

Astronomy Week 2008

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Death Valley National Park
California/Nevada



Schedule of Events

- Monday, January 28th**
- 7:00 PM Evening Program. “Luna-cy.” Furnace Creek Visitor Center Auditorium. Join “Dark Ranger” Kevin Doxstater as he explores some of the myths, legends, and popular culture – along with a little of what we know (and even don’t know) about our nearest celestial neighbor – our Moon. Night sky observing follows the program (weather permitting) at the Furnace Creek Airport.
- 7:00 PM Ranger Talk. “Challenges of the Night Sky.” Mesquite Springs Campground Campfire Circle. Observing and understanding the stars in the sky has challenged people for centuries. Join Ranger Mike Fitz and Physical Scientist Dan Duriscoe to challenge your observation skills during this 45 minute talk followed by night sky observing (weather permitting) at the campfire circle.
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- Tuesday, January 29th**
- 10 AM—2 PM Solar Viewing at Scotty’s Castle. Death Valley is one of the hottest places on earth and the sun is the ultimate source of this area’s heat. When the sun is high in the sky, we can rarely appreciate its beauty. Safely view the sun through a special solar telescope at Scotty’s Castle at your convenience. Rangers will help you to look for sunspots and other features of the closest star to Earth.
- 2:00 PM Guided Walk. Walk of the Planets. The size of the universe is difficult to grasp. Comprehending that space begins with an understanding of the solar system. Join a ranger for an easy walk on Death Valley’s salt pan (conditions permitting) that explores the size and unique features of our solar system. Meet at “Lowest Point on the California Highway system” sign on HWY 190 5.7 miles west of Furnace Creek Visitor Center. Tennis shoes, sandals, or other flat soled shoes are required. 1 hr.
- 7:00 PM Evening Program. Star Talk. Furnace Creek Visitor Center Auditorium. Explore the starry skies to reach deeper into the beauty, precision, and inspiration of our universe with Ranger Bob Spoelhof. Short slide presentation followed by night sky viewing outside the auditorium in the employee parking lot. Bring a jacket and binoculars if you have them. Telescopes will be available, weather permitting.
- 7:00 PM Ranger Talk. “Challenges of the Night Sky.” Mesquite Springs Campground Campfire Circle. Observing and understanding the stars in the sky has challenged people for centuries. Join Ranger Mike Fitz and Physical Scientist Dan Duriscoe to challenge your observation skills during this 45 minute talk followed by night sky observing (weather permitting) at the campfire circle.
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- Wednesday, January 30th**
- 10 AM—2 PM Solar Viewing at Scotty’s Castle. Death Valley is one of the hottest places on earth and the sun is the ultimate source of this area’s heat. When the sun is high in the sky, we can rarely appreciate its beauty. Safely view the sun through a special solar telescope at Scotty’s Castle. Come and go as you please. Rangers will help you to look for sunspots and other features of the closest star to Earth.
- 6:00 PM Starlight Walk. Guided Walk. Enjoy the dark night sky of Death Valley. Sign up required at the FC Visitor Center beginning 8:00 am on the morning of the walk or call (760) 786-3244. Bring a small flashlight, jacket, and water. Short 1-mile round trip. 45 minutes.
- 7:00 PM Ranger Talk. Mesquite Springs Campfire Circle. Physical Scientist Dan Duriscoe will have his large binocular telescope available for public viewing at one of the darkest sites in the country, weather permitting. Look deep into the universe and backward in time millions of years in a wild and beautiful setting.
- 7:00 PM Evening Program. “Luna-cy.” Furnace Creek Visitor Center Auditorium. Join “Dark Ranger” Kevin Doxstater as he explores some of the myths, legends, and popular culture – along with a little of what we know (and even don’t know) about our nearest celestial neighbor – our Moon. Night sky observing follows the program (weather permitting) at the Furnace Creek Airport.
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- Thursday, January 31st**
- 10 AM—2 PM Solar Viewing at the Furnace Creek General Store. Death Valley is one of the hottest places on earth and the sun is the ultimate source of this area’s heat. When the sun is high in the sky, we can rarely appreciate its beauty. Safely view the sun through a special solar telescope near the Furnace Creek General Store. Come and go as you please. Rangers will help you to look for sunspots and other features of the closest star to Earth.
- 7 PM—11PM Night Observing. Furnace Creek Airport. Join Ranger Kevin Poe and Physical Scientist Dan Duriscoe for a tour of the night sky and observing through a variety of telescopes.

