

DFAC Astronomy Night: Briefing for Guests

The Desert Foothills Astronomy Club welcomes you to the wonders of astronomy. We want you to get the most out of this fascinating educational experience, and this briefing will help prepare you for the evening. If you've never been to an event like this before, you probably have a lot of questions about what to expect. We'll try to answer those questions here.

First, dress for the weather and venue. In the desert, it gets a lot cooler at night — especially if the sky is clear. Wear comfortable clothing, and closed shoes. You will be moving around in a relatively dark outside area, and it's possible you might step on an unfriendly critter.

If you want to bring a small flashlight to help you find your way to and from the viewing area, no problem. But be aware that, near the telescopes, lights are forbidden. You'll notice how the telescope operators use red lights, which preserve night vision. Once in the dark, it takes your eyes about 30 minutes to become adjusted for optimal viewing. A single flash of bright white light will start that process all over again.

Moving around in the dark also presents some risks to the telescopes. Be aware that some use electricity, so there may be extension cords on the ground. There may also be tables or trays of equipment near the scopes, so move around carefully. And never attempt to adjust or handle a telescope without first asking the owner's permission. These instruments must be sensitively aligned to operate properly.

When the viewing begins, simply walk up to any telescope, get in line (if there is one) and the show begins! DFAC members are amateur astronomers with hundreds of years of combined experience. Our astronomers will explain what you'll be looking at and answer any questions you might have. You are here to learn, and we are here to teach, so ask away.

After your time at the telescope (usually a few minutes), go to another scope for a whole new show. When all the guests have seen all the views, the scopes will be adjusted to new objects and the process begins again. We generally observe from sunset for about 2-3 hours, so there's plenty of time to see the wonders of the night sky.

What you will actually see depends on the time of year, as the sky rotates slowly bringing new objects into view each month. We try to schedule these events to include a look at the Moon, which is always a favorite — if you've never seen the Moon through a high-powered telescope, prepare to be amazed. Details about specific objects visible on your Astronomy Night will be available from whomever organized the event.

We look forward to seeing you at Astronomy Night and hope you enjoy your personal tour of the desert night sky. To learn more about the Desert Foothills Astronomy Club, visit our website at: www.DFACAZ.org.