

Santa Claus isn't coming to town...

...but you can Zoom him

Acherished tradition of the holiday season for kids is sitting on Santa's lap and telling him what you want for Christmas. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has made getting up close and personal with Santa Claus a risky proposition.

Some places still let kids visit Santa — with social distancing and protective barriers in place. That's better than nothing, but it's not the same. Plus, you still have to go to a place full of potentially infected people, and that carries a certain amount of risk.

If we can go to school and work remotely, of course we can visit Santa remotely too. There are quite a few websites that let you schedule a virtual visit. I haven't personally tried any of these experiences, but I'll review the offerings of a handful of sites.

mrkringle.com

If you're in the Cleveland area during non-pandemic times, Mr. Kringle & Company offers several in-person experiences with Santa Claus. The site also offers a couple long distance opportunities for interaction. You can have a letter from Santa sent to your believer for \$12. You can also order a short pre-recorded video from him for

\$28. For \$48, two believers can have a personalized Zoom meeting with Mr. Kringle. For \$58, those two believers can have a slightly longer and more personalized video chat with the man. Additional kids are \$8 each. Santas of different ethnicities are available, and accommodations can be made for children with special needs.

santatheexperience.com

Santa the Experience offers a more elaborate presentation for its virtual experience. You start by meeting Pickles the elf. She takes you on a tour of the North Pole headquarters that includes the mailroom, reindeer stables, toy factory and a visit with Mrs. Claus in her kitchen. The finale is a live chat with the big guy himself. Prices start at \$35 for a daytime visit but go up in price in the evening. As you get closer to Christmas the price can be as high as \$80.

santazoomvisit.com

Santa Zoom Visits is a little pricier than the previous two sites, but it offers a longer visit and boasts of a more personal experience. An energetic, musical video invite is sent before the visit to build anticipation. The live virtual session will last 20 to 25 minutes and starts with an elf building up excitement. You can send a letter to Santa in advance that he will read to your believer. He will address them by name, answer questions, tell stories and sing songs. There's no limit to how many

people can join the session. Prices start at \$129 and go up to \$150 depending on the package you choose. Arrangements can be made for American Sign Language, Spanish and children with special needs.

virtualclaus.com

Virtual Claus, Meet with Santa is a more bare bones video experience. For \$25, one child can have an eight-minute personalized video chat with Santa. Additional kids, and time, can be added for \$20 each. For \$40, you can book a 15-minute story time with Mrs. Claus. All the sessions end with a personal email from Santa and a screenshot of the chat.

visitfromtheclasses.com

Live Video Call with the Clauses gives you a two-for-one experience. Both Santa and Mrs. Claus have a video chat with your believer. The site offers three packages. For \$49, you get a five-minute chat for one or two kids. \$69 gets you 10 minutes for three or more kids. The Party Package goes for \$149 and lasts 30 minutes. This gives everyone at a big event time with the Clauses. This was the only site I looked at that had a Santa with an obviously fake beard.

Hopefully one of these sites will provide a memorable experience for your young ones. Merry Christmas!

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