

## Why astro tourism?

- Durham has a number of Dark Sky Discovery Sites on its doorstep
- You do not need to change your business model – simply include dark sky friendly alongside your business description in your promotional material
- Information is readily available
- Helps supports the rural economy and encourages visits during off-peak times



## Dark Sky Discovery Sites

Parts of the county have some of the darkest skies in England, making it one of the best places in the country for stargazing.

There are currently 12 Dark Sky Discovery Sites across Durham;

1. Balderhead Reservoir
2. Bowlees Visitor Centre
3. Burnhope Reservoir
4. Cow Green Reservoir
5. Derwent Reservoir - Millshields
6. Grassholme Reservoir
7. Hamsterley Forest
8. Hury Reservoir
9. Parkhead Station
10. Pow Hill Country Park
11. Selset Reservoir
12. Tan Hill Inn





# Your business offer

Dark sky tourism is an increasingly popular market and helps support tourism in rural areas at off peak times (October to March).

You can quickly and easily enhance your offer from the traditional peak market.

Photo: Gary Lintern

## Welcoming stargazers

### Equipment

All you need to get started is a pair of binoculars and some basic information on stargazing, including star maps that your guests can have access to. It doesn't have to be expensive or top of the range.

If you can stargaze from your property, you could provide a designated viewing area on-site with appropriate outside lighting which should be minimal but still ensure the safety of guests.

### Facilities

Find out what each dark Dark Sky Discovery Site has to offer. Is there access to toilets? Is there somewhere to get something to eat and drink?

### Lighting

External lighting should be well shielded so that light points down where it's needed. Try using less powerful, low wattage, lights or consider whether you need external lighting at all. Guidance on dark sky friendly lighting is available at [www.britastro.org/dark-skies](http://www.britastro.org/dark-skies).

### Access to Wi-Fi

Guests may want to use apps and websites to track and log information during their visit.

### Pre-arrival information

Provide guests with a check-list of what to bring to enjoy the night skies e.g warm clothing, red light torches.

### During visit

Provide information: leaflets, star charts, reference books, websites, ipads and apps.

Promote stargazing activities and events via your promotional channels, this may bring additional business to you.

### Be flexible

Guests may arrive back late at night and may want a late breakfast the next day. Can you accommodate this?

### Events

There are a number of stargazing events held across the season. Keep up to date with when and where they are taking place. This information can be used pre and post arrival.



## Best times to observe


Mid-summer nights don't get properly dark. From early May to late July you won't see many stars. During the rest of the year the only obstacles are the weather and the moon. The moon is obviously a wonderful object to view through a telescope or using binoculars but the light it reflects will wash out the fainter stars. The best starry nights are to be found in the new moon period. Spring is a great time to view brighter galaxies and planets like Jupiter and Saturn. Autumn is a prime viewing time – nights are properly dark and the Milky Way is overhead in the evening, resembling a shimmering river of stars. Meteor showers like the Leonids put a good show on in November. Winter is the best time – the sky is at its most transparent as temperatures dip.



## The North Pennines

The area is one of England's darkest places. The North Pennines AONB & UNESCO Global Geopark is recognised as the darkest mainland AONB in the country. In the North Pennines you'll see thousands of stars overhead compared to only a handful in towns and cities. You'll see the Milky Way in all its glory, along with distant galaxies and sparkling star clusters and more Dark Sky Discovery Sites than anywhere else in the UK.

Dark sky friendly   
**Durham**

Make  
your  
business  
dark sky  
friendly 

Visit County Durham has developed a charter mark to recognise businesses that support stargazing tourism.

For more information and to apply for this self-assessment process [visitcountydurham.com/darkskies](https://visitcountydurham.com/darkskies).



## Supporting the rural economy

- ★ The nature of stargazing means visitors from outside of the area often stay overnight.
- ★ Overnight visitors spend on average 8 times more than day visitors.
- ★ Stargazing starts in the evening and visitors often incorporate this activity with eating out. Familiarise yourself with the opening times of local eateries or provide a stargazing menu.



There are a number of sources of information about the location of sites, what can be seen and what events are taking place. Familiarise yourself with these so you can pass on dark sky discovery information to guests.

[www.thisisdurham.com/inspire-me/short-break-ideas/darkskies](http://www.thisisdurham.com/inspire-me/short-break-ideas/darkskies)

[www.northpennines.org.uk/exploring/stargazing/](http://www.northpennines.org.uk/exploring/stargazing/)

[www.explorenorthpennines.org.uk/recreation-opportunity/stargazing](http://www.explorenorthpennines.org.uk/recreation-opportunity/stargazing)

[www.northpenobservatory.org.uk](http://www.northpenobservatory.org.uk)

## Hints and tips

1

Using a red-light helps you see more when you are viewing, preserving night vision.

2

Stargazing doesn't have to be an organised activity – thousands of stars can be seen from a pristine night sky and can be seen from some of the more remote areas.

3

Stars are best seen when the moon is not full as its brightness makes the fainter stars hard to see.

4

Wrap up warm – stargazing can be a chilly activity.