

Dark Skies Constellation Guide



STARGAZING IN ALMOST HEAVEN

Picture this: mountains beside you, grass below you and a gleaming starry-night sky above. There's a reason West Virginia is known as Almost Heaven. Here, you can get back to the basics and marvel at the natural beauty of a dark sky. The state is home to show stopping stargazing spots with some of the clearest night skies east of the Mississippi. If you're looking for an otherworldly experience, you'll find that and more in a wide-open West Virginia sky.

CAN YOU FIND THESE CONSTELLATIONS?



URSA MAJOR "THE GREAT BEAR"

Best seen: Spring/Summer

Probably the best known group of stars in the Northern Hemisphere is the Big Dipper. The Big Dipper is not technically a constellation, but part of the constellation known as Ursa Major. The best time of year to find Ursa Major is during the summer. It is most easy to spot the cup and long handle of the Big Dipper. The handle is part of the bear's head and neck. The cup is part of the bear's chest and front legs.



URSA MINOR "THE LITTLE BEAR"

Best seen: Summer

If you can find the Big Dipper it makes finding the Little Dipper easier. Once you find the Big Dipper find the two stars that form the right side of the cup. Starting at the bottom, make a straight line and you will see Polaris, the North Star. Polaris is the start of the Little Dippers handle. Different that the Great Bear, the handle of the Little Dipper is the Little Bear's Tail. The cup forms part of the bear's side. Once you spot the Little Dipper you have found Ursa Minor.



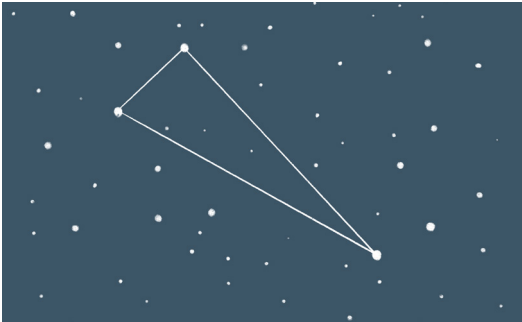
ORION "THE HUNTER"

Best seen: Winter

Orion is one of the easiest constellations to find in the starry sky. The best way to begin is to look for the three stars that form a straight line or Orion's belt. Next, you can follow the curved group of stars that makes the hunter's bow or shield in one hand. The best time to spot Orion is during the winter months but the constellation can still be found early on summer mornings.

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TRIANGULUM "THE TRIANGLE"

Best seen: Spring/Summer

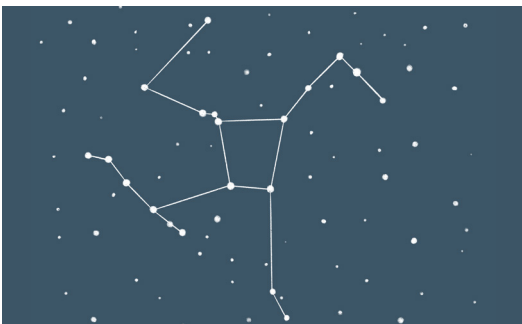
As the name suggests, Triangulum's three brightest stars form a small triangular-shaped constellation within the northern sky. This cluster is home to the Triangulum galaxy, the largest stellar mass black hole known to man.



DRACO "THE DRAGON"

Best seen: Spring

The 8th largest constellation of the night sky, Draco spans a massive area of 1,083 square degrees. Draco is home to 17 formally named stars and is associated with the meteor shower the Draconids.



HERCULES "THE STRONGMAN"

Best seen: Summer

Hercules contains two bright globular clusters, one of which is the brightest globular cluster in the entire northern hemisphere. Although Hercules is the 5th largest formation out of the 88 modern constellations, it can often be difficult to spot due to its dim stars.



LYNX "THE CAT"

Best seen: Winter/Spring/Summer

The Lynx or "the cat" is another faint constellation whose brightest stars form a zig zag in the sky. Created to fill a large gap between two neighboring constellations, astronomer Johannes Hevelius decided on the name because he said it took the eyesight of a lynx to see it.

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CYGNUS "THE SWAN"

Best seen: Summer/Fall

One of the most recognizable constellations of the northern summer and autumn, Cygnus displays a distinct cross shape that swims through the river of the Milky Way. This formation is believed to be Greek god Zeus in disguise on his way to a tawdry tryst.



LEO MINOR "THE SMALLER LION"

Best seen: Spring

Meaning "the smaller lion" in Latin, Leo Minor is a dim constellation that lies between the larger and more recognizable Ursa Major to the north and Leo to the south. This cluster is also known as Praecipue, which means "principal star" and is located about 95 light years from Earth.



CANES VENATICI "THE HUNTING DOGS"

Best seen: Spring/Summer

One of the 88 constellations designated by the International Astronomical Union, Canes Venatici is a small northern constellation that was first created in the 17-century. Cor Caroli, the constellation's brightest star, is one of the reddest naked-eye stars as well as one of the brightest carbon stars.



AURIGA "THE CHARIOTEER"

Best seen: Winter/Spring

Auriga is a hidden gem constellation that can be found neighboring Gemini and Taurus in the northern hemisphere. Its name is Latin for 'charioteer', associating this group of stars with multiple mythological characters including Erichonius and Myrtilus. This constellation contains three star clusters known as M36, M37 and M38.

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TAURUS "THE BULL"

Best seen: Spring/Summer

The Taurus constellation is often paired with Orion. If you can find the Hunter, you can find the Bull. To find Taurus look slightly above the shield/bow side of Orion like both constellations are facing off. Find the group of stars that make a fork shape to form the Bull's horns. The brightest star in the constellation is Aldebaran also known as Alpha Tauri. The best time to spot Taurus is April through July.



GEMINI "THE TWINS"

Best seen: Winter

If you are familiar with astrology, then you will be familiar with the Twins. Gemini gets its name because of the group of stars that look like two stick figures. Gemini can be found by looking for its brightest stars Pollux and Castor which are also the names of each of the twins. Although the easy time to find Gemini is in the Northern Hemisphere during December and January, it can still be found during the summer months.



PERSEUS "THE HERO"

Best seen: Winter

Named after the mythological hero, Perseus is one of the 48 ancient constellations and is the 24th largest in the sky. Perseus contains Algol, or the Demon Star, a "variable star" meaning it brightens and dims with regularity that's visible to the naked eye.



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Be sure to use #AlmostHeaven and tag @wvtourism when you post it on social media!

