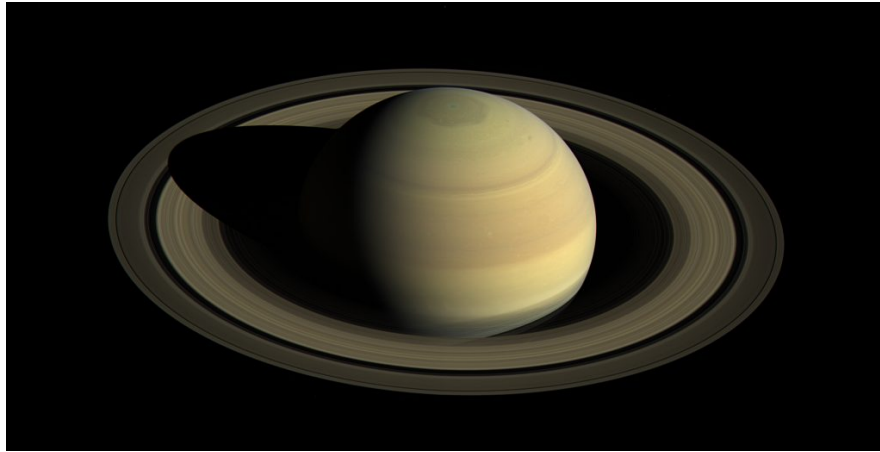


Star Guide: Saturn is worth a visit



Saturn is visible at night with a telescope. Photo/NASA Cassini

By Tony Berendsen

He has been in our night sky long before we were walking the surface of the Earth. Moving among the fixed stars in a repetitive path every 29 years he was noticed by us and given the name Saturn by our ancestors. Saturn, the father of Jupiter, and a variety of mythological stories, are all we knew about him until the development of a new technology allowing a closer look; the telescope.

Viewing the planet Saturn through a telescope is an amazing experience. To the unaided eye it's a fairly bright yellowish star, but through the eyepiece its unique ring system heightens our imagination and wonder about the solar system.

You can go to Saturn if you like. Of course we don't have human space flight out to Saturn yet, but with a little imagination, some awesome images from robotic space explorers, and maybe a peek through the eyepiece of a telescope this summer you can have an "almost like being there" experience. And you won't have to ride in the openness of space for

several years, held up inside a rocket, nor worry about getting back to Earth safely.

Let's start with my favorite way to go to Saturn, through the eyepiece of a telescope. The telescope doesn't have to be expensive, but it should have a good quality optical system and a sturdy mount. The scope need not be computer controlled or have motors for tracking, although I do prefer computer controlled scopes. There are many telescope manufacturers to choose from, but I prefer Celestron, their product line is amazing, offering something for everyone.

To go to Saturn with a telescope you first need to know where Saturn is in the night sky. This June Saturn is rising in the East in between the constellations of Scorpio and Sagittarius just after the sun sets. As the stars start to become visible, Saturn will be the first to appear above the eastern horizon. If you're not sure which star is Saturn, load up a star gazing app on your phone and it will show you.

Next, choose an eyepiece for your telescope that gives a low magnification between 30 to 60 power. The low power will give a larger field of view and a sharper image of Saturn. If you're not sure about which eyepiece to use Sky and Telescope magazine is a great resource. Depending on the aperture (light gathering power) of your telescope, you will see a beautiful image of Saturn, and at least one moon Titan, or up to seven or more.

Looking through a telescope at high magnifications (to get a closer look) can be very disappointing. Our atmosphere is very turbulent at times, causing a blurred image. There are optical limits to sharp images at high magnification, too. So, if you want a really close look at Saturn have a robot share some images with you, let Cassini take you to Saturn.

The Cassini spacecraft was launched from Earth in 1997 and began orbiting Saturn in 2004. Since then this robust robotic

space explorer has sent thousands of images of Saturn and its rings and moons back to the Earth. **NASA** has posted them for all of us to see on the Nasa Cassini site. Spend some time looking at these images, read the descriptions, and you will be amazed with the absolute beauty and wonder of Saturn.

Don't stop at those wonderful images, go back to the eyepiece and look at Saturn again. Let the photons bouncing off that distant planet flow into your eyes and ignite your imagination, remember the Cassini images: you are at Saturn.

Tony Berendsen runs Tahoe Star Tours. He may be reached at 775.232.0844 or tony@tahoestartours.com.