

# Utah's Dark Sky Passport Program

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Lisa Stoner, *Colorado Plateau Dark Sky Cooperative, Coordinator*

## An invitation to explore and celebrate Utah's Dark Night Skies

When one has the opportunity to experience the grandeur of the Milky Way, witness a shooting star, or identify a new constellation, such moments can spark curiosity, a sense of awe, and provide memories that last a lifetime. These experiences however, do depend on a night sky where the view of the cosmos remains unobstructed by artificial sources of light at night. Fortunately, Utah is well-known for its exceptional dark sky viewing conditions due to the large percentage of undeveloped public lands, relatively few and small population centers, and dry climate. In fact, [Utah has more accredited dark sky places](#) than any other state in the country.



*Milky Way over Goblin Valley State Park's hoodoos, Photo Credit: Bettymaya Foott*

The [Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism \(IORT\)](#) at Utah State University developed a new educational tool, Utah's "Dark Sky Passport," to connect youth and their families to the cosmos through outdoor experiences *at night*. The [Dark Sky Passport](#) is an invitation to explore Utah's picturesque landscapes under truly dark, star-filled nights.

The Passport provides a fun way to learn about the night sky and nocturnal environments through a series of activities and stickers, including passport stamps that

can be placed on the pages dedicated to recording the passport holder's experience with each dark sky place visited. A map, showing Utah's [International Dark Sky Places](#) including the parks, communities, and sanctuaries formally recognized for their commitment to the protection and education around naturally dark skies, can be used for planning travel itineraries and checking off the places that have been visited. An introduction to the [Bortle Scale](#) is also included to show how the quality of a night sky varies depending based on the amount of artificial light at night and its effect on the number of stars that can be seen. The Dark Sky Passport comes with a [companion website](#), where passport holders can share their experience and receive a Dark Sky Passport certificate. The website offers tips for star gazing, where to find a star party, dark sky activities that can be done at home, and ultimately, information on why we should care about the dark night sky and ways it can be preserved.

The Utah Dark Sky Passport was designed to complement existing Junior Ranger or Night Explorer Programs run by the National Park Service and State Parks within Utah. It is also appropriate for any astronomy festival, star party, solar or full moon event planned within the state. The Passport is intended to inspire curiosity and family-based activities while encouraging an appreciation for nighttime environments and the precious night sky resource that exists in Utah and the greater Colorado Plateau region.



*Dark Sky Passport display cases at Visitor Centers in various National and State Parks across Utah*

## Distribution

Since June, 2023, just over 25,000 Dark Sky Passports have been distributed to *thirty* unique locations across Utah, including *18* State Parks (Eastern Region (7), Northern Region (6), Southwestern Region (5)), *11* National Park units, and *1* County Destination Management Office (DMO in Uintah County). The park managers and education specialists at each location have their own method for distributing the Passport to their visitors. The first supply of passports were primarily delivered to parks formally recognized under the [International Dark Sky Places \(IDSP\)](#) program. Other locations were selected as they are currently in the process of applying for IDSP accreditation, or are

well known for holding regular dark sky events. Future deliveries are planned for Utah's Dark Sky Communities of [Torrey](#) (accredited since 2018), [Helper](#) (since 2020), and the newly accredited [Springdale](#) (since July, 2023), as well as to resupply the parks as needed.

## Next Steps

The main goal of the Dark Sky Passport program is to get people excited about exploring new areas within the state to experience the full extent of Utah's dark skies. The IORT is currently working on ways to enhance the educational elements and outreach potential of the Passport program within the parks and neighboring communities. The Passport is an experiential learning program to bridge one's personal activities and observations to a greater understanding of what naturally dark skies mean and the significance for the quality of life for humans and the environment.



## Learn More

- [Dark Sky Passport Program](#)
- [More Dark Sky Activities Page](#)
- For building astro-tourism itineraries, visit [Utah Office of Tourism](#) and this [Guide to Utah's Darkest Skies](#)
- [Eclipse Areas for Annular Solar Eclipse in Utah, on October 14, 2023](#)