



# RUGGED SKIES

Stargazing Industry Advocacy & Engagement Guide

## SAY "YES" TO THE STARS

Promote your dark skies and increase responsible tourism to sustain and enhance the character of your destination.







## RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Promote your dark skies and increase responsible tourism. Responsible tourism sustains and enhances the character of a destination, including the environment, culture, heritage, and community well-being.

Through stargazing and dark-sky tourism, destinations can achieve greater responsible tourism by targeting visitors interested in nature and conservatism. By promoting stargazing, destinations can also disperse visitors geographically, drawing them away from overcrowded regions and directing them to more rural areas.

Dark-sky tourism may also provide opportunities for regenerative tourism, which means visitors may have a positive impact on a destination, eventually leaving it better than they found it.





# STARGAZING TOURISM PRODUCTS & ACTIVITIES

Ready to bring visitors in to see your dark skies but don't know where to start? Try creating one of the following products so you have something tangible to market.

## **Equipment Rental**

Have easy-to-use equipment like binoculars, red flashlights, printed astronomical maps, or telescopes available for rent at libraries or outdoor gear shops.

## **Hire a Guide**

Just like rafting or rock climbing, stargazing can be led by a guide. Employ a local expert willing to take small groups to great stargazing spots to explain what is happening in the sky and the best way to see it.

## **Star Parties**

Star parties are often scheduled on the days when the moon is the least visible for optimal stargazing. These fun and often free gatherings can be hosted at unique locations like wineries or wildlife refuges or your local observatory. Having guides during these parties is a great idea too!

## **Full Moon Activities**

Combine a local activity with the night sky. When the moon is full, take advantage of the light and host a full moon float, hike, or snowshoe. You'll be surprised at how many night owls show up.

## **Night Sky Photography**

Night sky photography is becoming a popular hobby, and what better way to draw visitors to your destination than by hosting a night sky photography workshop? Seek out a local pro (hint, there's a list in this guide), and invite them to lead one or two nights of workshops.

## **Storytelling**

Nothing feels as nostalgic as telling stories under a night sky. Utah has a rich history of mining, pioneering, and indigenous lore to fill night upon night of great storytelling. Find your expert and bring a group together. Encourage visitors to get cozy in sleeping bags and prepare hot cocoa for the group.

## **Festivals**

Celebrate your night sky with a festival. Invite speakers, host stargazing parties, and bring in the food. Let your imagination run wild and invite the whole community to celebrate. Plan these festivals around special occasions, such as the solstice, a meteor shower, lunar eclipse, and more.





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## DARK-SKY BENEFITS

**There are loads of benefits that come from preserving the night sky. Here are just a few.**

### **Socioeconomic**

A 2019 Missouri State University study by Mitchell and Gallaway examined the economic impact of dark-sky tourism on the Colorado Plateau economy. Since dark-sky observation mostly occurs at night, tourists are far more likely to make overnight stays.

On average, overnight visitors spend 3 times more than day-only visitors. With the typical off-season months associated with longer nights, dark sky areas can increase visitor counts year-round, leading to more efficient use of local community and tourism-related resources.

Protecting dark skies doesn't just create dark-sky tourism opportunities and support other outdoor recreation, it can also enhance property values and a community's sense of pride, and even benefit a location's bottom line by reducing energy waste.

### **Environmental**

The IDA estimates that 30% of outdoor light in the U.S. is wasted and is associated with 21 million tons of carbon dioxide emission per year. By reducing outdoor light, you not only preserve the night sky but help to reduce greenhouse gasses.

Preserving naturally dark environments also contributes to the conservation of species and their ecosystems in both urban and rural areas. After all, life on Earth evolved with a bright day and a dark night.

This day and night cycle is encoded in the DNA of all plants and animals. Sustaining or restoring a naturally dark night supports life-sustaining biological mechanisms including growth, foraging, mating, and breeding.

### **Cultural**

The night sky has been around as long as people have been looking up. Those dark skies that once covered the entire planet inspired oral storytelling, poetry, literature, religion, science, philosophy, art, architecture, and music. By preserving the night sky, we are saving a rich and storied cultural history for generations.

### **Health**

Over millions of years on Earth, the human body has evolved by experiencing light during the day and darkness at night. This is also known as a circadian clock or rhythm. This clock affects our physiology in many ways, including sleep patterns, hormone release, eating habits, digestion, and body temperature. Having an irregular circadian clock has been linked to various chronic health conditions, including sleep disorders, obesity, diabetes, depression, bipolar disorder, and seasonal affective disorder.

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