

Printed from

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Around the world in 80 minutes, virtually

24 May 2009, 0140 hrs IST, Divya A, TNN

Twelve-year-old Ashutosh Sinha's holiday homework involved making a PowerPoint slideshow about his impressions of the monuments he planned to visit over the summer. But unlike previous years, Asutosh isn't going anywhere this year. A pay cut has forced his father, an IT executive, to shelve travel plans. When Ashutosh's mom shared this problem with the schoolteacher, she came up with a simple suggestion: A virtual tour.

This pocket-friendly way of globe-trotting is finding favour with those who don't want to restrict their horizons just because of a funds crunch. In the pre-recession era, virtual travel was pitched as a way of getting a feel of a place before one actually visited but now, it's become an alternative to actual travel, says diehard virtual tourist Sandeep Saxena, 18, who recently logged on for a virtual tour of New York's famous Times Square.

Others bitten by the travel bug in these cash-strapped times are getting creative too. Many have joined online network couchsurfing.org which helps backpackers across the world to find free accommodation and meals on a swapping basis. With over 17,000 members across the world, the network helped Mumbai-based media professional Sahil Rastogi, 37, to find a place to stay during his recent holiday in Greece. He says he got to know about this couch surfing network through a friend. "Since I travel abroad quite often, I immediately registered. It's a great way to take in local culture and stretch your budget."

The concept of couch surfing has been around for a couple of years now but the slowdown has given it a boost. In 2006, there were barely 760 Indian members registered with the website. Today, Mumbai has the highest number of Indian members at 3,661 while Delhi has 2,500 registered couch surfers. Adrienne Mekachera, who lives in France, has been the guest of fellow couch surfer Rohit Suri at his home in Delhi's Vasant Kunj for the past week. "Now whenever I go to France, I will have a place to stay. My family and I are also enjoying Adrienne's stay here," says Suri.

For those trawling the web for discounted offers, there are new options like websites that allow travellers to invite bids from hotels. Through an open tender, one can find a meeting venue, conference hall, wedding hall or a hotel room in major cities in India. The requirements are instantly dispatched to the website's partner hotels which present a range of venues and hospitality proposals tailored to the customer's specific needs.

"Most hotels don't like to give throwaway discounts on their own as this impacts the brand. So, third-party websites help strike a deal," says Francis Dean, marketing manager with a five-star hotel chain.

Customers can get as much as 50% discount from the published rates. "As our website is a recessionary product, it helps people get better value for their money," says Zal Dastur, head of sales and marketing at venuemirror.com. For clients, this reduces time spent and cost incurred on finding and booking a venue or room. For the hotels, it's a good way of finding customers in these difficult times.

Powered by Indiatimes

[About Us](#) | [Advertise with Us](#) | [Careers @ TIL](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Sitemap](#)Copyright © 2009 Bennett Coleman & Co. Ltd. All rights reserved. For reprint rights: [Times Syndication Service](#)

This site is best viewed with Internet Explorer 6.0 or higher; Firefox 2.0 or higher at a minimum screen resolution of 1024x768