

# Enjoying space on Earth

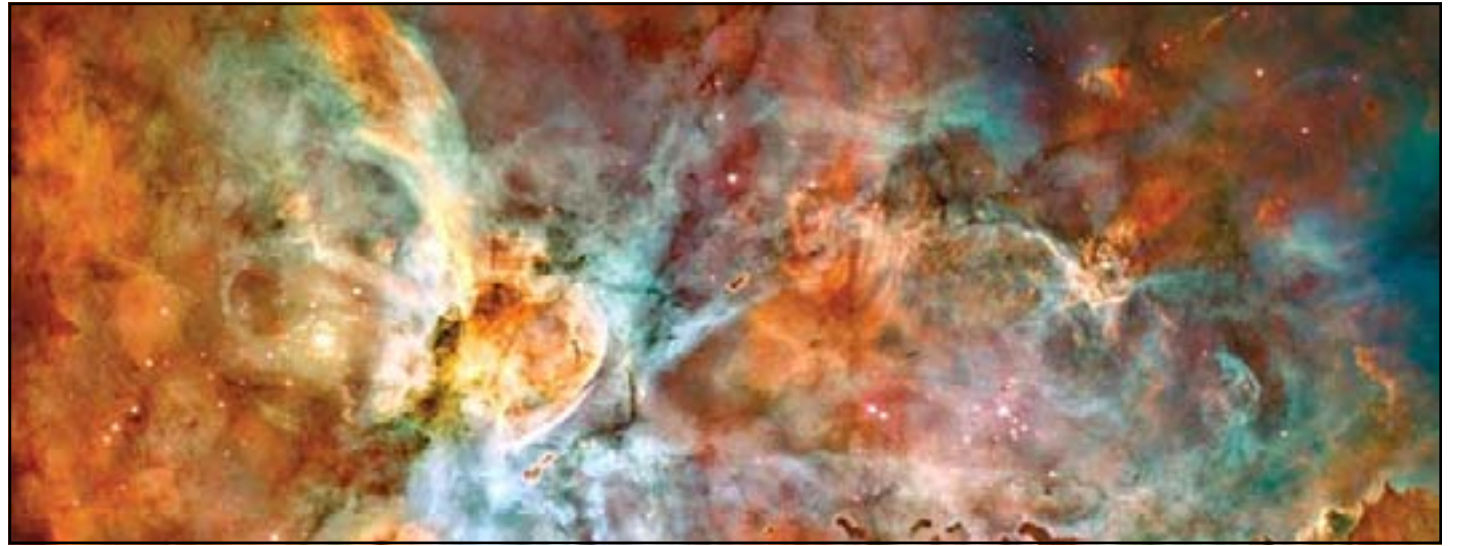


PHOTO COURTESY NASA

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Exploding nebulas.  
Bursting stars.  
And endless black holes.  
Oh what the thought of space and all of its mysteries do to me.

Just the mere thought of the star encrusted heavens and its infinite planets, galaxies and universe launches me into a lather.

Since my tender years I have dreamed and tried to will myself into outer space. To imagine the beauty and marvels of a space so foreign and alien to anything we can even comprehend is awe-inspiring.

Yes folks I admit I fantasized about being Jodi Foster's character in the movie Contact. But I bet I am not alone.

How many of you ever dreamed of going to space and trekking through the Milky Way or discovering some remote galaxy? And if that's a bit out there, many of you have at least wanted to get a better idea of what's really in the heavens.

In case you are wondering - it does not matter whether you have a fat wallet or just a few bucks - anyone can enjoy space.

And with August being a hot month for viewing space launches, the red planet Mars and the Perseid meteor showers now is a great time to grab the hubby, wife, kids, friends, pets, pet rock or whatever makes you happy and revel in the beauty and scientific wonders above us.

Florida-Weekly has put together an exclusive package of ways you can enjoy space from the comforts of your own backyard to flying as a civilian to space.

For starters the Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium in Fort Myers - the only planetarium in Southwest Florida - has about a dozen space related programs and events throughout the year. For under \$30 a family of four can watch timely space programs about topics such as Mars, and the stars visible for local viewing.

