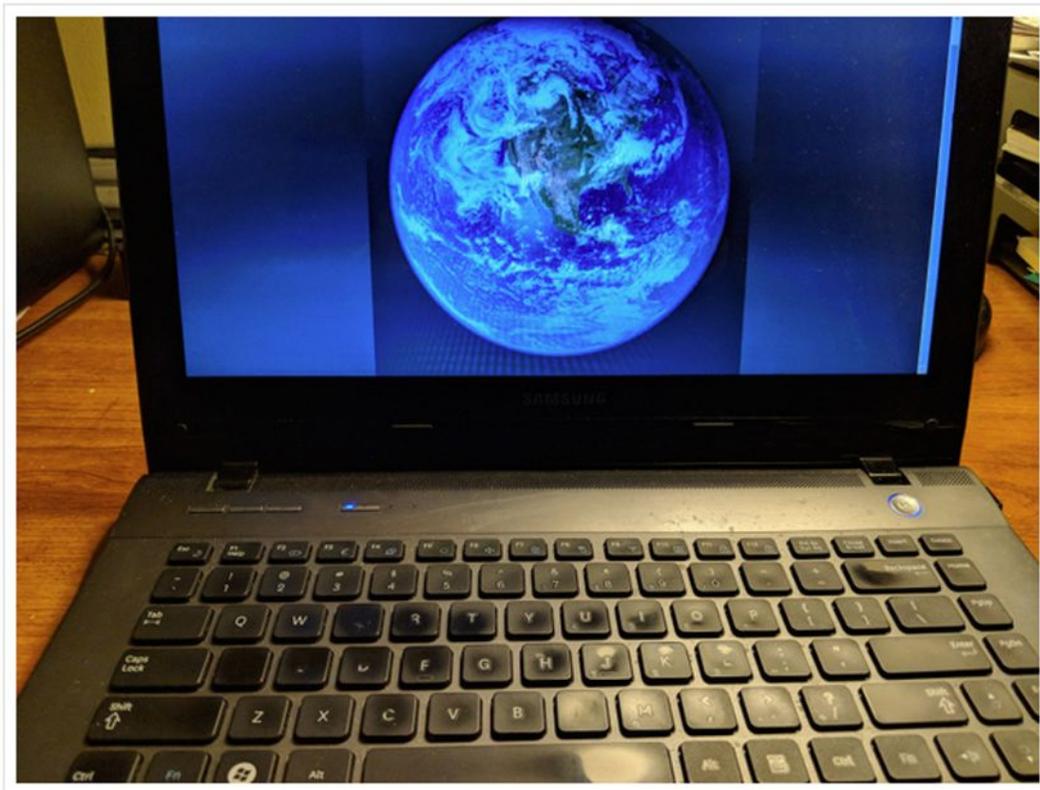


# Modern Parent

## Window on the World

by Liz Rothaus Bertrand, Mama on the Go

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Most weekdays around 2:15 p.m., my son is napping blissfully while I prepare for another voyage abroad. I examine the day's travel itinerary and make sure everything is in order: electrical systems activated (check), headset plugged in (check), espresso coffee and a square of dark chocolate within reach (check)... I take a deep breath and I'm off on an adventure halfway around the world.

Perhaps I'll spend an hour near sunny Geneva, Switzerland and then high-tail it back to Quebec province in Canada, where they're expecting snow. I'll likely spend the rest of the week hopping around French cities like

Paris, Lyon, and Cannes but sometimes last minute reservations reroute me to tropical destinations like Martinique or Tahiti.

If only I had passport stamps for all of the places I've visited!

While I don't have physical records of these trips, I have vivid memories of each of the people I've met along the way. For more than two years now, while my son naps, I've traveled the world virtually through a language teaching website called Learnissimo.com.

My students are a diverse bunch – from countries around the world, of all different ages, varying socio-economic backgrounds, with a plethora of hopes and ambitions. But no matter their differences, they all share one thing is common: they want to practice English with a native speaker. And, as luck may have it, I happen to fit the bill.

My computer has become a veritable window on the world – bridging space and time so that I can see my students and talk to them from my own living room. I commute via an internet connection and webcam to their own homes. While teaching, I discover their interests, meet their families, hear about work projects, travel aspirations, or school projects. It has been an incredible privilege to connect with these fascinating people, some of whom I've worked with for months or years. It's also strange to “know them” so well when the odds are good that we'll never meet in person.

What I see through my window depends on the day: here's 20-something tech entrepreneur Olivier\* prepping for interview questions before he moves to England; there's 6-year old Myriam running around the house again, laughing as she evades the grasp of her grandmother, who is desperately trying to keep her on task; here comes stylish 14-year old Celine, who is studying three languages and knows way more about American pop music than I do; or Luciana, a mother-of-three, who shares her baking secrets and favorite recipes.

I've made some surprising discoveries along the way too: like retiree Christiane who regaled me with tales from her joyful summer vacation at a nudist colony in the South of France; Indonesian Suharto who told me that there was no past or future tense in his native language; or glimpsing the facades of Parisian buildings as 5 year old Julien spoke to me on his mom's iphone from the backseat of the car.

For a stay-at-home mom trying to work part-time, it's been an amazing way to tour the world. I hope my students have found it to be just as worthwhile an experience and will keep opening up new windows of their own on other cultures. What about you? When is the last time you sat across the table from a mysterious stranger speaking Italian and sipping an espresso?

\* Names have been changed for privacy.