

OFF DUTY TRAVEL

Where to Go Stargazing, Whether Your Budget Is \$95 or \$95,000

This fall is high time to get starry-eyed. Five astronomy-focused getaways, from a low-key adventure in North Carolina's Outer Banks to a 'Sky's the Limit' package in California's Wine Country



CONSTELLATION VACATION Cape Lookout lighthouse, one of the meeting spots for the Crystal Coast Stargazers, an astronomy club in the Outer Banks that welcomes visitors to its stargazing events.

PHOTO: ALEX GU

By [Nina Molina](#)

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IT'S BEEN A banner year and a half for astronomy buffs. Backyard hobbyists, housebound for much of the pandemic, drove sales of home telescopes, according to David Nagler, president of Tele Vue Optics in Chester, N.Y., which specializes in astronomical instruments. "There isn't a week that doesn't contain several phone calls from customers who either bought their first telescope or had a latent interest in amateur astronomy but never got around to pursuing it," said Mr. Nagler. And then this July, the Shanghai Astronomy Museum—the world's largest—opened and the Chankillo Astronomical Complex, a prehistoric observatory in Peru's Casma Valley, was added to the Unesco World Heritage List.

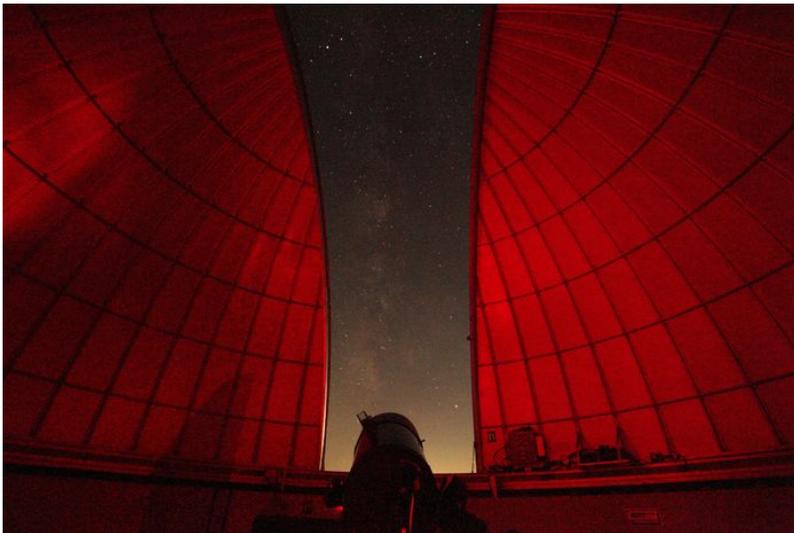
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Where are your favorite stargazing spots? Join the conversation below.

While Peru reopened its borders to tourists in March, China remains off-limits to most visitors for now, but astronomy fans are typically a patient bunch. If you can't wait to indulge your stargazing passion, we've rounded up a few places stateside to satiate pros and rookies alike.

Moon Over the Blue Ridge

Primland Resort in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains isn't known for a wild nightlife scene but its on-site, 30-foot observatory dome draws an after-dark crowd. Equipped with computerized Celestron telescopes, guides lead guests on a half-hour "Star Walk" tour of the skies. Fall is ideal for spotting certain celestial bodies, said astronomy supervisor Lauren Peery, including "Saturn with its magnificent rings, Jupiter and its 'Galilean' moons, and our moon with its craters when it is above the horizon." *Rooms from \$550 a night, aubergeresorts.com*



Primland Resort in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains has its own on-site observatory.

PHOTO: PRIMLAND OBSERVATORY

Join the Crew in North Carolina

Crisp nights in the Outer Banks make for foolproof stargazing, according to Vermadel Nienstedt, member of Crystal Coast Stargazers, an astronomy club of over 40 members

based in Morehead City, N.C. Visitors can link up with the group for one of the frequent astronomy events around the Outer Banks (*check ccgazers.com for dates*). Bunk down at the Crews Inn, a historic B&B on Ocracoke Island whose wraparound porch makes a fine stargazing perch *Rooms from \$75 a night, thecrewsinn.com*

Lofty Goals in Sonoma

At the posh new Montage Healdsburg in California, the “Sky’s the Limit” package includes a private-jet transfer from the guests’ home anywhere in the U.S. to the resort, an astronomer-led tour of nearby Robert Ferguson Observatory and a photo session with an astrophotographer, plus two nights in the Presidential Suite and a cheffy meal. The price tag is suitably astronomical—\$95,000 for up to six guests. For a more earthbound fee (*\$415 for 2 to 15*), guests can opt just for a private tour of the observatory. *Rooms from \$1,295 a night, montagehotels.com*



The presidential suite at the Montage Healdsburg in California’s Wine Country.

PHOTO: CHRISTIAN HORAN

Cut-Above Camping in Utah

At Yonder Escalante, a new glamping resort in Southern Utah, the stargazing is the do-it-yourself variety. But at a place this far removed from light pollution—it’s surrounded by national parks and monuments—it won’t be tough to make out the constellations on your own. When you’re not surveying the skies, Yonder Escalante offers plenty of creature comforts, including accommodations in vintage Airstreams, decked out in midcentury furniture as well as private fire pits, a pool and a drive-in theater. *From \$195 a night, stayyonder.com*

Casual Observation in Maine

About a 30 minute drive north of Portland, the Blueberry Pond Observatory in the town of Pownal invites visitors to peek through its unconventional, fold-down dome. Thurston Searfoss, founder and director of the observatory, leads two-hour private tours for aficionados and newbies. “It’s relaxing,” Mr. Searfoss said of stargazing. “And, the celestial objects are quite beautiful.” Mr. Searfoss recommends peering first through the 12” telescope, then gawking at the celestial objects through the digital camera lens attachment before snapping away—a keepsake that sure beats a blurry smartphone pic.

From \$140 for two, blueberryobservatory.com

You can spend the night at Harraseeket Inn, in Freeport, Maine, a five-minute drive away. The inn’s L. L. Bean guest house, is a historic, three-bedroom abode. *From \$270 a night,*

harraseeketinn.com

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