

# Into the Night

THIS SUMMER, MAKE A TREK TO ONE (OR ALL) OF OUR FAVORITE SPOTS FOR STARGAZING.

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## Joshua Tree National Park

What better place to see the stars than our own backyard? Joshua Tree National Park spokesman George Land says there are several good viewing areas that are not closed off at night, such as Cap Rock, Boy Scout Trail parking area and Hemingway parking area. Cap Rock is located at the junction of Park Boulevard and Keys Views Road; the Boy Scout Trail parking area is located at the south end of the trail inside the west entrance; and the Hemingway parking area can be found just under 2 miles past the Quail Springs lot when driving from the west entrance. Other spots are Jumbo Rocks and White Tank campgrounds, recommended by Sky Watcher Stargazing Tours Sky Guide Bill Kronsted, because “you are getting farther away from the lower desert light.” Kronsted says to bring a nice lounge chair, binoculars and drinks. “The best is just to relax and key your eyes to the sky to catch satellites or falling stars,” says the guide, who offers private and group tours. A couple dates to put on your calendar: July 27-28 for the Delta Aquariids meteor shower, August 12-13 when the Perseid meteor showers are expected to peak, and August 21 for the total solar eclipse.

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## Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

Not only is Borrego Springs the state's first (and only) International Dark Sky Community, but Anza-Borrego Desert State Park offers more than 500 miles of dirt roads through undeveloped land. State Park Superintendent Kathy Dice recommends Blair Valley, which "first attracted astronomy groups from greater San Diego because it has the least amount of light pollution than anywhere else in the desert." The furthest point in that valley is now called Astronomy Way and is where Dice says "the mountains do the best job of blocking ambient light from distant cities."

The roads there are generally good for all cars, though popular park spots like Font's Point usually require four-wheel drive. While the latter is a great place to view the desert at night, its elevation does give way to the lights of distant towns. The lower washes in the badlands, Dice says, are probably better. Be sure to check ahead for summer storms (the clouds can obscure the stars), and bring plenty of water even if you're just staying overnight. Dice recommends a fan and a raised cot to make things comfortable. Better yet, she says, "it is very comfortable to look at the sky from your Borrego Springs Motel pool!"



## ASTRONOMER ADVICE 101

**1** Don't use a regular white flashlight, as it ruins your vision at night. Cover it in red cellophane, or purchase a red-light flashlight.

**2** As a courtesy, if you're driving into a stargazing spot after it is well dark, don't use your high beams (they'll blind already set-up astronomers). Do a courtesy flash of your lights so others can look away.

**3** Just because a meteor shower is reportedly peaking doesn't mean you have to rush out to see it that day. Amateur astronomer Brandon Finnigan suggests basing trips off when the moon isn't full, rather when it's in new phase or going to set early.

**4** Don't forget a gallon of water for every day you're traveling. An extended Desert Pack List is available on Mojave Desert Land Trust's Monuments Adventure Kit website ([mojavemonuments.org](http://mojavemonuments.org)).

**5** Download the NightCap Pro app for your camera phone, which Finnigan uses, as it allows for long exposures to capture constellations.

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## Amboy Crater

Part of Mojave Trails National Monument, Amboy Crater rises 250 feet above the almost-ghost town of Amboy and is “the absolute darkest spot in the Mojave Desert that you can go to that has safe parking, bathrooms and you’re less than 2 miles away from gas, food and water,” says Brandon Finnigan, an “amateur astronomer” who has been visiting for the last five years. Adjacent to the historic Roy’s gas station on Route 66, the extinct cinder cone boasts parking lots and covered picnic areas. Finnigan says there’s nearly no light pollution from Las Vegas or Los Angeles, though there’s a bit from Twentynine Palms. “If you have even a small scope, a backyard telescope, pack it in the car and take it out with you,” he says. “You’re really going to push the limits of what it can see in a place like Amboy.” Finnigan sets up a small tent next to his 8-inch dobsonian mounted reflector and says the spot is perfect for introducing his young son to the stars. “It’s so bright out there on clear nights in Amboy, I don’t even use a flashlight to read my star charts by,” he says. “It’s bright enough that I can read by the light of the Milky Way.” In the coming months, Finnigan notes you’ll also be able to see the Andromeda Galaxy. “You know you’re having a perfect night at Amboy if, when you look up and look toward the south, it’s a feature I call the Dark Horse,” he adds. “It’s actually a cloud of dark, I guess, molecular gas in the Milky Way that kind of obscures the background light of all the stars behind it and it literally has the shape of a horse that’s trotting.”



## STAR TREK

Join us for a highly interactive, interpretive tour of the desert night skies with high-powered telescopes and experts who combine "mythology and science with a splash of entertainment." The professionally trained Sky Guides weave dream tales of mythology, legends and folklore of the Native American Indians and explain the difficult concepts of astronomy. Our friends at Sky Watcher Tours are offering their expertise at a very special price for the Adventure Club, making it a great opportunity for the whole family.

JUNE 24 | 8-10:30 PM. | JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK  
\$30 FOR ADULTS; \$15 FOR CHILDREN AGE 12 AND UNDER; FREE FOR CHILDREN AGE 3 AND UNDER; PARK ENTRANCE FEE NOT INCLUDED

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## Sky's The Limit Observatory and Nature Center

Located at the southernmost edge of Twentynine Palms, this 15-acre campus offers a 360-degree view of the stars. According to its website, the "nearest neighbor to the south is Joshua Tree National Park, assuring that nothing will be built to impede the view of the darkest part of the night sky." In addition to free Saturday night stargazing parties (volunteer astronomers bring telescopes for viewing), there are also daytime education exhibits like a walkable model of the solar system. But the campus is always open, so you can visit with a personal telescope or binoculars; there is no running water, however, and restrooms are locked unless a docent is present. According to astronomer Steve Caron, the summer Milky Way "is much brighter and more noticeable than its winter counterpart" and other prominent summer constellations are Scorpius, Sagittarius, Aquila, Cygnus and Lyra, not to mention the Summer Triangle formation of Vega, Deneb and Altair. Saturn also will be visible in the Sagittarius constellation for several months along the Milky Way this summer, he says. Private star parties may be arranged two weeks in advance; there is a suggested donation of \$150 for groups up to 15 and \$10 per person for larger groups. 🌱