

Stargazing through the seasons



Spring

A great time to view brighter galaxies and planets like Jupiter and Saturn are also well placed. Nights are still long and the weather is warming up so it's a great time to observe. The constellation of Leo dominates the southern sky.



Summer

You will see fewer stars around mid-summer, but watch out for ghostly noctilucent clouds high in the sky. You will also see tantalizing glimpses of the Milky Way to whet appetites for the months ahead. Watch out for August's Perseid meteor shower – one of the year's best.



Autumn

Together with the spring this is a prime viewing time. Nights are properly dark and the Milky Way is overhead in the evening, resembling a shimmering river of stars. Star clusters also look fantastic. Meteors showers like the Leonids can put on a good show in November.



Winter

The season of sparkling skies! The sky is often at its most transparent as temperatures dip. Glittering star clusters and magnificent constellations like Orion grace the sky, along with bright nebula. Wrap up warm and the rewards can be amazing.

PHOTOS BY ROBERT INCE



Astronomical Happenings

Anyone who has spent a few hours under the night sky will tell you there is a lot happening up there! Keep your eyes peeled for big astronomical events like meteor showers. The better ones are nearly always flagged up by the national media. Showers are best seen when the moon is absent, which varies from one year to the next. During good outbreaks you can expect to see as many as a couple of meteors per minute. The best ones are the Perseids in August and Leonids in November, but others include the Lyrids in April and Orionids in October. **Here is a list of the major shower in 2020**

Shower Name	Date of Maximum	Normal Limits	Rate/Hour	Description
Quadrantids	3-4 January	28 Dec-12 Jan	120	Blue meteors with fine trains
Lyrids	21-22 April	13-29 April	18	Bright fast meteors, some with trains. Associated with Comet Thatcher
Eta Aquariids	5-6 May	18 Apr-27 May	35	Low in sky. Associated with Comet Halley
Delta Aquariids	29-30 July	11 July - 22 Aug	20	Steady stream of meteors over several days but a low rate per hour
Perseids	12-13 August	16 July - 23 Aug	100	Many bright fast meteors with trains. Associated with Comet Swift-Tuttle (1737, 1862, 1992)
Draconids	8-9 October	5-9 October	~10	Associated with Comet 21/P Giacobini-Zimmer
Orionids	21-22 October	1 Oct - 6 Nov	25	Fast with fine trains. Associated with Comet Halley
Taurids	Southern: 9-10 Oct Northern: 10-11 Nov	Southern: 10 Sep - 20 Nov Northern: 19 Oct - 9 Dec	10	Very slow meteors
Leonids	17-18 November	5-29 November	15	Fast bright meteors with fine trains. Associated with Comet Tempel-Tuttle
Geminids	14-15 December	4-17 December	100+	Plenty of bright meteors, few trains
Ursids	21-22 December	16-25 December	<10	Sparse shower. Associated with comet 8P/Tuttle