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Southwestern Consortium of Observatories for Public Education.

ARIZONA

FLANDRAU SCIENCE CENTER

Flandrau Science Center located at the University of Arizona in Tucson features a heliostat-projected live image of the solar spectrum (rainbow) for visitors to examine in detail. Visitors also enjoy planetarium shows, hands-on exhibits, a giant mineral display, demonstrations, programs, and telescope viewing.

Tucson. Open daily, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Wed-Sat, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Call 520-621-STAR (7827); <http://www.flandrau.org>

FRED LAWRENCE WHIPPLE OBSERVATORY

Astronomers use the telescopes of the Whipple Observatory to study Sun-like stars and search for planets around nearby stars. Observing Sun-like stars during different stages of their lives help us understand possible changes in our star. Precisely measuring the motions of nearby stars can detect the “wobble” created by planets’ gravity tugging on the parent star.

Amado. Visitor center open weekdays, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Free admission. Tours by reservation on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, March-November. Tours: \$7 adults, \$6 Smithsonian Associates, \$2.50 children 6-12. 520-670-5707; <http://linmax.sao.arizona.edu/help/FLWO/whipple.html>

KITT PEAK NATIONAL OBSERVATORY

At Kitt Peak, the Sun is studied with six solar telescopes. Sun-like stars are also studied. These nighttime observations can reveal what the Sun may be like at various stages in its life. While visiting Kitt Peak, you may tour the world’s largest solar telescope, and view the Sun live at the Visitor Center.

Tucson. Open daily 9 a.m.-4 p.m., except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s. Free guided tours at 10 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. Group tours by appointment. Nightly Observing Program and Advanced Observing Program available by reservation only. 520-318-8726; <http://www.noao.edu>

LOWELL OBSERVATORY

Astronomers at Lowell Observatory carry out a unique program of monitoring long-term changes in the Sun and its closest stellar cousins with a single instrument, to better understand the nature and causes of the solar activity cycle. You can view the Sun through a telescope specially equipped for the purpose when you visit Lowell Observatory.

Flagstaff. Summer hours: Open daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m., and every night except Sunday, 7:30-10 p.m.; night sky shows at 8 and 8:45 p.m. each of those nights. 520-774-3358 (210); <http://www.lowell.edu>

NEW MEXICO

APACHE POINT OBSERVATORY

The large telescopes at Apache Point Observatory are mostly used for investigations of faint objects such as galaxies, quasars, interstellar clouds, and other stars. The Sun itself is rarely observed, but many Sun-like stars are studied. Measurements of their spectra, magnetic fields, and brightness variations provide clues to how these phenomena arise in our Sun.

Sunspot. Self-guided tours daily. May to October: Guided tours through Sunspot Astronomy and Visitor Center. Free. Winter hours and tour information: 505-437-6822; <http://www.apo.nmsu.edu>

NATIONAL RADIO ASTRONOMY OBSERVATORY

The National Science Foundation’s Very Large Array (VLA) radio telescope is used regularly to observe the Sun. Often, the VLA is used to observe at the same time that other observatories, such as the National Solar Observatory on the ground and ultraviolet and X-ray observatories in orbit, also are observing the Sun. This allows astronomers to study different aspects of solar phenomena at the same time and thus better understand them.

Socorro. Visitor center open 8:30 a.m.-sunset daily. Self-guided walking tours. Guided tours for educational groups available with at least two weeks’ notice. Free. 505-835-7000; <http://www.nrao.edu>

NATIONAL SOLAR OBSERVATORY

The National Solar Observatory is a research facility dedicated to the study of the Sun. Tour all of our telescopes and watch astronomers at work. The Sunspot Astronomy & Visitor Center offers a wide range of displays which explore the Earth and its relationship to the closest star, our Sun.

Sunspot. Self-guided tours daily. Guided tours May-October. Sunspot Astronomy & Visitor Center open daily May-October. Free admission. Winter hours and tour information: 505-434-7000; <http://sunspot.noao.edu/SP-home.html>

TEXAS

MCDONALD OBSERVATORY

Astronomers at McDonald Observatory study stars that are like our Sun and many of them look for planets around other stars. Visit McDonald Observatory and participate in solar viewing activities and see spots, prominences, and flares on our Sun.

Fort Davis. Visitor center open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. Guided tours and solar viewing twice daily. Self-guided tours during business hours. Star parties beginning 30 minutes after sunset on Tuesday, Friday, Saturday. Information: 915-426-3640. Recorded message for times and prices (toll free) 1-877-984-7827; <http://vc.as.utexas.edu/>