



active traveller

# Heavens *above*

Kate Crockett reveals seven of the best places to sleep under a star-studded sky

**Escaping the city** for the wilderness offers more than just peace and tranquility: away from the bright lights there's the revelation of the night sky in all its twinkling glory. Gazing into the cosmos reminds us of our small place in the universe and how much more there is to discover 'out there'. To mark the International Year of Astronomy events are taking place around the globe, encouraging us to better understand the celestial world. Take your cue and watch meteor showers from mountain tops in Europe, track the 2009 solar eclipse across Asia or sleep under the stars in the African bush. There is nothing quite like it. Here are the places to create your own stargazing memory...

*Luvu, Nsolo and Kakuli Bush Camps  
South Luangwa National Park, Zambia*

Head off the beaten track with nothing more than a mosquito net and a bed roll. Spend the night in the bush, enjoying stories around a campfire, and fall asleep under star-filled southern African skies. ([normancarrsafaris.com](http://normancarrsafaris.com))

*Baines' Camp, Okavango Delta, Botswana*

A tented bush camp of five suites elevated above the Boro River. The four-poster beds are fully mobile, allowing them to be wheeled out onto the viewing deck for slumber under the stars. ([sanctuarylodges.com](http://sanctuarylodges.com))

*The Ahwahnee  
Yosemite National Park, California, USA*

The hotel of choice for Yosemite's visiting presidents and well-heeled star-spotters. Take the free shuttle bus to the amphitheatre at Glacier Point where stargazing clubs congregate on summer evenings: Mars and Jupiter can be seen with the naked eye. ([yosemitepark.com](http://yosemitepark.com))

*Ecocamp, Torres del Paine National Park, Chile*

An environmentally friendly village of domed lodges based on the traditional Patagonian Kawésqar hut. Trek to forested peaks and admire glaciers in daylight; be awestruck at the blanket of stars at night. ([ecocamp.travel](http://ecocamp.travel))

*Traditional Ger tents, Eagle Valley, Mongolia*

Stay in a traditional tent and camp in the Gobi Desert to enjoy an evening of stargazing with a telescope in one of the best locations in the northern hemisphere. If you're in the area on 17 November, the annual Leonid meteor shower is expected to produce a display of up to 500 shooting stars per hour. (020 3147 7777; [intrepidtravel.com](http://intrepidtravel.com))

*JR Yakushima Hotel,  
Yakushima Island, Kagoshima, Japan*

This forested, Unesco-protected island is in the path of the total solar eclipse that crosses Asia this summer. Watch the four-minute spectacle from the Hirauchi hot springs, situated by the sea, and stay at the JR Yakushima Hotel in Onoaida. ([jrhotelgroup.com](http://jrhotelgroup.com))

*Pic du Midi, Midi-Pyrénées, France*

The summit of the Hautes-Pyrénées is home to one of the world's best astronomical observatories. Stay for a sunset dinner and spend a night in the hotel that was originally designed for astronomers and technicians, before waking up to a spectacular sunrise. ([picdumidi.com](http://picdumidi.com))

*Al-Karm Ecolodge, Sinai, Egypt*

Guides from the Jabaleya Bedouin tribe reveal stories of the constellations and distant galaxies above the Sinai desert from the state-of-the-art observatory at this eco-lodge built in stone and palm logs. (01306 888799; [yallajabaleya.com](http://yallajabaleya.com))

*Hotel de Larache, Atacama Desert, Chile*

The high-altitude, cloudless skies are a great place for stargazing. As the region is prone to an inhospitable climate, why not stare up at the heavens from this luxury hotel. (00 56 2 206 6060; [explora.com](http://explora.com))