

"Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2009" guide lists the best places to view the moon, stars and beyond.

1. McDonald Observatory, United States

For a night-time even like no other, head 2,040 meters (6,700 ft) above sea level to the top of Mount Locke. The McDonald Observatory, at the Davis Mountains in Texas, enjoys some of the best dark skies in the continental United States, ensuring jaw dropping views of celestial splendor. It also holds regular star parties, allowing you to look through the kind of massive telescopes that make astronomers rub their hands with glee.

2. Stonehenge, Britain

Thought by some to be a giant, primitive observatory, Stonehenge suggests that going "wow" at the heavens' twinkling bits is nothing new -- they began building this monumental circle of standing stones around 5,000 years ago. It's still a good place to stargaze today -- out in Salisbury Plain, in Wiltshire there aren't many lights around interfering with nature's display.

3. Abu Simbel, Egypt

Even in a country crammed full of awesome ancient sites, Abu Simbel, one of the most important ancient observatories in the world, inspires. Its four 20 meter (66 ft) statues of Ramses II and the monumental main hall were laid out to honor sun gods. The whole structure was moved, lock, stock and statuary during the construction of the Aswan High Dam, and rebuilt, still precisely aligned.

4. Caribbean Islands

Where better to gaze at a bejeweled blanket of stars than the islands where the breeze is warm, the night air is fragrant with frangipani and the rum is sweet. Find a romantic beachside, palm-fringed spot, lie back and star into the velvety darkness.

5. Pisac, Peru

For the Incas gazing at the heavens was about much more than horoscopes and romantic views. Instead, the firmament features a celestial roadway -- the Milky Way. Priests possibly used this wide band of diffuse light as a route map for parallel terrestrial pilgrimages.

6. Caldera de Taburiente National Park, Canary Islands

Flung out into the sea off west Africa, the Canary Islands are the last chunk of land before a whole lot of ocean. La Palma is the island furthest west, and right at its tip is the Caldera de Taburiente National Park. It's such a good spot for star gazing that it's home to the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory, which has one of the most extensive fleet of telescopes in the world.

7. Sherbrooke, Canada

Once the global hub of ice-hockey-stick manufacturing, Sherbrooke, Quebec, didn't, until recently, have many other claims to fame. Visitors tend to use this French-speaking city as a springboard for the pristine rivers, mountains and lakes of nearby Mont-Mégantic National Park. But there is another reason to visit: both the park and the city have been designated the world's first International Dark-Sky Reserve.

8. Slovenia

As Oscar Wilde put it: we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars. In theory, you should be able to see a lot of stars in Slovenia -- the country recently passed its first light-pollution law. The International Dark-Sky Association reckons the law will save Slovenia 10 million euros (\$13.5 million) a year, and the planet a some hefty greenhouse gas emissions.

9. Hawai'i (the Big Island), Hawaii, United States

You may plan to explore the smoking, steaming landscape around Crater Rim Drive, crawl through the lava tubes at Kaumana Caves or simply snorkely and sunbathe on the perfect white beaches of Kauna'oa Bay. But it'd be a shame to leave the Big Island without at least one long look at the night sky -- Hawai'i's altitude and isolation give it a distinct astronomical advantage.

10. Sark, Britain

Get out of the cities to see more stars. Urban light pollution means you'll usually only see 100 with the naked eye; in a dark-sky zone you can pick out 1,000. For a beautiful nightscape, head to Sark, in the Channel Islands. This high plateau of granite is nearly 5 km (3 miles) long, 2.5 km (1.6 miles) wide, has few houses and no cars or street lights. Cycling its pock-marked, unpaved lanes by moonlight is magical -- but bring a flashlight.