



LONE STAR STATE

Stargazing





Keep Your Eyes to the Sky!

These are some of the best places to stargaze in Texas:

Big Bend National Park

Big Bend National Park is not only Texas's most famous park — it is also known as one of the most outstanding places in North America for star gazing. Thanks to the sparse human occupation of this region, it has the least light pollution of any other National Park unit in the lower 48 states. This can be a real surprise to visitors when they are outside in Big Bend at night and see the Milky Way in its full glory for perhaps the first time in their life. You can stargaze just about anywhere in Big Bend, but there are a few spots you might want to consider. If you're an admirer of astronomy, bring your telescope to the Marathon Sky Park.

Brazos Bend State Park

Located an hour outside of Houston, Brazos Bend State Park is a great place for any astronomical enthusiast. Not only is it far removed from the light pollution of the Lone Star State's biggest city, it's home to the George Observatory, where visitors can view planetary objects up close and personal.

Caprock Canyons State Park

Home to the only wild bison herd in the state of Texas, Caprock Canyon State Park in the Texas panhandle has stunning views of constellations.

Copper Breaks State Park

In 2014, Copper Breaks State Park was designated an International Dark Sky Park. Located in the Texas Panhandle, Copper Breaks State Park is known for its absolutely stunning nighttime views.

Davis Mountains State Park

Settled high in the mountains of West Texas, the Davis Mountains State Park is home to the McDonald Observatory, which houses the largest telescope in Texas and hosts regular star parties. Fear not, though; you don't need a telescope to see the stars in the Davis Mountains; the state park is plenty dark enough for you to see them with the naked eye.

Dripping Springs

Just west of Austin, Dripping Springs is a little slice of Hill Country heaven. The word is out on the small town, though. Its growing population brings with it new property developments and dreaded light pollution. However, Dripping Springs resident Cindy Cassidy is leading an effort to combat this using "smart lighting" techniques that aim exterior business lighting at exactly what needs to be lit, and only that. Cassidy's efforts have earned Dripping Springs an International Dark Sky Community, even with its proximity to Austin.

Enchanted Rock

Not far outside of Austin, the Enchanted Rock State Park was recently named an International Dark Sky Park in recognition of its stunning stargazing quality. The Texas Parks and Wildlife maintains a website where you can check on celestial events and the park's darkness level on any given night.

Palo Duro Canyon

Located outside Amarillo in the panhandle, Palo Duro Canyon is a beautiful and remote place to see a meteor shower. Or take a telescope and check out some constellations.

Resaca de la Palma State Park

Located down south near Brownsville, Resaca de la Palma State Park is an ideal place for stargazing. The nearby Nompuewenu Observatory hosts occasional "Astronomy in the Park" events that are educational and fun for the whole family. This south Texas state park is also an incredible place to go bird watching (no comma) due to the many species of birds that reside in the park.



Celestial Bodies

The Milky Way

Our galaxy is a massive spiral-shaped collection of hundreds of billions of stars, cosmic dust, and gas that resembles a spinning pinwheel. This enormous cosmic structure gets its name from Greek mythology, though different cultures around the world have given it various names like "Silver River" in China or "Backbone of Night" in the Kalahari Desert of Southern Africa. Our solar system sits on one of its spiral arms, positioned about 25,000 light-years from the galaxy's center.

The galaxy's distinctive flat, disk-like shape with a central bulge results from its constant rotation, with gravity serving as the cosmic glue that prevents everything from flying apart. While we can observe about 6,000 stars with the naked eye from Earth, this represents just a tiny sliver of the galaxy's true stellar population.



Constellations

Ursa Major

Visible Year-Round

Ursa Major, which means "the great bear" in Latin, is one of the most famous constellations visible in the northern sky. It's best known for containing the Big Dipper, that distinctive ladle-shaped pattern of stars that many people can easily spot on clear nights. This massive constellation has captured human imagination for thousands of years, appearing in myths and stories across different cultures around the world. Beyond its cultural importance, Ursa Major also contains some spectacular deep-space objects like distant galaxies that astronomers love to study and photograph.

Ursa Minor

Visible Year-Round

This one's hard to spot outside of West Texas. Ursa Minor, also called "the little bear," is known for containing the famous Little Dipper star pattern. This ancient constellation, first catalogued by Greek astronomers over 1,800 years ago, is best known for containing Polaris, the North Star, which sits at the tip of the Little Dipper's handle. The North Star is special because it marks the north celestial pole, making it a crucial navigation tool that has guided travelers for centuries. Despite being called the "lesser bear" compared to its larger companion Ursa Major, this constellation plays an outsized role in stargazing and navigation.

Leo

Visible in Spring

Leo is one of the most recognizable star patterns in our night sky, representing a the mighty Nemean Lion from ancient Greek legends. This large constellation sits in the northern part of the sky and contains bright stars like Regulus and Denebola that help form the distinctive lion shape. As one of the zodiac constellations, Leo has been known to stargazers for thousands of years and is home to several fascinating galaxies and deep-space objects. It's relatively easy to spot on clear nights, making it a favorite among both casual stargazers and astronomy enthusiasts.

Scorpius

Visible in Summer

This zodiac constellation is incredibly old, known to astronomers for over 5,000 years, making it one of humanity's earliest recorded star patterns. Its name comes from a tale in Greek mythology about an encounter between the great hunter Orion and a deadly scorpion. You can easily find Scorpius because it sits near the bright center of our Milky Way galaxy, and it's packed with brilliant stars like the red giant Antares, along with stunning clusters and nebulae that make it a favorite target for stargazers.

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