

## Inform and entertain the kids with these 7 virtual trips

By Kari Bodnarchuk  
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**Y**our kids' circle of travel may be restricted to your neighborhood, but their minds can still travel the world — and beyond. As you juggle working from home and home-schooling, you may discover there's a fine line between keeping children entertained and providing them with good educational tools — especially for families who minimize screen time, like we do. Many museums, zoos, travel companies, and other institutions have stepped up their online offerings so they can provide engaging fresh content that's both entertaining and informative. Here are a few of our top picks.

### A PEEK INTO ZOO LIFE

Zookeepers still need to care for their resident animals, and some post regular segments about the world's coolest creatures so your children can learn about them from home. At Nebraska's Lincoln Children's Zoo, keepers now post short videos — anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes long — during which they interact

**VIRTUAL, Page N14**

with and care for animals and chat about what makes these precious creatures unique.

Children can see animals up close and learn fun facts about them, such as how much an American alligator grows in a year (one foot), what it takes to train a white-cheeked gibbon (Gerber puffs and Craisins), how many hours giraffes spend eating each day (20!), and which cute animals have rotated rear ankles that help them climb in the arboreal realm (clouded leopards). The Keeper Corner segments appear at 4 p.m. on the zoo's Facebook page and on its website soon after (under the Animals tab on [www.lincolnzoo.org](http://www.lincolnzoo.org)). Each program includes a related activity sheet that kids can download from the website.

Similarly, Chicago's Brookfield Zoo hosts "Bringing The Zoo To You" live chats on its Facebook page every weekday at noon EST. See snakes up close and find out how and why they camouflage themselves, and "meet" the zoo's new African lions, Brutus and Titus, who arrived

in March. Upcoming chats will feature African painted dog puppies, Leo the red panda, Quilbert the prehensile-tailed porcupine, and Charger the California sea lion. Send in your questions and animal care staff will answer them during the recorded programs. The zoo plans to produce weekday live chats until it reopens to the public. Catch any missed segments on the zoo's Facebook page or YouTube channel. And trust me, watching and learning about animals never gets old (at any age).

### TURN YOUR CURIOSITY TOWARD CHICAGO

Emily Graslie brings her infectious sense of fun and lively reporting to Chicago's Field Museum, where she serves as the museum's Chief Curiosity Correspondent, interviewing scientists and experts on everything from bugs to mushrooms. Graslie produces *The Brain Scoop*, a series of fun and educational videos that takes viewers behind the scenes at the Field Museum and showcases the museum's collections, experts, and ongoing research efforts.

Check out the short video segments all about eggs, snakes, spiders, glow rocks, worms, whales, and even "The Joy of Cooking (with Bugs!)." For those who can stomach higher ratings on the "grossometer" scale, watch fascinating segments that feature alligator and skunk dissections (using already-dead critters donated to the museum).

Graslie has created more than 200 educational videos about natural science (find them on YouTube or the museum's website, [www.fieldmuseum.org/blog/the-brain-scoop](http://www.fieldmuseum.org/blog/the-brain-scoop)), and although she can't film new content inside the museum right now, she's working on a new video about the joys of backyard birding — using content from cameras strategically mounted around her yard — to be released soon (keep an eye out on the museum's website).

"The great thing about the Brain Scoop is that it encourages viewers to find curious wonder all around them, no matter where they might be in the world — and I hope that message is something that can resonate with people staying at home today, too," says Graslie.

### VIRTUAL ADVENTURES WITH A TRAVEL PRO

Find out why you can't swim in hot springs, how many bears live in Yellowstone National



Park, and what makes a geyser blow during the first of numerous online adventures produced by Kasey Austin, president of Montana-based tour operator Austin Adventures. The company's new Virtual Adventures for Kids series kicked off recently with a focus on Yellowstone National Park, featuring videos of Old Faithful and Austin's lively descriptions of the park's landscape and wildlife, and explanations of the geological forces at work that cause geysers to erupt. More than 1,000 kids (and a few curious parents) tuned in to the show, which is geared to ages 6 to 12.

