcam

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NEW YORK (AP) -- Ride the waves. Race down the slopes. Visit Times Square. Take a virtual vacation that requires no money, no vacation days, and no planning.

Webcams, short for web cameras, are capturing more than baby pandas at the zoo.

More than a million are offering images in real-time across the Internet, ranging from the not-so-interesting (a pug sleeping on a couch) to destinations like Iceland. Some are live streaming video 24-7, while others refresh the image every few seconds or longer.

Still, regardless of how "live" these images are, webcams are showing the world to the world, says Brian Curry, founder and CEO of [EarthCam](http://www.earthcam.com), a leader in providing webcam content, technology and software.

Here are some webcams worth checking out. Note that some of these Web sites may prompt you to download software before you can view them; many are best viewed at certain times of day, and some can be enlarged for better viewing.



This undated photo released by EarthCam shows the front page of Boston Cam, which links to a live picture from the New England Aquarium's Ocean Tank.



This undated photo released by EarthCam shows a detail from the front page of Hawaii Cams, which links to a live view of the beach.

HAWAII WAVES

<http://www.mauiwindcam.com/streaming/> -- Catch the waves on the reef in the North Shore of Maui. Two webcams capture the Uppers Kanaha and Camp One, famous windsurfing spots. Professional windsurfers launch right in front of the camera and train in the winter months before starting the Professional Windsurfers Association tour. (Note: The camera runs from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. HST but replays the previous 12 hours during dark hours).

TIMES SQUARE

<http://www.earthcam.com/usa/newyork/timesquare/> -- One of the best webcams for people who are burning the midnight oil. The cameras show live streaming video of Times Square and the illuminated signs means the view is great 24-7. The main image captures the "Crossroads of the World" at 46th Street and Broadway and allows users to zoom in or zoom out. EarthCam has a total of 20 cameras in Times Square, including four inside the Hawaiian Tropic Zone Restaurant, Bar & Lounge.

AFRICAN SAFARI

<http://www9.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/wildcamafrika/> -- Go on a virtual safari with live streaming video of the Mashatu Game Reserve in Bostwana, Africa. Watch lions, tigers, bears, deer and other animals feed at a watering hole. The best viewing times are 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. EST or 12 a.m. to 4 a.m. EST, according to the site. (Note: You have to sit through a commercial -- or two -- before the live video).

INSIDE AN AQUARIUM

<http://www.earthcam.com/oceantank.php> -- One of EarthCam's top 25 webcams. Watch more than 150 species of sea life, including sharks, eels and turtles, in the circular, 4-story Giant Ocean Tank at the New England Aquarium in Boston. Check <http://www.neaq.org> for feeding times. Double click on the image to make it full size to set up a virtual aquarium at your desk. Note: The lights in the exhibit are turned off at night, so make sure you take this vacation during the day.

OLD FAITHFUL

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/yell/oldfaithfulcam.htm> -- Watch an eruption of the Old Faithful Geyser in Yellowstone National Park. The geyser erupts more frequently than any of the other big geysers, according to the National Park Service, with an average interval between eruptions of around 91 minutes. The geyser shoots as much as 8,400 gallons (31,800 liters) of boiling water into the air at heights that can reach about 185 feet (56.4 meters). (Note: The image updates every 30 seconds, so you may have to watch for awhile to see the eruption).



This undated photo released by EarthCam shows a detail from the front page of Snowman Cam, which links to a live picture of a snowman.

NIAGARA FALLS

<http://www.earthcam.com/canada/niagarafalls/> -- The camera is on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. The image updates once every two to three seconds. (Note: The camera has an automatic windshield wiper, which can be distracting).

FOR SKIERS

<http://www.skisugar.com/sugarlive/smrbase.phtml> -- Race down the slopes at Sugar Mountain Resort in North Carolina. The live streaming video shows skiers at the base of the Lower Flying Mile beginner slope. For the summit webcam, check out <http://www.skisugar.com/sugarlive/index-summit.phtml> which shows the Tom Terrific expert level slope. Double click to make them full size for a real virtual skiing experience. (Note: Skiing stops at 10 p.m. and lights are turned off.) Many other ski resorts have webcams, so check out the Web site for your favorite slope.

FOR DIVERS

<http://www.breathebonaire.com/> -- Go scuba diving in Bonaire National Marine Park in the Netherlands Antilles without donning a wet suit. The megapixel camera is located 49 feet (15 meters) below the drop off at the dive site and offers a view of the coral reef. Control how fast the image updates by selecting the refresh rate in the lefthand corner of the screen. You can make it as fast as every two seconds.

THE DEER AND THE SNOWMAN

<http://www.earthcam.com/usa/michigan/gaylord/snowman/> -- For a snowy scene, here's a live streaming video of a snowman (not made of snow), a duck and a thermometer showing the temperature in Gaylord, Michigan, a golfing and snowmobile destination. Ken and Sheryl Borton's display is near their home in Wilderness Valley and has become a tourist destination for snowmobile enthusiasts. During daylight hours, you may not see much action on the webcam. But in the evening, you may spot deer in the woods coming to feed.