

DESTINATIONS

AUSTRALASIA | DARK SKY EXPERIENCES



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From immersive festivals to astronomy tours, **India-Jayne Trainor** explores the solar system in the southern hemisphere



STARGAZE IN NEW ZEALAND

Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve is the largest in the southern hemisphere. Located on New Zealand's South Island, this protected area encompasses Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park and the Mackenzie Basin, with clear and dark skies. Guests on this G Adventures tour head out for an evening of stargazing, guided by astronomy experts with powerful telescopes, plus there's the chance to try astrophotography to capture the moment forever.

Book it: G Adventures' 12-day Discover New Zealand tour starts from £4,299, including 11 nights' accommodation, transport and a Tekapo Dark Sky experience. Excludes international flights. gadventures.com

JOIN A DARK SKY FESTIVAL

Australia's secluded Lord Howe Island, a short flight from Sydney, will host its second dark sky festival next May. Visitors can enjoy astronomy talks, astrophotography workshops, yoga under the stars and a children's rocket science workshop. There are also telescope sessions with local experts, who help identify celestial bodies, plus dining, live music and dancing.

Book it: Gold Medal offers an 18-night tailor-made trip to Australia, including four nights on Lord Howe Island, from £8,099 per person for a May 9, 2026, departure, including Qatar Airways and Qantas flights from Gatwick, car hire and all accommodation. goldmedal.co.uk



WATCH DRONES LIGHT UP THE SKY IN THE RED CENTRE

The Wintjiri Wiru After Dark experience at Uluru is a light-and-sound show telling the story of the Anangu people, using drones, lasers and projections. Each October, more than 1,200 drones illuminate the night sky against the backdrop of Uluru, accompanied by storytelling and a gourmet picnic with Australian wines.

Book it: Kuoni has an 11-night Australia's Icons tour, from £3,406, with Qantas flights from Heathrow, domestic flights, accommodation and the Wintjiri Wiru After Dark Experience. Departs September 24. kuoni.co.uk

SEE STARS ON SCREEN AND SKY

At the Hermitage Hotel in Aoraki/Mount Cook, a planetarium screen (pictured) recreates New Zealand's night sky. Guests see the Southern Cross and other constellations, photos from Nasa's James Webb Space Telescope and watch a presentation followed by a Q&A with an astronomer, which can be paired with stargazing walks in the Dark Sky Reserve.

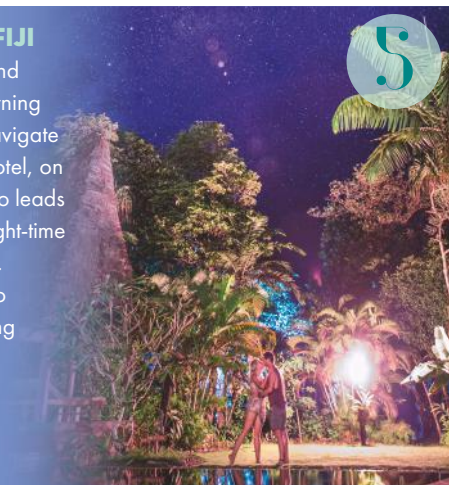
Book it: First Class Holidays has a 16-night itinerary to New Zealand from £5,970, with return economy flights from Heathrow to Christchurch and accommodation (including two nights at The Hermitage with Big Sky Stargazing), plus car hire, for an April 17, 2026, departure. fcholidays.com



LEARN CELESTIAL NAVIGATION IN FIJI

Guests at Nanuku Resort in Fiji can view stars and planets through a high-powered telescope, learning how Fijians have used the stars and Moon to navigate the Pacific Ocean for thousands of years. The hotel, on a 500-acre estate, has a celestial concierge who leads sessions in cultural storytelling, astronomy and night-time boat trips to demonstrate navigation techniques.

Book it: Anzcro offers a seven-night itinerary to Fiji from £5,399 based on two sharing, including return flights from Heathrow to Nadi, three nights at Nanuku Resort and private transfers, for departures in February and March 2026. anzcro.co.uk



PICTURES: Shutterstock/Lin4pic; Gavin Heatherington-Tait; Tourism NT/Ray Reyes Voyages; Nanuku Resort