

Mobile Dark Skies Photography Guide



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almost heaven

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While professional cameras are great for capturing high-quality photos, with simple adjustments, modern smartphones can also snap beautiful dark-sky shots! Explore the guidance below to show off your West Virginia starry getaway today with the perfect photo.

GET STARTED WITH THESE SIMPLE STEPS



CHOOSING A LOCATION

The best spots for dark sky photography are those with very little light. Luckily, West Virginia is full of wide-open spaces surrounded by rugged mountain beauty and far away from light pollution. Known for having some of the clearest skies east of the Mississippi, West Virginia has three official Dark Sky Parks designated by the International Dark-Sky Association: Watoga State Park, Calvin Price State Forest and Droop Mountain Battlefield State Park. These are designated places for stargazing but dark skies can be found all across the Mountain State.



TIMING YOUR SHOOT

While the star-studded skies of Almost Heaven are stunning 365 days out of the year, certain times within the phases of the moon allow for better dark sky photography. The moon can create too much light and overpower the sparkling stars, so four days before or after a new moon is considered to be the best time to get a starry shot. Hoping to capture the moon in your photo? During a full moon, dusk is the best time to nail your shot.



PLANNING YOUR SHOT

There are many apps that allow you to plan your astro shot; our photographers recommend PhotoPills. These exciting augmented reality tools can help you angle your shot in the perfect direction – and they customize to your specific location and the time of your shoot.



EXECUTING THE SHOT

The perfect settings for capturing your dark sky shot vary from device to device! Check out the step-by-step guidelines below, available for both Apple and Samsung devices.

Photo tip > Be sure to turn off your automatic flash to capture the best photo.

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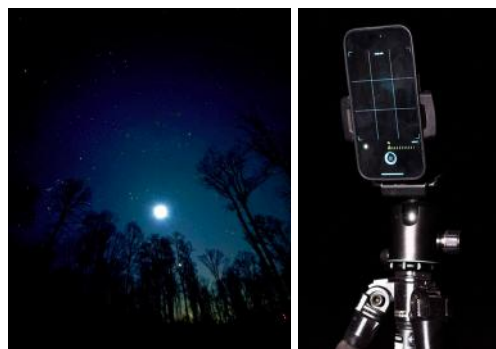
APPLE USERS

STEP 1: If you have a PRO model iPhone, start by turning on ProRAW. If not, skip to step 2. To take photos with ProRAW, go to Settings > Camera > Formats, then turn on Apple ProRAW under Photo Capture. To take a ProRAW photo, tap RAW in the Camera app, then take your shot. ProRaw will give you the max detail in your photo, from your iPhone's sensor.

STEP 2: Navigate to your camera app to adjust the shutter speed. Most iPhone models have a setting called "Night Mode" which is best to use for dark sky photography. When you take a photo in Night mode, a number appears next to the Night mode icon to indicate how long the shot will take. To try longer Night mode photos, tap the arrow above the viewfinder. Tap the Night mode button that appears below the viewfinder, then use the slider above the shutter button to choose Max, which adjusts the shutter speed. When you take the photo, the slider becomes a timer that counts down to the end of the capture time. With newer iPhone models you can set the shutter speed up to 30 seconds, which will help you get the best shot possible.

STEP 3: The goal of astrophotography is to achieve zero motion as the photo is being taken. A tripod isn't a must but is very helpful - or get creative propping your phone on rocks, signs etc.

STEP 4: Set the photo timer to 3 or 10 seconds so that once you trigger the shot, all vibration has subsided and you can capture the most steady shot. Once you take your shot, make sure to keep the phone still as possible until the photo has finished capturing the image, especially for longer exposures.



SAMSUNG USERS

STEP 1: Open the camera app on your smartphone.

STEP 2: Within the camera app on your smartphone, tap on "More" or "Mode" to open additional camera settings.

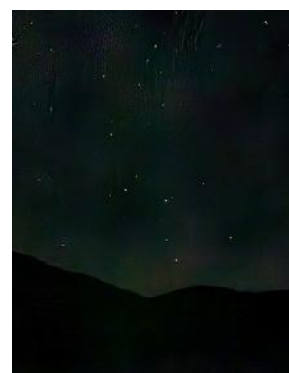
STEP 3: Select "Pro" mode to adjust settings manually. Note: Some smartphone models have additional modes that automatically adjust for nighttime and dark sky shooting.

STEP 4: Tap on "Shutter" to adjust the shutter speed. The appropriate shutter speed will depend on how much ambient light is in the sky. Darker scenes require longer shutter speeds. 20-30 seconds is recommended for most scenes.

STEP 5: The goal of astrophotography is to achieve zero motion as the photo is being taken. A tripod isn't a must but is very helpful - or get creative propping your phone on rocks, signs etc.

STEP 6: Press the shutter button to start the exposure. After the exposure begins, be sure not to move or shake the smartphone until the exposure has completed.

STEP 7: If a brighter photo is desired, you can increase the camera's sensitivity by tapping "ISO" and increasing it by 2-3 steps.



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EDITING YOUR SHOT

The perfect adjustments to any photo will vary based on the shot and your personal preference, but the below resources are a great place to start.

CUSTOM INSTAGRAM FILTER

Scan the QR code or click the link below to use our pre-built Instagram filter. This will make editing your photo a breeze!



WV Dark Skies Dramatic

bit.ly/wvfilter



EDITING OUTSIDE OF INSTAGRAM?

The below adjustments are a great place to start as you fine-tune your photo.

- Exposure: +50
- Brilliance: 100
- Highlights: -32
- Shadows: -26
- Contrast: -30
- Brightness: -15
- Black point: 10
- Saturation: 10
- Vibrance: 8
- Warmth: 10
- Tint: 29
- Sharpness: 14
- Definition feature: 23

SHARE YOUR PHOTOS



Once your picture is perfected, be sure to use #AlmostHeaven and tag @wvtourism when you post it on social media!



Plan your trip.

Dreaming of a dark sky getaway? Lucky for you, West Virginia is home to one of the largest and darkest skysheds on the East Coast and otherworldly starry sky views are around every corner. Choose your destination(s), book a stay with a local lodging provider, travel our country roads and head out under a blanket of star-studded skies for an unforgettable experience. Start planning your starry getaway today with the help of our Dark Skies toolkit. Find trip guides, exclusive discounts & deals, a sweepstakes and more.



WEST VIRGINIA DARK SKIES SWEEPSTAKES

Want to take your astrophotography to the next level? Enter our Dark Skies Sweepstakes for the chance to win a GoPro HERO11!

Scan the QR code or click the link below to enter.

WVtourism.com/stars

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