



Making the Most of Dark Skies Tourism: Cumbria Tourism Business Toolkit

As the UK gives way to darker nights, the Lake District, Cumbria is an ideal location from which to spend the days exploring the famous landscape, and the nights admiring the beauty of the heavens.

According to light pollution maps issued by the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the Lake District, Cumbria is one of the best places in England for a star-gazing getaway. The National Park and our designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, along with surrounding areas across the county offer a number of locations perfect for a night of stargazing, with many businesses already prepared to reap the benefits.

The Lake District, Cumbria easily outshines the city lights for a memorable autumn or winter holiday, with thousands of stars visible on a clear night – complimented by part of our own galaxy The Milky Way, which majestically stretches across the night sky. Meanwhile, vantage points near large towns or cities serve-up just an average of around 100 stars visible to the naked eye due to the intrusive nature of countless streetlamps and other urban light sources.

As a Cumbrian tourism business, we want you to join Cumbria Tourism and our partners in promoting our amazing dark skies to your audiences, both old and new, and for your business to benefit from the value of dark skies tourism.





Advantages of Dark Skies Tourism

- ✓ Supports Cumbria's rural economy by extending the season and promotes winter tourism during traditionally quieter periods (October to March)
- ✓ Encourages longer dwell time due to the nature of stargazing activities which take place during the evening, therefore boosting overnight stays and increasing spend
- ✓ Research shows there is a demand for stargazing breaks; 23% of domestic audience would consider stargazing as a holiday activity in England (VisitEngland, 2017)
- ✓ Inspires visits to locations across the county which visitors may not have visited before and explore off the beaten track
- ✓ Stargazing is accessible to a wide audience (families, empty nesters etc.) due to the variety of experiences available, therefore gives the opportunity to enhance your offer quickly and easily from the traditional peak market
- ✓ Opportunity for tourism businesses to provide new and exciting enriching products and packages, giving visitors the chance to explore our region in an immersive way they can both see and do - more reasons for visitors to book with you!
- ✓ Provides new ways for visitors to fulfil their desire to explore the outdoors and getting closer to nature. Cumbria Tourism's visitor survey research from May/June 2020 revealed that 94% felt that a visit to the Lake District, Cumbria, would improve their physical and mental wellbeing
- ✓ Easy to implement in your product offering and market across your channels, particularly so during these challenging times where stargazing can be approached with social distancing in mind

What Time of Year?

Stargazing offers the perfect winter activity, generally from October through to March, helping to extend the season and give a boost to tourism during this traditionally quieter time of year. As the night sky is continually changing, stargazing at different times of the year will mean that you have the chance to spot seasonal constellations.

Winter is the optimum time to enjoy the darkest skies and has the advantage that children do not need to stay up late to participate in stargazing activities.

Top Tip: Witnessing a meteor shower is an incredible experience. Look out for the Quadrantids every January.

Summer nights are, of course warmer. However, the skies don't really get fully dark in June and July.

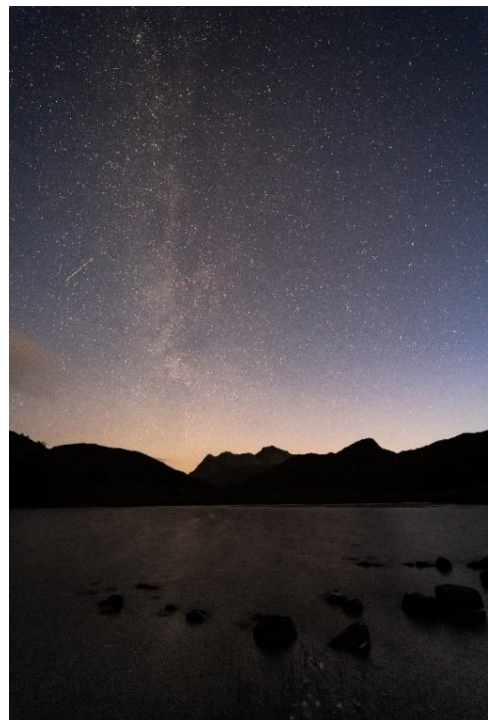
Top Tip: The Perseids meteor shower can be seen from July 17 to August 24, but peaks on August 12.

