

The New York Times

EarthCam Featured in "New York City" Virtual Weekend. Sunday September 2, 2007

TRAVELING is fun, except for the traveling part. If you live in Alaska or North Dakota or somewhere else where dashing to New York for the weekend seems a bit extravagant in these days of six-hour runway waits, it's time to bring the city to you. (And not just in the form of presidential candidates like Mr. Giuliani and Ms. Clinton.) We're talking about a weekend in a virtual New York City, a k a your own home.

For the sake of argument, let's say you live in a suburban house, own a car, belong to Netflix and have the disposable income to pay \$4 for a bagel. Adjust as necessary.

THE MENU

Friday dinner: Consider all the great New York dishes you could whip up at home — something from Danny Meyer and Michael Romano's "Union Square Cafe Cookbook," a Peter Luger-quality porterhouse, a big fat hot pastrami on rye. But just consider it, because cooking is out of the question. Order in Chinese.

Saturday breakfast: Order H & H bagels in advance via Federal Express from www.hhbagels.com. They're pricey — two dozen for \$59.95, delivery included, but they arrive in a state approximating fresh. (Sticker shock is part of the experience, anyway; they cost \$1.10 each in New York.) Optional: Smoked salmon from Zabar's: \$42 a pound, plus shipping.

Saturday lunch: Find the nearest Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs, which started in Coney Island but is now in 19 states. Eat a "bigger than the bun" dog, or go for Joey Chestnut's record of 66 wieners in 12 minutes.

Saturday dinner: Order in pizza. Eat. When just scraps are left, release live cockroaches into the pizza box. (Cockroaches are available at www.wardsci.com; 10 for \$19.95 or 50 for \$79.99.)

Sunday brunch: Laze around the apartment and think about going to the gym, until you're really, really hungry. Then head to your favorite pancake or omelet spot. Instead of walking right in, wait outside for at least 45 minutes, simulating the typical brunch wait in Manhattan.

ACTIVITIES

Check which weekends the Yankees and Mets are in town in September (Kansas City, Boston and Baltimore for the Yankees; Florida and Atlanta for the Mets); get tickets if you can. If not, try a classic New York City street game like stickball. The rules are at www.streetplay.com.

If you're more cultured, scrutinize listings for Broadway road shows, or theater with New York themes (see westsidestory.com for coming dates in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Atlanta, among others). Or, just load up on DVDs of films and television series that ooze New York mood.

The Times critic A. O. Scott suggests (among others): "The Squid and the Whale" (2005), "Saturday Night Fever" (1977), "The Sweet Smell of Success" (1957) and "Raising Victor Vargas" (2002); Manohla Dargis chimes in with "Taxi Driver" (1976), "The Panic in Needle Park" (1971), "The Apartment" (1960) and "Crooklyn" (1994).

In addition, entire seasons of "Seinfeld," "The Jeffersons," "The Honeymooners" and more are available on Netflix.

In between, check out Webcams of what's actually going on in New York. Earthcam.com includes 11 angles of Times Square and those zany Central Park Zoo penguins. And tune in (on your computer) to New York radio streamed over the Internet. Everything from the NPR affiliate WNYC to New York's leading Spanish-language station, La Mega (WSKQ-FM) is available.

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CREATING THE CLIMATE

The real key to your weekend is going to be the little intangibles that make New York New York, and everywhere else merely everywhere else. (Those cockroaches were a great start.)

First, with private parking spaces selling for six figures in Manhattan, move your car out of the garage or driveway and onto the street. What time would you usually get up on Saturday? Take that hour (say, 9 a.m.), subtract two hours and five minutes and set your alarm. At 6:55 a.m., jolt awake, run outside in scandalously ratty or revealing clothing, and move your car to the other side of the street to simulate compliance with alternate-side-of-the-street parking rules. If it's not moved by 7 a.m. sharp, donate \$45 to your favorite "Victims of NYC Traffic Police" charity.

Then, there's your place. It's too big. New York is all about being cramped. So rope off half the house (maybe with yellow barricade tape) and, if you have children, force them to share a room. Optional: Using cellphones or walky-talkies, rig up a live feed from your neighbor's house into yours. This should simulate the thin walls of a typical Manhattan apartment.

A weekend in virtual New York can be exhausting, so by the time Sunday night rolls around, you're ready to call it quits. No such luck. Call your local fire department and see if they're willing to break out the hook and ladder and have it go careering past your bedroom window, sirens blaring, horns honking — 4:30 Monday morning sounds just about right.