

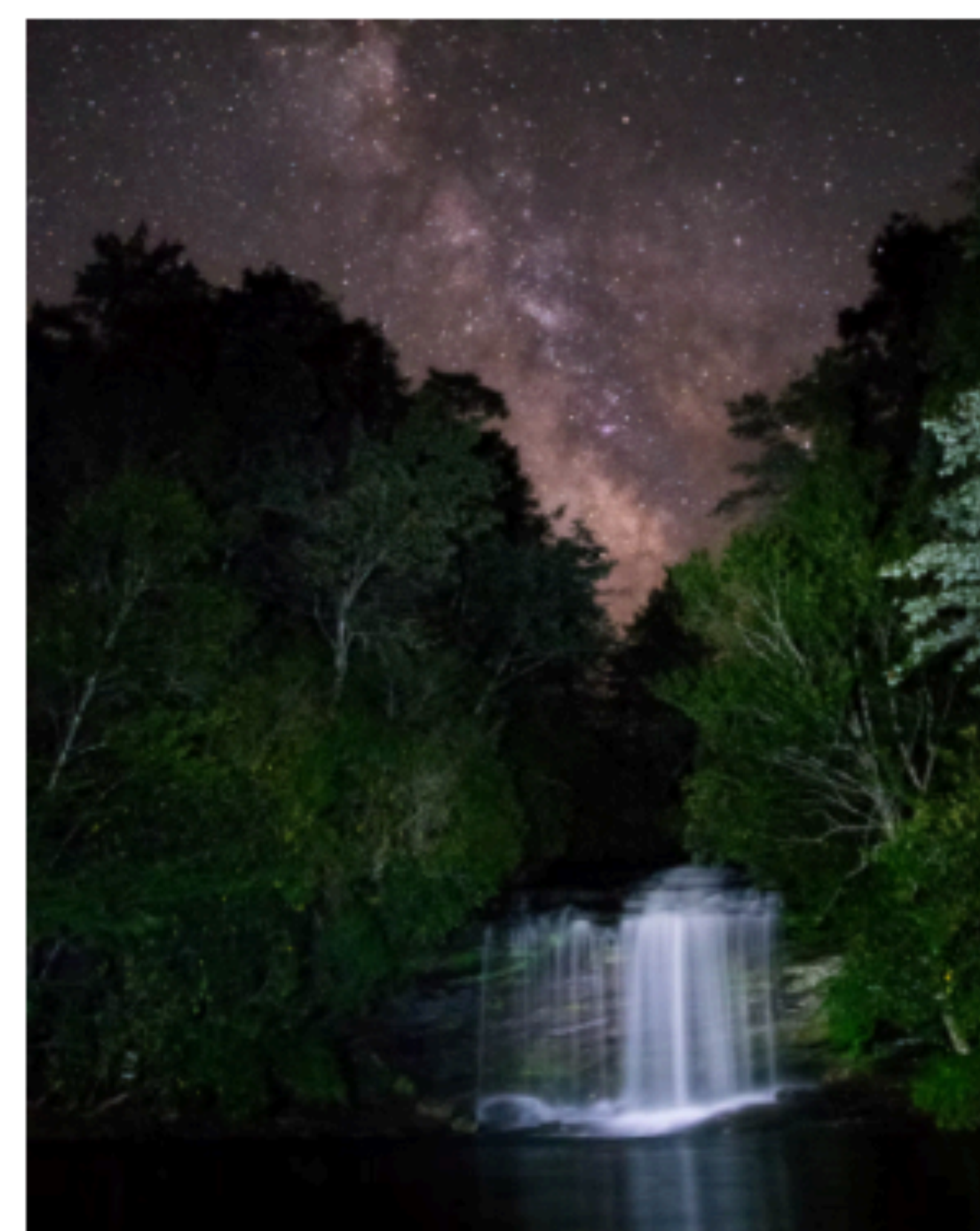
The Best Stargazing Travel Destinations For Outdoor Enthusiasts

Traveling with a purpose is a pretty efficient means for making your trip memorable and fulfilling. And with the last two pandemic-fueled years causing a spike in outdoor adventure, it's only natural that a holiday centered around something like stargazing has become increasingly more common. "The AAVSO has certainly seen an increase in interest surrounding stargazing," Staff Astronomer Bert Pablo tells TZR. The American Association of Variable Stars Observers is an international non-profit with a mission to encourage scientific discovery through amateur astronomy (or what they refer to as variable star astronomy). "The 2020 shutdown made us all get creative and think about ways to stay entertained and pick up new and 'COVID-safe' activities such as stargazing."

Naturally, a destination that lends itself to starry night skies will also be somewhere beautiful, making the decision to find these sorts of places all the more strong. A few things to consider: "If you can, the AAVSO recommends observing at national parks that are certified as dark skies parks. The National Park Service has a list of 27 national parks recognized by the International Dark Sky association for their dark night skies," he says. If you're not in a dark sky area, all you need is a pair of binoculars or a small telescope. "The AAVSO recommends selecting a location where you can see the sky (dense trees will not help) and that's far away from light pollution. Also, stargazing is more fun if the moon is not full, so it is recommended to pick days close to the new moon (the 'invisible' moon)."



Crystal Coast Stargazers/Alex Gu



Lucas Haase

Aside from the fact that a celestial-focused trip will result in a relaxing and awe-inducing experience, it also might even help out scientists (how often does that privilege come along?).

“Astronomers rely on citizen scientists to gather variable star data because professional astronomers need data from different places on earth...to get the full picture of what's going on with these stars,” Pablo explains. “It's really difficult for an astronomer to be able to gather all the data they need for their work by themselves and information sharing is huge.”

Ahead, locations around the globe from the deserts of Africa to the islands of Hawaii that not only make for excellent travel destinations but also offer the opportunity to bask in the arresting night sky.

North Carolina



Cruetal Coast Stargazers/Alex Gu

Cape Lookout National Seashore was recently certified as an international dark sky park and is the first Atlantic coastal dark sky place in the National Park Service to receive this certification — reason enough to make your way to North Carolina’s gorgeous crystal coast. This 56-mile strand of silken beaches is the ideal backdrop for witnessing the beautiful night skies and the area offers several astronomy-based experiences for park visitors. If you head inland to North Carolina’s Jackson County, you’ll find more pollution-free skies in this remote destination. Overlooks, hikes, and camping spots all lend unique opportunities to take in the stars; and complete your trip with a night or two at newly-renovated Hotel Cashiers.