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WHERE TO ...

Be starstruck

With astrotourism on the rise, the vistas at these accredited Dark Sky hotspots will have you seeing stars.



22 virgin australia

1. RIVER MURRAY, SA

Australia's shiny new International Dark Sky Reserve (above) hugs the curves of the Murray River, an easy 90-minute drive from Adelaide. Join the Big Bend By Night tour to gawp at the Milky Way from Big Bend's soaring cliffs before bush camping; or rent a houseboat to catch the nightly show as you float along the mighty Murray.

2. MACKENZIE REGION, NEW ZEALAND

Some of the Southern Hemisphere's most glorious night skies await in the Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve (left). Tekapo Star Gazing tours combine a guided stargaze with a float in the balmy Tekapo Springs, while Dark Sky Project works with Mt John Observatory to help guests ponder the great celestial dome.

3. PIC DU MIDI, FRANCE

Efforts to banish light pollution over the Pyrénées helped Pic du Midi become the first Dark Sky Reserve in Europe (an honour bestowed by the International Dark-Sky Association).

A cable car whisks visitors to the literally breathtaking Pic du Midi Observatory. Book a stay in Europe's highest hotel (at 2877m) to stargaze at the observatory used to map the moon for NASA's Apollo Missions.

4. WARRUMBUNGLE NATIONAL PARK, NSW

Shaped by an ancient volcano, the craggy ranges of Warrumbungle offer truly stellar Milky Way views. This region, north of Dubbo, became Australia's first Dark Sky Park in 2016 – camp out to see why. Science buffs should visit in October, when Siding Spring Observatory throws StarFest to offer insight into its pioneering work.

5. DEATH VALLEY, US

Despite being within reach of Las Vegas' glow, Death Valley is home to the largest Dark Sky Park in the US. The Las Vegas Astronomical Society throws regular 'star parties' here, and rangers lead stargazing tours from November to April. Rub shoulders with stars of another ilk at The Inn at Death Valley – a desert oasis once favoured by Marlon Brando and Clark Gable.

Photos: SATC / Ben Goode, Tourism NZ / Julian Apse