



Starry starry NIGHTS

Travel that puts the stars, moon and Northern Lights into focus is trending. Here's where you should be gazing - to infinity and beyond >>

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Do you remember the first time you stared up at the night sky to the stars? To a child, the universe is mind-boggling, vast, breathtaking and ancient, although it somehow slips out of focus as we get older. Time to just look up and ponder the bigger picture is lost. But now, a rise in astrotourism holiday experiences is putting the celestial magic back into our lives.

'Dark skies are good for people, good for economic development and good for the planet,' says Susan Serven of DarkSky International,

which advocates for protecting our night-time landscapes. With an estimated 80% of the planet now suffering from light pollution, is it time we thought about protecting our skylscapes, just like forests, lakes or oceans? Not only are dark skies beneficial for wildlife, biodiversity and human health, says Susan, they also connect us to history.

After all, from the ancient Greeks to the early Polynesians, civilisations across the globe have embraced constellations, the moon and solar

phenomenon as an important part of culture and communication.

While keen astrotourists may want to book a specialised tour to see the Northern Lights or a far-flung eclipse, in many cases you needn't travel to sample night-time wonders. The UK is home to a number of dedicated 'dark sky' reserves, where the heavens are

'DARK SKIES ARE GOOD FOR PEOPLE'

particularly spectacular, and they are at their best right now, when days are short and crisp, as cool weather increases clarity.



winter wonders

Best for...
**THE
NORTHERN
LIGHTS
THRILL**



Explore beyond the Arctic Circle for untamed landscapes, dog-sledding, forest skiing and the spectacular aurora borealis

SWEDISH LAPLAND

Seeing the aurora borealis dance in hues of green and pink across a frosty Nordic sky is the epitome of an astrotourism adventure for many. In terms of getting there, you could do-it-yourself and travel to the northern stretches of Scandinavia or Canada and hope that you get lucky. Alternatively, you may prefer to join the local Malmström family in Swedish Lapland's Arctic Circle for an expert guided adventure that includes dog-sledding with huskies, snow-shoeing and cultural experiences of the Sámi, Sweden's indigenous people - as well as nightly spectacles of the Northern Lights.

✦ **An eight-day 'Arctic Circle Aurora Adventure' starts from £2,699pp, excluding flights; exodus.co.uk >>**



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Best for...
THE
BUCKET-
LIST
BONANZA

2 AUSTRALIA

Enjoy dinner at sunset, breathtaking views and a sleep-out under the stars

If you've always dreamt of visiting Australia, turn your grand tour into a night skies spectacular with a visit to Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, tucked in the rugged Flinders Ranges in South Australia, 600km north of Adelaide. For more than 50 years, this certified Dark Sky Sanctuary has had a strong focus on conservation and science - its landscapes have a geological history dating back around two billion years - and now that extends to what's happening above. Sign up to a series of astronomical activities, ranging from observatory tours to stargazing sessions in a recliner using astronomical binoculars. Or, the undisputed highlight - a sleep-out tour, where you'll camp out under the stars on a magnificent viewpoint, rising next day to a gourmet breakfast.

✦ Two nights for two people, £960;
arkaroola.com.au



3 NORTHUMBERLAND

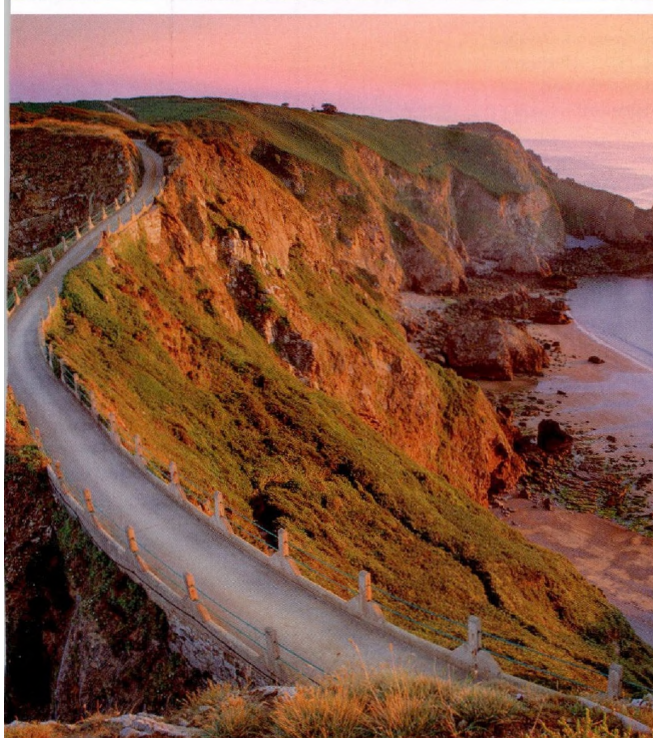
Curl up by a crackling fire, hot toddy in hand, telescope at the ready, and let expert astronomer Andrew Gray introduce you to the universe. At the Lord Crewe Arms in Blanchland, Northumberland - a 12th-century hotel that was a

guesthouse to Blanchland Abbey, providing a bolthole for visiting monks - there is no phone signal, no crowd and no shortage of stargazing. Here in the North Pennines' dark skies, twinkling constellations and tumbling meteors come into sharp focus, especially with Mr Gray there on hand to point out the highlights.

