

THE CONSTELLATIONS

- Constellations are patterns of stars in the night sky that have been identified and named by various cultures throughout history.
- Constellations were used by ancient sailors for navigation and themes for cultural story-telling.
- In 1922 The International Astronomical Union (IAU) officially recognized the current 88 constellations. This standardization was important for creating a consistent global reference for astronomers and ensuring that star catalogues and celestial maps used the same constellation boundaries worldwide.
- 48 of the 88 constellations were recorded about 2,000 years ago by the ancient Greek astronomer, Ptolemy. However, many of these 48 constellations were probably named and recorded by cultures such as the Persians, Babylonians, and probably others well before them.
- Many of the official 88 constellations are named after characters from Greek mythology, such as Orion the Hunter and Andromeda the Princess.
- The zodiac constellations have been recognized for thousands of years and play a significant role in both astronomy and astrology.
- The zodiac constellations are important in astronomy because they mark the Sun's path through the sky over the course of a year.
- Different constellations are visible at different times of the year due to Earth's orbit around the Sun. They move overhead with the progression of the seasons and so different constellations are visible at specific times of the year.
- The patterns we recognise in the stars and constellations are just the result of the chance alignment of stars relative to each other. Star constellation patterns are merely random alignments of stars. There is no inherent meaning or significance to the shapes they form; they are simply the result of our perspective from Earth.
- Astronomers use the constellations as a form of map of the sky.
- Some constellations such as the Southern Cross, Scorpius, and Leo have star patterns that look as their name suggests – a cross, a scorpion and a lion. Most of the constellations were defined and named by ancient astronomers in the northern hemisphere. As a result, they often look upside-down in the southern hemisphere.



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A good way to learn the constellation patterns and their position in the sky is by using a planetarium app on a mobile device. The larger screen of a tablet can make the task easier than the small screen of a mobile phone. You also need to go to a location with a dark sky well removed from the light pollution bubble of towns and cities. There are many mobile device applications providing simple star maps or fully-functioned planetarium displays. You might like to try Stellarium <https://stellarium.org/> or perhaps Sky Safari <https://skysafariastromy.com/>

