

Dark Sky Tourism – “The Oregon Way”

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Dawn J. Nilson, Owner of Fibonacci Enterprises and an IDA Delegate



Insert photo caption

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When the average tourist thinks about stargazing, they think of southwestern deserts and the many national parks dotting that landscape. When the average tourist thinks about Oregon, they think of lush forests, snowcapped volcanoes, and a breath-taking coastline with quaint communities. However, as 1,000 visitors who travel far and wide to the annual [Oregon Star Party](#) can attest, Oregon is a hidden gem among dark sky enthusiasts. Just a glance at a map from the [World Atlas of Artificial Night Sky Brightness](#) (Falchi et al, 2016) shows that not only is a large majority of the state privileged with dark skies above, but nearly half of the state has pristine skies. In fact, eastern Oregon is within the largest pristine dark sky zone in the lower 48 states. In most of that zone, trees are sparse, horizons are broad, rain is scarce, and elevations are high – criteria favorable to avid stargazers. But a night sky doesn't need to be pristine to attract the average stargazer. Just seeing the Milky Way is a treat to many, and one can see it within only a 30-minute drive from Portland. So, is it any wonder that the state's tourism office, Travel Oregon, decided it was time to put Oregon on the map for its dark skies just like many other western states?



Starry Sky Bench in

the Nossentiner / Schwinzer Heide,
Germany

The scientific background

The dark adaptation of the human eye has evolved over 100,000 years. There is a five-step process that the eye goes through when trying to capture as much light as possible. It does this by trading color perception and focusing during the day for contrast perception and farsightedness at night. This is done by adjustment of pupil dilation, chemical processes, the change of sensor groups in the eye. that together change the sensitivity of the eye. After 30 minutes, people with dark adaptation can see about twice as many stars as before when viewing in a dark sky location.

According to the International Dark-Sky Association, 80% of people in the United States live in a place where they cannot see the Milky Way. Guided stargazing is a way to rediscover life in the dark.

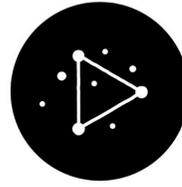
How can dark sky parks offer this activity?

Nature parks can set up public wooden benches for stargazing. Specialized hosts and larger resorts can set up a space on their property for stargazing.

Guests use their smartphones to listen to the VISIT DARK SKIES audio guide and relax on the stargazing furniture or simply on the ground. Independent of a knowledgeable

guide and set times, they can watch the stars as they appear, with flexibility.

The audio file was carefully developed with many pilot listeners and is tailored to the experience with timeless music, stories, and astronomical explanations. It can be licensed by Visit Dark Skies to be offered free of charge. Visitors can also purchase and stream it through the Visit Dark Skies website, with hosts as distributors. The audio file is available in English and German.



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About the Author

Etta Dannemann is an architect and lighting designer living in Berlin, Germany. She founded VISIT DARK SKIES, a publishing company specializing in experiential products that explore light and darkness. She works with nature parks, dark sky hosts, and tourism operators in remote regions worldwide. She can be reached at etta@visitdarkskies.com.

Learn More

- [Visit Dark Skies](#)
- [Watch Etta's recorded presentation](#) on her Guided Star Gazing audio tour, co-sponsored by Night Sky Science and the Colorado Plateau Dark Sky Cooperative during International Dark Sky Week, 2022.

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Photo credit:

Samuele Errico Piccarini
Parco Nazionale Foreste Casentinesi, Pratovecchio, Italy

Opportunity for dark sky activity hosts

Hosts can offer this unique service to interested guests by renting a special stargazing chair, blanket and hot water bottle, and a speaker for groups, Comfort is an essential factor in making guided stargazing work well.

Etta Dannemann works with hosts in her workshop “How to Become a Dark Sky Host” to harness the potential of astro-tourism for themselves. VISIT DARK SKIES works with partners that show respect and sensitivity to the night sky, have night-friendly lighting, and offer nature-based but comfortable accommodations.

Column 3

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