Friday, February 1st

- 10 AM—2 PM Solar Viewing at the Furnace Creek General Store. Death Valley is one of the hottest places on earth and the sun is the ultimate source of this area's heat. When the sun is high in the sky, we can rarely appreciate its beauty. Safely view the sun through a special solar telescope near the Furnace Creek General Store. Come and go as you please. Rangers will help you to look for sunspots and other features of the closest star to Earth.
- 3:00 PM Ranger Walk. Walk of the Planets. The size of the universe is difficult to grasp. Comprehending that space begins with an understanding of the solar system. Join a ranger for an easy walk on Death Valley's salt pan (conditions permitting) that explores the size and unique features of our solar system. 1 hr. Meet at "Lowest Point on the California Highway system" sign on HWY 190 5.7 miles west of Furnace Creek Visitor Center.
- 7:00 PM Evening Program. "Dark Wars." Furnace Creek Auditorium. Accompany "Dark Ranger" Kevin Poe for a tour of the battlefield between artificial light and natural darkness—a struggle where the fate of astronomy, nocturnal animals, and even human health hangs in the balance.
- 8:00 PM Night Observing. Furnace Creek Airport. You are welcome to join rangers and members of the Las Vegas Astronomical Society in observing the night sky through a variety of telescopes.
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Saturday, February 2nd

- 10 AM—2 PM Solar Viewing at the Furnace Creek General Store. Death Valley is one of the hottest places on earth and the sun is the ultimate source of this area's heat. When the sun is high in the sky, we can rarely appreciate its beauty. Safely view the sun through a special solar telescope near the Furnace Creek General Store. Come and go as you please. Members of the Las Vegas Astronomical Society will help you to look for sunspots and other features of the closest star to Earth.
- 11:00 AM Guided Walk. "The Mars/Death Valley Connection." Entrance to Artist's Drive. Physical Scientist Dan Duriscoe leads a walk to the top of "Ventifact Ridge" from which you can view landforms closely resembling those seen on the Martian surface. A brief introduction to the science of Planetology and life in extreme environments. ½ mile, 1 hour.
- 2:00 PM Ranger Walk. Walk of the Planets. The size of the universe is difficult to grasp. Comprehending that space begins with an understanding of the solar system. Join a ranger for an easy walk on Death Valley's salt pan (conditions permitting) that explores the size and unique features of our solar system. Meet at "Lowest Point on the California Highway system" sign on HWY 190 5.7 miles west of Furnace Creek Visitor Center. 1 hr.
- 3:30 PM "Afternoon Tea and Astronomy" at the Oasis Room, Furnace Creek Inn. John Heller describes the bright features of the winter night sky. A fee is charged for food and beverages.
- 6:30 PM Outdoor Evening Program. "Wonders of the Winter Sky." Furnace Creek Airport. Bring a folding chair or pad to recline on and a pair of binoculars and receive a tour of the winter night sky. John Heller of Las Vegas Astronomical Society and Physical Scientist Dan Duriscoe will point out and describe some of the brightest and most easily seen deep sky objects. 30 minutes.
- 7:30 PM Indoor Evening Program. "America, the Beautiful, at Night." Furnace Creek Auditorium. Join award winning astrophotographer Wally Pacholka for a presentation of his outstanding images. A longtime southern California amateur astronomer, Mr. Pacholka has compiled a photographic view of the astonishingly clear night skies as seen over some of America's greatest national parks and landmarks. 1 hr.
- 7 PM—11 PM Star Party and Night Observing. Furnace Creek Airport. You are welcome to join rangers and members of the Las Vegas Astronomical Society in observing the night sky through a variety of telescopes.
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Be Prepared! A Note on Weather and Night Outdoor Programs

While Death Valley's climate is typically rather mild in winter, the weather is very changeable. Wind, rather than temperature, is the biggest challenge during evening outdoor activities. Even a slight breeze can turn an enjoyable evening into a struggle to keep warm. Before attending any of the night outdoor programs, be sure you are prepared with layered and wind resistant clothing. Winds in excess of 15 mph will most likely result in drastically shortened or cancelled night observing. Clouds may not necessarily preclude observing, but any precipitation will result in a cancellation of an evening outdoor activity.