

# The National Space Centre



The National Space Centre is the largest visitor attraction dedicated to space and space exploration. However, we are not only a visitor attraction. The National Space Centre has education as one of its core elements. This is through the factual information for visitors, including over 59,000 school visits in 2009, as well as workshops in schools, the Challenger Learning Centre, Stardome and the Space Now information hub.

The National Space Centre was voted Large Visitor Attraction of the Year in the 2007 and 2009 East Midlands Excellence Awards.

## The Visitor Experience

As visitors enter the Experience they walk into The Hub. Lined with giant images taken from space, this is where the visitor will be able to sit down, meet friends and family, or just take “time out” to reflect on and absorb the Space theme. The primary role of the Hub is to orientate the visitor. It is here that they can find out more about the visitor centre and the day’s special events. Five themed portals mark the entrances from the Hub into six very different experiences.

**Into Space** covers the fascinating questions about space travel, going from launch into orbit, investigating life in Space and looking to the future. It deals with the teamwork, hardware and technology behind getting into space. Of all the areas, this one probably has the most “hands-on” interactives: visitors can launch model rockets, build satellites and see if they “have got what it takes” to be an astronaut.

They will also get an idea of the size of the International Space Station by walking through a full-scale model of Europe’s Columbus module, and be able to compare that with a full scale Mercury capsule – someone once said “you don’t get in it, you put it on”!

**Into Space** is continued in the 42-metre **Rocket Tower**, which houses some of our largest rockets and satellites. As well as finding out more about how rockets work and survive the conditions in space, in the tower the visitor can marvel at these examples of space technology, or simply look at a wonderful view of the city!

**Exploring the Universe** is very different to **Into Space**. While the latter is bright and hi-tech, **Exploring the Universe** uses technology in a more mysterious and hidden way to bring to life the wonders and mind-blowing aspects of our universe. “Where did we come from?”, “How did the Universe begin?”, “Is there anybody out there”. From black holes to backyard astronomy, this area will work on two levels – one for those who want to ask questions, and one for those who just want to look. Exploring the Universe is very image intensive and has a large number of physical interactives. It also contains a stellarium – a magical 3-dimensional “scoop” of the universe showing stars’ locations, magnitudes and colours.

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**The Planets** has fun with the planets – not just the facts, but also the myths, the magic and the fiction. Mars might be a rusty red rocky planet, but in many minds it is home to the Martians and the Tripods or might even be the planet they hope to go and live on one day. We used to believe that the Moon was made of green cheese, but now we have sent dozens of probes to find out about its origin and composition, and have even walked on its surface! The culture and history surrounding each planet is very rich – from early woodcuts to modern-day music and films – and this is intermingled with more scientific artefacts such as moon rock, meteorites and models of satellites. National Curriculum topics, such as reasons for seasons and tides & eclipses, are explained by physical interactives. While most space galleries display a static line of planets with the facts, the National Space Centre is attempting to break the mould on how this science is presented, and to appeal to a much wider audience.

**Orbiting Earth** explores the way that we look at our dynamic and beautiful planet. We use space on a daily basis: weather forecasting, communications, television, navigation, tracking and mapping. A multitude of scientific experiments are all done from space using satellite technology. These satellites produce beautiful, colourful and intricate images that can be appreciated both scientifically and aesthetically. The challenge of Orbiting Earth is to explain how we sense the Earth in an inviting, interactive way, without losing the sense of awe that our planet can inspire, or intimidating those who are unused to technology.

**Space Now** is the most high-tech area of the centre. Space Now communicates the latest in space! Investigate the many exhibits that tell a story of the UK's involvement in cutting edge space exploration. Watch live demonstrations meet scientists and find the answers to those questions that have puzzled you. *Space Now* seeks to enthuse and inform the public. With live demonstrations, web terminals and discovery boxes of information, this area offers visitors the opportunity to choose which topic to explore.

**Tranquillity Base** - Human spaceflight is at the top of the space agenda: both in the short term, with the return to flight of the space shuttle following the Columbia disaster in 2003, and in the long term as NASA and ESA (European Space Agency) plan the next big step for mankind. Ultimately, this might mean putting a human on Mars – possibly in the 2030s. Most agree that the moon is an important first step and that a lunar base could be established sometime in the 2020s.

The inspiration for *Human Spaceflight: Lunar Base 2025* undoubtedly comes from these developments. It also comes from visitors who tell us that human spaceflight is the subject that inspires them most. Since our own launch in 2001, visitors have voted the big physical interactives their favourite things here, with their favourite question: 'what is it like to be an astronaut?'