Spring is a great time for stargazing. The weather is warming up but there are still long hours of darkness.

Top Tip: In spring you can still see Orion and the stick figures of Gemini on a clear night.

Autumn, like spring, is a good time for mild nights but offers plenty of after dark hours.

Top Tip: The Milky Way is best seen in Autumn when it is high overhead and spans much of the sky.





Dark Sky Friendly Sites

According to Cumbria Tourism's visitor research, 90% said they would rather visit somewhere rural than a city/urban destination (May/June 2020) and with Cumbria's lack of light pollution, this is major marketing tool to show why we are perfect destination to enjoy the stars.

We are truly spoilt for choice when it comes to places to see the stars. The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) & UNESCO Global Geopark is the darkest mainland AONB and recognised as one of the darkest places in England.

Here are just some of the locations across Cumbria as displayed on gostargazing.co.uk/ and www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk/ which are good for stargazing, offering visitors the opportunity to discover new areas which they may not be as familiar with and to explore off the beaten track. There are of course many more locations, therefore make sure to check which are the best spots close by to you. If you are making recommendations to guests, then make sure the site is accessible with car parking available and let them know of any facilities such as toilets that are nearby.

Allan Bank, Grasmere (Orion class*)

Blea Tarn Car Park

Bowness Knott Car Park

Crummock Water Car Park

Grizedale Forest, Forestry England

Low Gillerthwaite Field Centre, Ennerdale (Milky Way class*)

RSPB Geltsdale - Clesketts Car Park (Milky Way class*)

Trinity School Observatory, Carlisle

Wasdale Head Car Park

Whinlatter Forest, Forestry England

**Denotes Dark Sky Discovery Site Status*

At "Orion" sites, the seven main stars in the winter constellation Orion are visible to the naked eye and would usually refer to being away from, or shielded from, bright lights such as street lights, security lights or approaching car lights.

"Milky Way" sites are locations where the Milky Way is visible to the naked eye and are much darker sites found only in more rural areas.





Hints and Tips...

Here are some handy hints and tips to consider when developing and marketing your businesses dark sky offer.

Friendly checklist for your guests and visitors

Imagine yourself taking part in a stargazing trip, what would help you enjoy a magical night under the stars? Most stargazing activities and events take place outdoors during winter season when it's cooler, therefore make sure to let visitors know what they will need to bring with them; scarves, gloves, a warm hat, sensible footwear, red-light torch for map reading, binoculars and your favourite flask, for example.

Equipment & little extras

There's no need to fork out on expensive or top of the range equipment for your guests to experience our dark skies. Whilst the naked eye can explore the night sky, providing binoculars or a telescope allows for detail. You could even designate an area for stargazing which offers minimal outdoor lighting, but enough to keep your guests safe. As your eyes can take up to 20 minutes to fully adapt to night-time vision, perhaps you could provide folding chairs, blankets, even flasks to make hot drinks to stay warm and comfortable.

Supply your guests with star maps, charts and make recommendations for apps which they can access on iPads or mobile phones. SkyView® Lite, to give an example, is available to download free of charge from Google Play and Apple's App Store. If guests are bringing a laptop, they could try Stellarium - a free open source planetarium for their computer showing a realistic sky in 3D.

Provide access to the internet

Make sure your business offers good Wi-Fi to enable your guests to access websites and apps, as well as to upload their best photos showing their stargazing experience to social media sites in an instant.

#thepperfectplacetobe

THE PERFECT PLACE TO STARGAZE

THE LINGHOLM ESTATE, PORTINSCALE, KESWICK

Photo © Peter Wilkinson

Visit Lake District, Cumbria BOOK YOUR STAY AT VISITLAKEDISTRICT.COM

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THE ENGLISH LAKE DISTRICT
WORLD HERITAGE SITE



Offer your guests flexibility

If your guests are attending an evening stargazing activity, this could mean that they return to their accommodation later in the evening. If you can offer a later breakfast the following morning and even the option for a later checkout, then make sure to highlight this. Also, if you offer evening catering, could you be more flexible on when your guests can dine, either before or after their stargazing activity?