Austin, who has a degree in elementary education and has worked in the travel industry for more than 20 years, will lead educational virtual adventures to Costa Rica April 16 and Peru April 30, with a segment on "Life Is Good: The Power of Positivity" on April 23, which focuses on embracing optimism through adventure travel while learning about Canada, Montana, Utah, and Costa Rica. These free programs run 30 to 60 minutes on Thursdays at 2 p.m. (with a second weekly program possibly coming soon); catch missed adventures and check for future additions on the company's website, [www.austinadventures.com](http://www.austinadventures.com); register online.

#### **TAKE A TOUR OF A MIGHTY BATTLESHIP**

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, and staff at the Battleship Missouri Memorial in Oahu offer free virtual tours of this historic ship for families and students in grade 5 and above. These engaging personalized tours run 30 to 40 minutes anytime between 1 p.m. and 10 p.m. EDT (that's 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Hawaii Standard Time).

Neil Yamamoto, a former middle school teacher and now the memorial's Education Outreach Coordinator, and his staff lead interactive tours aboard the ship (you can ask questions anytime) using Zoom or Skype and cameras that provide 360-degree views of different areas of the ship. Your guide will navigate the virtual tour — bringing up different viewpoints and zooming in and out along the way — while telling you about the world's last operational battleship and its role in history.

See the ship's impressive guns with their 67-foot-long barrels, view the historic spot where the Japanese surrendered, and hear fascinating tales about the ship's construction — such as why her deck is made with 3-inch-thick non-sparking teak wood. Then go inside the battleship and explore the Combat Engagement Center or other spaces while your guide provides interesting facts in real-time. You'll need a free Skype or

Zoom account, and a computer with reliable Internet access, a Web-enabled camera, and speakers. (Contact Neil at [neily@ussmissouri.org](mailto:neily@ussmissouri.org) to set up a tour.)

#### **ENGAGE WITH SCIENTISTS**

Seattle's Pacific Science Center (known as PacSci) has created new online educational content to keep inquisitive minds active and engaged, wherever you live. PacSci's new Curiosity at Home online resource ([www.pacificsciencecenter.org](http://www.pacificsciencecenter.org)) includes streaming live science shows, hands-on STEM activities, tutorials, interviews with scientists, and a chance to connect with experts in real-time and ask questions.

Since it launched several weeks ago, the center has produced fun scientist-led videos on combustion, sound, and "super cold things"; projects that let you combine your math and science skills to make lava lamps, rain clouds, and electric circuits, and to create music with wine glasses (parents may appreciate the cleanup process, too). Also watch a demonstration on how lungs work and then make your own model lung to see how your diaphragm functions.

Not all of the content on the Curiosity at Home resource page is new — like the DIY projects that teach you how to create a milk carton boat, slime, fizzy sherbet, mini lightsabers, and fake snow — but they never get old.

#### **EXPLORE OUTER SPACE AT HOME**

Finally, let your young adventurer's mind wander into space. Using Stellarium, an open-source planetarium software that shows realistic sky views in 3-D, kids can explore their own night skies. Stellarium ([stellarium.org](http://stellarium.org)) shows celestial bodies overhead in real-time, based on your location and the date and time, so your budding astronomer can identify planets, constellations, and thousands of other interstellar objects.

The software, which works on your computer or using an Android or Apple phone (small fee for the app), has a catalog of more than 600,000 stars, 80,000 deep-sky objects, constellations for more than 40 countries, images of nebulae, realistic Milky Way views, and realistic sunrise and sunset views.

Hopefully, these activities will help keep life in perspective during this tricky time and give your young adventurer some peace of mind.

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JOHN WEINSTEIN/THE FIELD MUSEUM

**Dr. Janet Voight (center), a curator at Chicago's Field Museum, points out a feature on an octopus during the recording of an episode of "The Brain Scoop."**



**Above: Seattle's Pacific Science Center has created a new Curiosity at Home online resource for kids that includes streaming live science shows, hands-on STEM activities, and a chance to ask questions of experts in real-time. Right: Chicago's Brookfield Zoo hosts "Bringing The Zoo To You" live chats on its Facebook page every weekday at noon.**

