

A slice of the sky

This spectacular approximately 230-degree panoramic photograph of ESO's Very Large Telescope (VLT), taken by ESO Photo Ambassador(/public/outreach/partnerships/photo-ambassadors/) Gerhard Hühdepohl, gives us an inspiring view of a slice of the sky, encompassing both our nearest celestial neighbour and star clusters hundreds of light-years away.

The VLT's four large Unit Telescopes dominate the foreground. With gigantic mirrors 8.2 metres across, they allow us to peer into space and see things four billion times fainter than we can see with our eyes alone. Also visible are the round enclosures of the four 1.8-metre Auxiliary Telescopes, one to the left of the Unit Telescopes and three to the right. This observatory has an excellent location, on Cerro Paranal in the Chilean Atacama Desert. It is so high, at 2600 metres altitude, that what looks like the rippling ocean to the west, on the left of the image, is in fact the cloud layer below the mountaintop. The Pacific Ocean is indeed in this direction, but lies below the clouds.

The slice of sky visible in the photograph contains a wealth of astronomical objects, including several that are well known. The bright orb above the blanket of cloud is actually the Moon, which is illuminating the telescopes, and also the sky. Soon it will dip below the horizon and a deeper darkness will cover the mountain.

Just above the Moon is what appears to be a bright star, but is in fact the planet Jupiter. A large gas giant, it is one of the brightest celestial objects in the night sky. The tightly grouped collection of stars near the top middle of the photograph is a cluster called the Pleiades, often known as the Seven Sisters. Above the Unit Telescope second from the left is the bright star Capella, while the stars Pollux and Castor, which represent the heads of Gemini (The Twins), can be seen above and slightly to the right of the right-most Unit Telescope. Above the shadowed Auxiliary Telescope to the right is the open cluster Praesepe, also known as the Beehive Cluster, or Messier 44. Above it, near the top of the image, is the bright star Procyon.

Links

- More information about the VLT(/public/teles-instr/vlt/)
- ESO Photo Ambassadors webpage(/public/outreach/partnerships/photo-ambassadors/)

Credit: ESO/G.Hühdepohl (atacamaphoto.com(http://www.atacamaphoto.com/))

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About the Image

Id:	potw1123a
Type:	Photographic
Release date:	6 June 2011, 10:00
Size:	10573 x 2955 px
Field of View:	200° x 75°

About the Object

Name:	Panorama, Paranal(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paranal_Observatory), Very Large Telescope(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Very_Large_Telescope)
Type:	Unspecified : Sky Phenomenon : Night Sky Unspecified : Technology : Observatory : Telescope
Category:	Paranal(/public/images/archive/category/paranal/)

Image Formats

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-  Zoomable(zoomable/)

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