Utilise your communication channels

The great thing about dark skies tourism is that you do not need to change your business model. Simply include 'Dark Sky Friendly' information and clear labelling alongside your existing information – or even better consider building an extra page on your website. If your business is offering stargazing breaks or running dark skies activities and events, then make sure that you are sharing this with your audience and shout about them across your channels.

If you aren't able to offer stargazing on-site, then point out sites close by which are good for good for stargazing. When doing this, make sure to let your visitors know how to get there and what facilities are available, such as carparking, toilets, food and drink.

Outdoor lighting

If external lighting at your venue is required, ensure the lighting is fully shielded, shining downwards and avoiding upward glare. Look at whether you could be using less powerful, lower wattage lights. Alternatively, make your lighting controls easy to operate – labelling it as a dark skies feature.

Don't forget to look down as well as up

Guided by the light of the stars, don't forget to encourage your guests to look down and see the thriving wildlife in their natural habitat. Nocturnal creatures flourish under dark skies without artificial light confusing their natural behaviours.

Work with other businesses and members of the stargazing community

Promote stargazing activities and events via your promotional channels which may bring additional business to you. Keep up to date with organised stargazing events and gatherings and offer guests the opportunity to join off-site stargazing adventures.



Events & Festivals

Local festivals provide the perfect opportunity to run and promote your own events. The Cumbria Dark Skies Festival takes place in February whilst the North Pennines and Yorkshire Dales Stargazing Festivals are held in October half term and offers audiences the chance to learn about the stars and experience the wonder of dark skies.

Hosting your own stargazing events is a great way to help your guests and visitors learn more about Cumbria's dark skies in an engaging and immersive way. Develop connections with local astronomers and experts in the field who could deliver events, walks and talks at your venue.

If you do not currently have the facilities or resources to run an event on your premises, then consider partnership opportunities with local attractions, activity and accommodation providers to collaborate and run a series of events with. Working collectively will also help to market the event to a wider audience and offers valuable opportunities for cross promotion.



Here are a few event ideas that you could consider:

Introduction to dark skies: stargazing walk

Organise an easy night-time stroll under the cover of darkness to really soak up the wonders of Cumbria's dark skies, providing advice on how to keep safe and warm and pointing out the perfect places to view the stars.

Dine and Stargaze Packages

Wrap up warm for an al fresco experience under the stars then let your guests enjoy a hearty meal afterwards.

Astronomy or Space talks

Give visitors more of an insight into what's above them by hosting an expert in the field, or an enthusiastic amateur!

Night-time art events and installations

Arrange a night viewing for arts and installations and give visitors the chance to experience a new perspective.

Astro-Photography Workshops

Perfect for keen night-time photographers, give visitors a chance to brush up on their photography skills and snap the perfect long exposure by arranging stargazing photography classes.

Marketing Your Event

Showcasing events and things to do is a great way to encourage visitors to plan ahead and book their break. Utilise your channels (website, social media, newsletters etc.) to promote your events and keep your audience engaged as to what you have planned for the upcoming season.

Remember if you are running a stargazing event, these can be promoted on visitlakedistrict.com's 'What's On' section. To submit your event, please complete the events form: www.visitlakedistrict.com/information/submit-event



Resources and Further Information:

Information on where to stargaze and events local to you:

gostargazing.co.uk/

www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk/

Friends of the Lake District Dark Skies Discovery Pack:

www.friendsofthelakedistrict.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=4ed0234d-0012-4378-ba34-afc9e08fdd8c

Festivals (*please note this section will continue to be updated*):

www.NorthPenninesStarFest.org.uk

www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/whats-on/virtual-dark-skies-week/

<https://www.visitlakedistrict.com/explore/dark-sky-cumbria/cumbria-dark-skies-festival>