÷ A stargazing experience and two-course supper, available on select dates, starts from £210pp. Double rooms from £160, with breakfast; lordcrewearmsblanchland.co.uk

Best for...
THE EXPERT STAR-GAZING SESSION

With Hadrian's Wall as a backdrop, wonder at the magic of the night sky

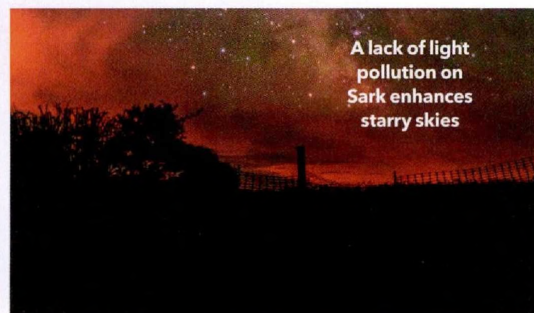


4 SARK

Connected by ferry to the neighbouring, larger Channel Islands of Guernsey and Jersey, tiny Sark - just three miles long and 1.5 miles wide - was proclaimed the world's first Dark Sky Island in 2011, in no small part thanks to its car-free status (no street lights or headlights to dilute the view). The centre of the island is home to an observatory with a 12in Meade telescope where, for a £10 donation per person, you can have a go at spotting planets and constellations.

÷ Stocks Hotel, built in 1741, offers double rooms from £157; stockshotel.com >>

Best for...
THE WORLD'S FIRST

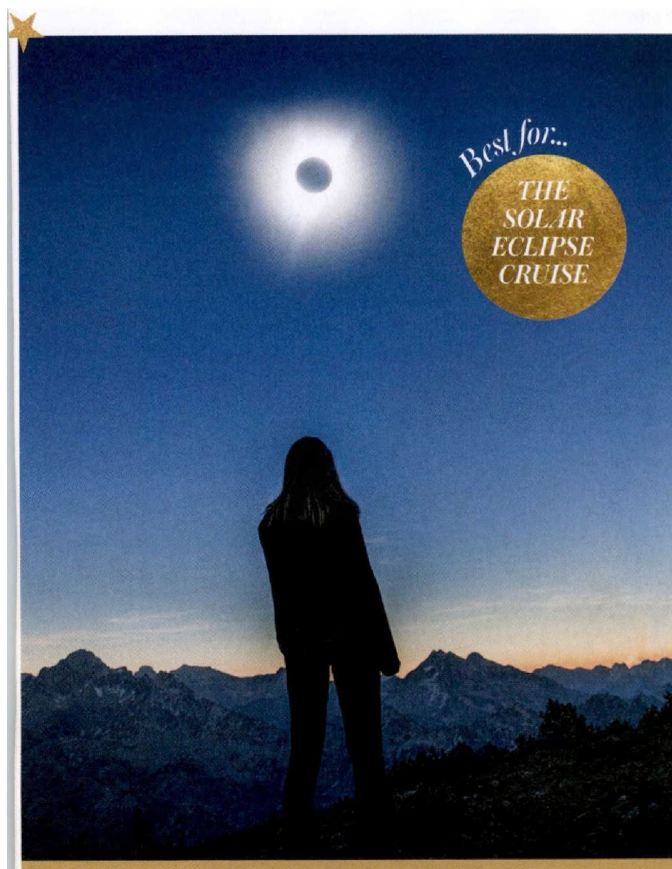




FOREST OF DEAN

Roughly once a month from the Tudor Farmhouse Hotel in the Forest of Dean, star 'storyteller' Jim Bell takes guests on an exploration of the stars via a hilltop vantage point in the grounds. After the two-hour 'safari', detailing the swirling views above (as well as those in his own portable planetarium), Jim will return you to the cosy hotel environs, where 20 bedrooms and dinners of roast Herefordshire beef await.

+ Safari, £40 per person. Double rooms from £199, including breakfast and dinner;
tudorfarmhousehotel.co.uk



winter wonders

6 COPENHAGEN TO REYKJAVIK

For astronomy enthusiasts, the must-see event of 2026 happens on 12 August, when a total solar eclipse will be visible from northern Spain up through the Arctic. Sailing on 30 July, the Oceania Marina will pass under the path of totality, giving you a prime view of this unforgettable astronomical event. The voyage includes speeches and presentations from NASA ambassadors and astronomers, with solar-themed menus and deck parties.

✦ A 14-day 'Eclipse in Iceland Voyage' costs from £4,799pp; oceaniacruises.com



7 LONDON

Best for...
THE CITY STAIRSCAPE

You might not think of London as your first port of call for a night-sky break, and normally you'd be right, but the Conservatory Suite at Hotel 41 in Victoria is an exception. With a glass ceiling and a telescope at the ready, the split-level room is an elegant pad where you can enjoy the night skies from under the duvet. When you aren't tucked in, attentive staff service and complimentary welcome champagne in the intimate customer lounge await. Can't quite justify the splurge for the suite? A rooftop terrace will give you just as good a view and is open to all guests.

✦ Double rooms from £536, with breakfast; 41hotel.com



HELEN CATHCART; NEIL MARKIDES; NICK TORTAJADA; ROB BESANT; SHUTTERSTOCK; SOUTH AUSTRALIAN TOURISM COMMISSION. DETAILS CORRECT AT TIME OF WRITING