

STARGAZING UNDER THE SOUTHERN SKIES

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It's the Winter Solstice on the 20th/21st of June! That's the day of the year that has the shortest amount of daylight, and longest amount of night-time in a 24 hour day.



The International Space Station circles the Earth every 90 minutes! If you have seen a bright star-like object moving fast across the night sky, you may have spotted it. It looks bright because sunlight is being reflected off its huge solar panel wings.



Mars is known as the 'red planet' as it is covered in iron oxide (rust). Can you see a hint of red when looking at Mars in the night sky?



Did you know that Saturn's magnificent rings are actually spinning chunks of rock and ice? Some of these chunks are as big as houses!



Have you ever looked up and seen that fuzzy white band across our night sky? It is called the Milky Way. The Milky Way is our Galaxy, and it contains 100-400 billion stars; our Sun is just one of those.



Jupiter is the largest planet in the Solar System. Nearly 1,400 Earth's could fit inside it!



There will be a Full Moon on the 5th/6th of June! To view it as it rises, look outside at sunset and face east - that's the opposite direction to where the Sun is setting



Mars has the largest volcano in the Solar System, called Olympus Mons. It is about three times higher than Mt Everest!



How can you tell if you are looking at a star or a planet? Stars are very far away from the Earth and twinkle, just like the words in the song, Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star! Planets don't twinkle like stars do and look like a constant or steady bright light in the sky.



How far can you see without a telescope? There are two fuzzy white patches in the sky called the Magellanic Clouds that you can only see from very dark places, away from the bright city lights. These are actually two small galaxies outside our own, over 150,000 light years away.



Sirius is the brightest star we can see from Earth, other than the sun of course! It's part of a constellation called Canis Major and during June can be seen low in the sky just after sunset in the west.



June is a great month for planet viewing! Three planets - Mars, Jupiter and Saturn - will be visible this month. Jupiter and Saturn will rise in the early evening, followed by Mars around midnight.



Scorpius is a great constellation to look for during the month of June. It is a constellation that looks like a scorpion. A bright red star called Antares is referred to as the heart of the scorpion because of its position and colour within the constellation.



On the 6th of June, there will be a lunar eclipse! But don't get your hopes too high - it's only a partial eclipse, and will be slightly visible in Africa and South America.



People across the world see different patterns or figures when looking at the stars that make up the Southern Cross. To some Maori cultures the stars look like an anchor, to some Indigenous Australians the stars look like a possum, and to some African cultures the stars look like multiple giraffes.

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