

Dark Texas Skies Map & Information

Location

Marathon Motel & RV Park
701 W US-90 Highway
Marathon, TX 79842

Get In Touch

Email: support@darktexasskies.com
Phone: 432-249-0315
Website: <https://darktexasskies.com>
Hours: Begins after Sunset

The map below illustrates the specific location where **Dark Texas Skies** meet nightly. We gather at the Visual Observatory, about 150 feet behind Room 8 of the Marathon Motel & RV Park. Admission is \$10.00 cash for adults (\$11.50 CC), children 17 years old and under are free. Tickets may be purchased at the Marathon Motel & RV Park office (cash only) or at the beginning of the star party.



Dark Texas Skies introduces cosmic adventurers to the stars with two large observatory grade reflector telescopes. Both telescopes are Newtonian and are mounted on James Dobsonian mounts. One primary mirror is 20 inches in diameter and the other is 24 inches in diameter. In addition, Oberwerk BT-100XL-ED binoculars are also used to view larger celestial objects. Whether you are a seasoned astronomer or a newcomer, you will enjoy using the equipment.

The picture below is that of the Visual Observatory. This is where all visual equipment is housed. It faces south toward the most westward entrance into the Marathon Motel & RV Park.



7 Tips to Prepare For Your Cosmic Adventure to Dark Texas Skies

1. The first and best bit of advice is to plan ahead for when the Moon will not be visible. Light pollution makes it difficult to see things in the night sky through a telescope or binoculars, and the Moon is the brightest thing in the sky when it is visible. Thus, you will want to avoid moonlight whenever possible. So, look at a calendar that indicates the moon phases. We have an annotated Moon phase calendar on our website to help you determine the best nights for your visit: <https://darktexasskies.com/moon-calendar/>.

Because of the Moon's counter-clockwise orbit around the Earth each lunar cycle, it waxes from the day of the new moon until the night of the full moon. Then, the Moon's luminosity decreases every night until the next new moon which we never see during the day. This is caused by the Moon's darkened near side (what we see) during the New Moon facing 180 degrees away from the Sun when the Moon stands between the Sun and Earth.

So, the very best night to visit **Dark Texas Skies** would be when the Moon never rises during the night—the New Moon—but only rises after the Sun on the next day.¹ The next best times to visit **Dark Texas Skies** would be any of the 10 nights before the new moon, or the first two nights after it. In total, this makes 13 nights that even the faintest objects can be easily seen in our nighttime sky, whether by telescopes, binoculars, or unaided eyes.

However, if you cannot plan your arrival during any of the above nights, then be aware that the Moon's luminosity increasingly saturates the nighttime sky with each passing night until the full moon. During these times, we observe and talk more about our bright and beautiful Moon and brighter stellar objects, such as constellations, planets (if visible), red super giant stars, globular & open clusters, double stars and several brighter galaxies.

2. Please dress according to the season that you will arrive at **Dark Texas Skies**. At an elevation of approximately 4100 feet in a high desert climate, the nights will feel cooler than most people expect. After sunset, the temperature quickly

¹ For further explanation of the Moon's phases and it's time delay rising each subsequent night after the night of the full moon, please see <https://darktexasskies.com/best-nights/>.

drops a few degrees, and more so after astronomical twilight.

3. Please use a flashlight that either has a red lens, or its lens is wrapped with red cellophane. Red light preserves dark-adapted vision. If you are staying at the Marathon Motel & RV Park, you can purchase a red lens flashlight when registering. **Dark Texas Skies** is located in the Greater Big Bend International Dark Sky Reserve. Let's all keep in mind that many people visiting this area are here because of the dark skies.

If possible and practical, it will be of help if you are staying in one of the rooms at the Marathon Motel & RV Park to remember to turn off all interior lights before attending the star party. When walking back to your room, use your red lights to see your way.

If you are dry camping and setting up a tent or RV after dark, it will help others to keep your lights at a minimum. And if you must use your headlights to see while you are setting up camp, please point your lights away from the observatory deck. If at all possible, use a flashlight instead of headlights and keep it pointed toward your site.

4. If you drive to **Dark Texas Skies**, back up your vehicle to the provided blackout screens. They are about 6 feet in height and are located to the east of the Visual Observatory. Thus, if you leave before others, then your headlights are pointed away from the Visual Observatory. Also, try not to arrive late, because your headlights will blind those who arrived at the appropriate time. It takes anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes to achieve dark adaptation. Without this adaptation, fainter objects will be much more difficult—or even impossible—to see through a telescope.
5. Please remember that sound travels and the reason you and others are visiting **Dark Texas Skies**. Unlike a traditional boisterous party, a star party is often quiet and serene with the guests enjoying themselves being washed in the stars and darkness. Your conscious help in this matter will be deeply appreciated.
6. Please feel free to bring a chair for yourself, binoculars, a red light and star charts. Some seating is available, but if a large group is present, then there will not be enough seating to accommodate everyone. Also, please bring your children if they are old enough. If you do bring them, make sure that they are supervised by you and are not permitted to run or play on the observatory

deck. It will be dark and accidents may occur if all of us are not careful.

7. If you have a question about something that the star party host is presenting, please feel free to ask. We ask questions to learn, and learning is a good thing. There is no such thing at a star party as a “dumb question.”