

Brinkwire

Why everyone is watching livestreams of normal life amid social distancing

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Coronavirus lockdowns have knocked the idea of normal right out of people's lives. No longer can we meet friends at a sunny park for a long lunch. Remember the joy of watching a new movie in a theater or going out with friends on a Friday night?

There's a lot we can't do, at least for the next few weeks as nations across the world pull out all the stops to stymie further proliferation of this pandemic. The uncertainty of it all — paired with the cabin fever that inevitably begins to creep in after a couple of days of social distancing — has imbued many people with a sense of grief and anxiety. And a lot of them have found comfort in an unusual place: Boring old normalcy.

In an attempt to cope, people have turned to watching livestream videos of daily life from locations that have returned to normal, like Japan, or even of animals sleeping or frolicking at the zoo.

"Has anyone else been tuning into webcams that passively livestream places where life is more or less still going on normally? For example, I found it soothing to keep open a window to a random Tokyo plaza today. Might even find a way to project this on a wall. #Quarantine," wrote Annie Lin on Twitter.

In addition to fixed webcam feeds, lengthy livestreams of local YouTubers walking around in their city have been gaining traction, too. Rion Ishida, a Japan-based travel and food YouTuber, has been actively hosting livestreams up to 4 hours long of himself strolling through Osaka's streets, which are still teeming with crowds, as he chats with the locals and eats at restaurants.

Ishida, who has studied psychology in the United States, however, didn't expect his videos to help people through the coronavirus crisis.

"I hope my video can be a mental health aid for someone, especially those who cannot walk outside or could not travel ... to Japan due to COVID-19," he told Digital Trends. "There are many people who cannot go outside right now, so I wish that people could feel they are walking outside with me and can have a little entertainment with me through my livestream. I cannot bring super-accurate info like news channels, so, at least, I want to bring them positive vibes and the fact that how Japan streets look like right now."

Meanwhile, Twitch's Just Chatting channel, which spotlights streams where hosts casually chat with their viewers while performing another activity, has soared to the top of the most-viewed charts, leapfrogging games like Fortnite and Minecraft. Finish-based gamer AndyPryor's livestream of going on a grocery run amassed over 25 million views at the time of this writing.

It's not simply videos of the outside world that are proving popular. Live cam feeds of zoo animals have offered solace to people struggling with mental health issues as well. A few, like the Cincinnati Zoo, have even introduced special online tours of their fauna.

Dr. Margie Housley, an English post-doc graduate at the University of Notre Dame who had been tuning into these feeds long before coronavirus hit the world, was one of the firsts to bring them to the public's attention. Her Twitter thread listing a number of animal live cams quickly went viral, accumulating nearly 30,000 likes.

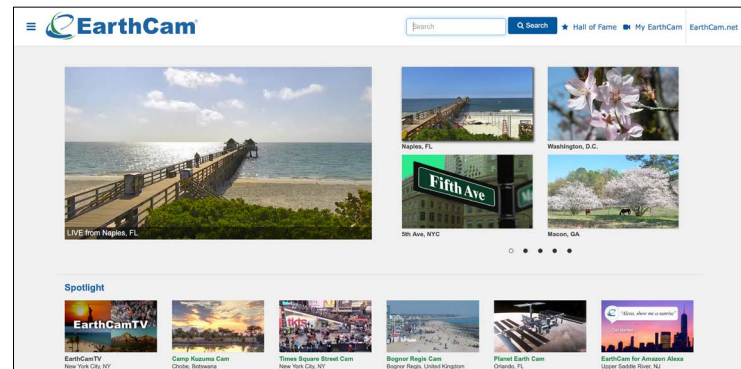
"They're always in the back of my head as a soothing thing to watch when sick or anxious, so when quarantine/isolation hit, I thought others might feel the same way. Even though I'm accustomed to staying home and often prefer it, the feeling that I can't leave home makes me really antsy, so these sorts of things are a nice break," she told Digital Trends.

The numbers reflect these behaviors. Websites and platforms that host these feeds have sustained exponentially high traffic over the last couple of days. The Cincinnati Zoo said its Facebook page gained 750,000 new followers and its engagement is up by 212% since its Home Safari series started.

[EarthCam](#), one of the largest hosts of public camera feeds from all over the world, said it's now hosting 65 times more views than it would normally this time of year.

"We are happy to be that pure live view that calms, excites, and helps people feel better by discovering what's really out there. [EarthCam](#) was built as a way to transport people to interesting and unique locations around the world that may be difficult or impossible to experience in person. Now, more than ever, it is important for us to explore our planet and connect with each other ... virtually," [EarthCam](#) CEO and founder Brian Cury said in a statement to Digital Trends.

What's more, internet searches for these live views have surged manifold. Topics like "Cincinnati Zoo live cam" are now labeled as "breakout" on Google Trends, which essentially suggests that the search term grew by more than 5,000% period over period since mid-March.



Being optimistic in such fearful times can be challenging. These live channels have offered people a glimmer of hope: They've reminded their viewers that the outside world is still there and they too will soon be able to return to their routines. No one can quite tell when this will all end, but it's comforting to watch goofy pandas go on about their business, oblivious to the grave happenings outside their habitats.