Programs like Skies over Southwest Florida highlight the area's starry assets, said planetarium director Carole Holmberg. Another show discusses the nine planets and the controversy of whether Pluto is a planet or not. There is a space show everyday except major holidays at 2 p.m.

The Nature Center's mission is to promote education about earth and space to the public, Holmberg said.

The planetarium also sponsors other programs such as telescope observations at the Center and in the community.

For those of you on a budget wanting to get a little spacey and maybe see some heavenly bodies, the planetarium is holding a telescope-observing event on Aug. 24 at the Caloosahatchee Regional Park in Alva.

Folks coming to the evening event are asked to bring a blanket or something to sit on and comfortable clothes in case it gets chilly. Telescopes will be available. Cost is \$1 per carload and guests are asked to use the north entrance of the park. With any luck viewers will be able to see the Perseid meteor showers set to fall at this time of the month, Holmberg said.

And at 8 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 12 anyone who wants to learn about using a telescope

This is a 50-light-year-wide view of the central region of the Carina Nebula where a maelstrom of star birth - and death - is taking place. Taken from the Hubble telescope.



PHOTO COURTESY NASA

**The Space Shuttle Discovery makes a night landing at Kennedy Space Center.**

or just observing through one can come to the center. Though the event is free reservations are required.

Holmberg said that learning about space is both interesting and important.

"Sometimes things that happen out there affect us here," she said.

And with all of the new space age discov-



PHOTO COURTESY NASA

**Ride into space on The Shuttle Launch Experience at the Kennedy Space Center.**

eries there seems to be no better time than now to learn about what lies out there.

"I think we live in amazing times," Holmberg said. "We're just a small part of the universe."

With that in mind here is guide to seeing the stars and space. Happy trails. ■



## Places to experience space:

>>**Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium**, 3450 Ortiz Ave., Fort Myers. Admission to the Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium is \$8 for adults and \$5 for children (ages 3-12). This one-price admission includes the Museum, Trails, and all Planetarium Shows scheduled that day. No charge for children under age 3. Hours are Monday-Saturday 9 to 5 and Sunday 11 to 5. For more information, call 239-275-3435.

>>**Kennedy Space Center**, from the Orlando International Airport, take SR 528 (KSC Highway) east and follow signs. Take SR 407 until it dead-ends into SR 405 and turn right. Continue to follow signs. From Interstate 95, take exit #212 (old 78 exit) if heading northbound, and exit #215 (old 79 exit) if heading southbound.

The Kennedy Space Center is considered America's busiest launch and landing facility. Watch the entire process from the extensive preparation to a launch, to a breathtaking landing. There are three orbiters in the NASA Space Shuttle fleet - Discovery, Atlantis and Endeavour. Interactive space activities such as space flight simulators are also available.

## Adventurous space experiences:

>>For a total spacey experience check out [www.gozerog.com](http://www.gozerog.com). Here you can train with an expert coach, board the specially modified aircraft, **G-FORCE ONE**, and experience zero gravity without going to space. Parabolic flight is the same method NASA has used to train its astronauts for the last 45 years and the same way Tom Hanks floated in Apollo 13. Though the cost is about \$3,000 per person, the experience will let you feel like you are in space. Customers experience true weightlessness and float about the cabin.

>>Commercial space travel is becoming more of a reality than a fantasy. In 2004 civilian vessel **SpaceShipOne** took off and hit outer space. More commercial space ships are on the horizon. For more information, check out [www.scaled.com](http://www.scaled.com).

## Space videos and movies:

- >>PBS - The Creation of the Universe
- >>Apollo 13
- >>The Right Stuff
- >>The Dish - an Australian movie
- >>And, just for fun; The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Universe

## Magazines:

- >>Astronomy
- >>Sky and Telescope

## Astronomy

>>For folks looking to learn about telescopes and make spacey friends check out the Southwest Florida Astronomical Society. The Web site is [www.theeyepiece.org](http://www.theeyepiece.org).

PHOTO COURTESY NASA