

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

My favorite travel guide

Every day, I marvel at the abundance of fascinating material available to anyone with a computer.

On Tuesday, I sang the praises of Google Earth and Street View, a free program that allows people to tour countries all over the globe.

Google Earth provides seamless color satellite imagery of the entire planet, and Street View shows ground-level images along myriad city streets and country roads (so far, more than 5 million miles).

There's another fascinating way to tour far away places from the comfort of home, thanks to intrepid Dutch traveler Kees Colijn and YouTube.

Colijn records hour-long walks through dozens of cities worldwide, including places Street View doesn't go, such as India and China, using a video camera at shoulder height. He then posts the videos to YouTube (keezi walks).

It's just as if you're walking through the city yourself, only you can do it from your study or living room, any time of night or day.



Kees Colijn

I find it very relaxing.

Think Pottstown has pot-holed streets? Try Kathmandu in Nepal, where most streets look like construction sites, with rubble everywhere. The



Commentary by
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inhabitants don't seem to notice (or slow down on their motorbikes).

You need to walk through Calcutta or New Delhi to truly appreciate the term, "teeming masses." Pedestrians, cars, dogs, rickshaws, pedicabs, and construction vehicles casually share the same narrow streets. I'm sure Indian vehicles have brakes, but drivers overwhelmingly prefer to use their horns instead. I wonder that no one is run over (perhaps it's been edited from the video).

Indian cities are strewn with trash; Tokyo is squeaky clean. You can walk for blocks through Singapore without spotting a single discarded candy wrapper or plastic bag.

European cities — Paris, Berlin, Kiev — tolerate graffiti artists. I wouldn't try it in Shanghai.

It's interesting to find English signs worldwide, even in places you wouldn't expect them, like Hanoi, where the Vietnamese still wear conical hats, and motorbikes outnumber cars by 100 to 1.

The most common street tree in the world? Clearly, the plane.

Programs like Street View and keezi walks make it easy to realize the world doesn't start and end in America.

There are billions of us, all sharing the same fragile planet.



A package-laden cyclist in Wuhan, China



Walking through Calcutta (Kolkata), India.