

Where in the World? (A review of GeoGuessr, 2/2001)

Where in the world? (No, not Carmen Sandiego!)

During the pandemic, I've seen various posts about pastimes and hobbies that you've enjoyed during extended at-home time – some new, some ongoing, and some rekindled. I'll share one that I've only recently found, but apparently that has been around a while. It has allowed me to vicariously travel to a lot of countries the last few months, without leaving the comfort and safety of the living room.

What is "it"? It's an educational game, online, that can be played as solitaire or as a competition with others. It's like a logic puzzle in that you have to do a lot of observations and then use both deductive and inductive reasoning to correctly identify the locations. It's like a jigsaw puzzle in that you have put a lot of pieces together to come to the right conclusion.

It's called GeoGuessr, available at <https://www.geoguessr.com/classic>. There's a free version (which is what I've played), as well as a fairly inexpensive paid version, which has more features.

There are no hard-and-fast rules, particularly if you're playing as solitaire, though "purists" tend to have a collection of strict conventions, particularly when playing competitively. But by being able to make up some of your own "rules", you can get out of it what you want.

How does it work? In the free version, there are basically three types of games.

First, there's a game where an image (taken from Google StreetView or Photospheres) comes up, and you have to figure out where you are. You can move around – just like in Google StreetView or Photospheres – and, using clues that you see, identify the exact location where you started. You place a pointer on the map, and then GeoGuessr tells you how close your guess is to starting point. It awards points for proximity – and keeps a running total of all your points. In this particular game, you can choose the starting country, or you can choose a variety of other map types. (There's even one where it starts at a McDonalds, somewhere in the world, and you have to figure it out.) In the free version, you can play 5 of these maps each day. (In GeoGuessr jargon, 5 individual, related maps = 1 set, so technically, you get one free set each day. If you don't complete them all on the same day, you can still access and play them later.)

Similar to that game, another free game is called the Daily Challenge, where you don't start off by knowing the country, and you only have three minutes to figure out exactly where you are. Again, points are awarded for proximity. This one is a lot more difficult, as there's no time for much research. These also come in sets of five maps, one set each day.

The last main type of free games is the Country Streak. Unlike the others, it's not necessary to identify the exact location; however, you do have to identify the country from the clues you find. You CAN choose to play a custom variation where you identify the exact location; however, the only thing scored is the country. In the free version, you can play as many of these each day as you want, as long as you don't break the streak. (And you can carry over a streak from one day to the next, to the next....)

In all of these maps, some are fairly easy (like Egyptian pyramids!), but some are quite challenging (like a valley under some unidentified railroad bridge in the middle of Switzerland). Purists advise not using external reference material; however, if you're trying to learn from the experience instead of competing or just guessing, you can use whatever resources you want.

There are a lot of interesting sights along the way, from beautiful scenery to creative artwork to unusual architecture, and lots more.

Anyway, for whatever it's worth, if you enjoy geography, culture, languages, travel, logic, puzzles, etc, you might find this an enjoyable pastime. Who knows, maybe I'll see you "on the road" somewhere!

Note: Since this article was written, GeoGuessr has added several more variations (including a US State Streak and some competitions).

-- Review by Diana Nelson Haase, 2/2021