

# Virtual Space is the Place

## A Ticket Out of This World Is Just a Click Away

Do you ever get tired of all the post-election post-morteming coming hard on the heels of all that pre-election political mudslinging? Do you ever just want to get away from all of the pundits pontificating, the polls prognosticating, away from the Google bombs, the YouTube videos and the remnants of all that election-themed mail and email that flooded through your portals in recent weeks and months?

Well, you're in luck. It happens that a free ticket out of this world is just a click away. Thanks to the folks over at the [Google Mars project](#), you can be nestled deep within the majestic Mariner Valley -- a canyon that makes the Grand Canyon look like a line in the sand -- in just a matter of minutes. And if outer space doesn't cut it for you, perhaps a brisk hike to the top of the Matterhorn, courtesy of [Arounder.com](#), is just what you need to clear your head a bit.

Either way, you'll be sure to be in good company while on your tour. As of August 2006, just over half of American adult internet users (51%) have taken virtual tours of another location online, up from 45% in a previous Pew Internet & American Life Project survey in November 2004. That translates to about 72 million people who have taken advantage of the internet to explore other areas, a 33% increase over 2004 when an estimated 54 million did so. On a typical day, more than five million people are taking virtual tours in cyberspace, up from roughly two million in 2004.

These findings come from a nationwide telephone survey of 2,928 adults by the Pew Internet & American Life Project in August 2006. The portion of the survey that covered virtual tours was administered to 1,018 internet users. The margin of error on the internet sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Virtual tours allow people to view an environment without having to physically travel to their location of interest. Through virtual tours, people can get information and experience which may not otherwise be available to them, preview a location before an actual visit, and make more informed plans and selections. And most virtual venues are far from exotic; virtual tours often fulfill practical, everyday queries about a potential destination. With the quality and accessibility of virtual tours improving and broadband penetration rising, people are increasingly turning to the internet to get a feel for such areas of personal interest as colleges and universities, tourist and vacation locales, historical sites, museums, real estate, and hotels.

For example, instead of setting up an on-site visit with an agent, a potential home buyer can now do some of the legwork on her own time. Sitting in front of a computer while clicking and dragging the mouse, she can take in 360-degree views of houses and inspect rooms from corner to corner and floor to ceiling, with descriptive text or audio accompanying her along the way. Without leaving her room, she now spends far less time viewing far more choices.

As in 2004, certain groups of internet users are more likely to have taken virtual tours: those ages 30-49, college graduates, those with higher household income, those living in non-rural areas, those with more online experience, and those with broadband access.

For example, 57% of people in the 30-49 age bracket have taken virtual tours, compared with 47% of those ages 18-29 and 29% of those ages 65 and older. Sixty-one percent of college graduates have taken virtual tours, compared with 41% of high school graduates. Those with household income of \$50,000 or higher are also more likely to have ventured somewhere online than those with lower household income (64% vs. 41%).

Virtual tour takers		
Demographic group	% who have taken virtual tours	
	2004	2006
Men	45%	49%
Women	46%	54%
Whites	47%	54%
Blacks	42%	50%
Hispanics	43%	38%
Age 18-29	41%	47%
Age 30-49	51%	57%
Age 50-64	47%	55%
Age 65+	33%	29%
Less than high school	35%	38%
High school graduate	37%	41%
Some college	41%	53%
College graduate or more	58%	61%
Live in households earning less than \$30,000	32%	35%
\$30,000-\$49,999	48%	47%
\$50,000-\$74,999	45%	60%
\$75,000 or more	62%	67%
Rural	42%	38%
Suburban	46%	54%
Urban	51%	53%
Less than 2 years of online experience	6%	26%
2-3 years of online experience	25%	28%
4-5 years of online experience	44%	42%
6+ years of online experience	55%	60%
Dial-up connection at home	33%	41%
Broadband connection at home	65%	62%
Parent with child under 18 living at home	51%	58%
Non-parent	42%	47%

Source: *Pew Internet & American Life Project November 2004 survey (N=537 internet users); August 2006 survey (N=1,018 internet users).*  
 Margin of error is  $\pm 4\%$  for internet users in the 2004 survey and  $\pm 3\%$  for internet users in the 2006 survey.

Unsurprisingly, broadband users and those with more online experience still lead the way when it comes to virtual tour taking. Sixty-two percent of home broadband users are virtual tour takers, compared with 41% of home dial-up users. Some 60% of internet users with six or more years of online experience have taken virtual tours, while only 28% of those with two to three years of online experience have done so.

And while rural internet users might be expected to utilize some of these exploratory tools more, they are, in fact, less likely to be virtual tour takers--38% have taken virtual tours online, compared with 54% of suburban users and 53% of urban users. In addition, internet users who are parents of children under 18 at home are more likely to have taken virtual tours than those who have no children under 18 (58% vs. 47%).