

# Dark Sky Tourism – “The Oregon Way”

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

## When the average tourist thinks about stargazing...

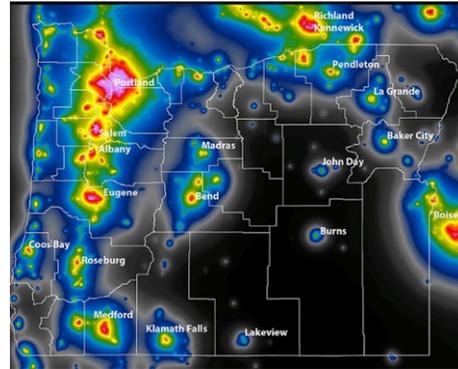
... they think of southwestern deserts and the many national parks dotting that landscape. When the average tourist thinks about Oregon, they think of lush forests, snowcapped volcanoes, and a breath-taking coastline with quaint communities.



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?

As a contractor to Travel Oregon, Fibonacci Enterprises outlined, authored, designed, and provided other content for the [Oregon Dark Sky Tourism Toolkit](#) published in June 2022. Travel Oregon developed this toolkit to help communities, businesses, public and tribal land managers, non-profit organizations, and destination management organizations (DMOs) learn about the many benefits

of embracing “dark sky friendly” practices and how to leverage those benefits into sustainable dark sky tourism and resource management opportunities. The 19-page toolkit with user-friendly tables, photographs, and nearly 100 embedded URL links is not only a primer on dark sky tourism but a primer on dark sky conservation. After all, without conservation, there is no sustainable dark sky tourism industry.



**Astrotourism** – Tourism that focuses on sky-related tourist activities, such as stargazing, astrophotography, chasing eclipses and auroras, and visiting facilities related to astronomy, like observatories and planetariums.

**Dark sky tourism** – Tourism that includes astrotourism and other special night-time activities, including moon-bathing, nocturnal creature guided tours, indigenous and cowboy storytelling, night sky inspired artistic events, and more.

The specific title of the toolkit is intentional. It emphasizes how the toolkit includes other special night-time activities in addition to astrotourism. The toolkit also speaks to an Oregon audience familiar with Oregon’s geographic diversity, high rates of volunteerism, alliance-building, environmental stewardship, and affinity to the outdoors.

## The toolkit is organized into seven chapters:

- Oregon’s Magnificent Dark Skies,
- Dark Sky Tourism Opportunities,
- Community Engagement Tools,
- Oregon Dark Sky Case Studies,
- Dark Sky Recognition Programs,
- Lighting to Save Night Skies,
- Other Helpful Tools and Resources

In addition to publishing the toolkit as a free, online pdf, Travel Oregon has developed a dark sky tourism technical assistance program. This program offers one-to-one technical guidance for tourism industry and outdoor

recreation partners interested in developing dark sky experiences in their destination. Just 30 to 60 minutes of consultation can help provide folks with a better understanding of their [dark sky assets](#), specific jargon they can use in their marketing, specific ideas to kickstart their dark campaigns or business, and the comfort that they have someone to turn to if they get stuck.



I've been a professional natural resources planner for over 30 years, a dark sky advocate for 14 years, an Oregonian for over 27 years, a long-time educator, and a life-long amateur astronomer. I essentially brought that relevant experience and many lessons learned into the pages of the toolkit to make it as simple as possible for others to get quickly up to speed with all things dark skies and to be effective in their efforts. I'm delighted that Oregon is addressing the conservation of our magnificent skies at the state level through this toolkit and that Travel Oregon is sharing it with fellow western states. Dark skies!



## Learn More

- To find out more, contact Dawn J. Nilson at [fibonaccioregonskies@gmail.com](mailto:fibonaccioregonskies@gmail.com) or Hilary Sager of Travel Oregon at [hilarys@traveloregon.com](mailto:hilarys@traveloregon.com).
- [Oregon Dark Sky Tourism Toolkit](#) (published June 2022)