

# A practical guide to tapping into Dark-Sky Tourism

Dark-sky tourism offers a profoundly moving experience of the night sky – free from light and noise pollution. It also provides opportunities for sustainability, cultural heritage preservation and rural development.

Here's your step-by-step guide to embracing this illuminating niche.

## 1. Understand the Dark-Sky Tourism Market

Unlike astro-tourism with its focus on telescopes, observatories and organised astronomy sessions, dark-sky tourism is about emotional, transformational experiences.

### Visitors seek:

- Awe-inspiring night skies, showcasing the Milky Way
- Contemplative solitude under a canopy of stars
- Reconnection with nature's nocturnal rhythms
- A reminder of our place in the vast cosmos

“ By day you see the world, but at night you see the universe. - Eleanor Muller, Marketing Manager at Transfrontier Parks Destinations ”

Key visitors include mindful travellers seeking authentic, outdoor adventures (think night drives or sleeping under the stars), as well as astro-photographers and those interested in Indigenous celestial stories.

### Ask yourself:

- What dark-sky experiences can you offer visitors?
- What improvements can you make to your lodge, camp or park to eliminate unnecessary or harmful light?
- How will protecting dark skies benefit your community?

## 2. Partner with experts, stakeholders and dark-sky mentors

It's important to collaborate with those passionate about dark skies and sustainability:

- Local astronomers who can share knowledge and learnings
- Conservationists to develop eco-initiatives
- Indigenous elders to showcase celestial heritage
- Renewable energy providers to reduce light pollution
- Rural tourism operators to create stargazing escapes

## 3. Craft Unforgettable Dark-Sky Moments

Africa is perfectly positioned to deliver worldclass astro-tourism and dark-sky experiences, while boosting economic transformation, enhancing the livelihoods of our local communities, and sharing our indigenous celestial stories with the rest of the world.

### Design special night sky experiences, like:

- Guided meditations under the Milky Way
- Silent safari drives showcasing nocturnal animals
- Fireside storytelling
- Overnight sleepouts with sky beds
- Night hikes exploring landscapes by starlight

### Note:

A dark-sky experience is not a 'nice to have'. Don't tack dark-sky activities onto overpacked safari itineraries. Dark-sky tourism demands gentle pacing.

## 4. Manage Light Responsibly

Eliminating unnecessary light is incredibly important.

### First steps include:

- Installing warm-hued bulbs (under 3000K)
- Using directional, shielded outdoor lighting
- Turning off non-essential lights at night
- Educating staff, guests and local communities

## 5. Consider Dark-Sky Certification

For lodges, reserves or parks keen to follow best practice, DarkSky International facilitates official Dark Sky certification. A Dark Sky mentor will work with you to assess your light management, community engagement and dark sky quality. Certification is a lengthy process, with auditors verifying and certifying your dark-sky credentials, including:

- Your destinations 'sky glow' and sky quality measurements (SQM).
- Efforts to reduce light pollution.
- Motivations for essential lighting, for example, the light required to prevent poaching.
- Research, awareness or education initiative around the dark-sky movement in surrounding communities.

“ It is a serious undertaking. It can take up to 10 years to reach 100% compliance, although you have to be 67% compliant when you submit to be certified. Luckily, you work with a Dark Sky mentor throughout the process. - Bronwyn Maree, Biodiversity Centre curator for the Lapalala Wilderness School ”

**By embracing Dark-Sky tourism, destinations worldwide can transform travel, inspire wonder in visitors, and contribute to sustainability – simply by dimming the lights and looking up.**

