

International Observe the Moon Night: Growing Global Engagement in an Annual Lunar Celebration

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Abstract

2018 participation in International Observe the Moon Night broke all previous participation records. We are eager to continue to grow and improve the program, and welcome new collaborations and partnerships. The flexible event format and relative accessibility of the Moon should facilitate expansion and engagement among audiences worldwide.

1. Introduction

International Observe the Moon Night is a worldwide celebration of lunar science and exploration as well as the cultural and personal connections we have to the Moon. Sponsored by NASA’s Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) mission with many contributing partners, the event has been held annually each fall on a Saturday on or near the first-quarter Moon phase since 2010. People participate by hosting or attending events, or joining in as individual lunar observers. Events range in size from small family gatherings to community events that draw hundreds of visitors. Hosts and observers register through the International Observe the Moon Night website, moon.nasa.gov/observe, where they also find event information and resources.

Thousands of people participate each year at museums, planetaria, observatories, schools, parks, private businesses, and backyards around the world. Registration data and feedback from event hosts and participants is analyzed by the International Observe the Moon Night evaluation team and used to improve the program and associated resources.

2. Accessible Object, Flexible Format

The Moon is one of the most accessible celestial objects. It is visible by naked eye even through bright city skies. It has influenced our art, our language, our culture. Those unable to see the Moon in the sky can observe it in other ways, such as tactile observations of 3D printed lunar landscapes, virtual field trips, citizen science activities, and galleries of lunar images and artwork. We highlighted some of our favorite ways to observe the Moon in a feature on solarsystemn.nasa.gov before the 2018 event [1]. We strive to make lunar science accessible by inviting approachable and engaging lunar scientists to participate in our events, and by connecting the science to art.



Figure 1. 2018 map of registered International Observe the Moon Night events.

We designed International Observe the Moon Night to also be accessible, primarily through its flexible format. We offer an opportunity for people to observe the Moon with their family, friends, and communities as part of a global lunar observing campaign. Baseline participation is simply to look at the Moon. Even better is to learn about and celebrate it in some way. We offer tips and resources for hosting International Observe the Moon Night events (e.g. links to some of our favorite hands-on activities; links to help find event speakers and partners; an

annually-updated event Moon map). But we encourage hosts to create events that match their needs, interests, and available resources with the needs and interests of their intended audience. Further flexibility lies in a date range (people can register participation within a 2-week window surrounding the official event date), and the ability to register events as public or private. Our promotional materials are editable so that hosts can fill them in with information specific to their event.



Figure 2. 2019 International Observe the Moon Night Save-the-Date card. Translated graphics in progress.

3. Program Improvements

The first eight years of International Observe the Moon Night had relatively stable participation, with an average of 558 registered events in a given year. Seeking to expand our reach and reinvigorate event hosts, we made several changes in 2018. We transitioned from an event-specific site (observethemoonnight.org) to a home on moon.nasa.gov. The move gave us greater visibility and the opportunity to make improvements to the user interface and experience. We opened registration to individual lunar observers, an expansion from an earlier focus on event hosts. This reduced a barrier of entry, encouraged more small-scale lunar observations, and enabled us to reach a wider audience. We also updated our graphics, created specific social media products, greatly expanded our efforts to translate event resources, and sought and established new international partnerships [2].

4. Breaking Records +Key Findings

In 2018, International Observe the Moon Night had 1,046 registrants (748 events and 298 individuals).

The previous record, from 2017, was 633 events. There was participation in all 50 U.S. states and 75 countries, 10 of which were new – an increase from 46 U.S. states and 51 countries in 2017. 61% of 2018 events were held outside of the United States, the highest percentage of international events to date. An estimated 160,000 people participated worldwide in 2018. Since 2010, 5,551 International Observe the Moon Night events have been registered worldwide in 107 countries, engaging an estimated 1.4 million participants. Further key findings from the 2018 evaluation report indicate that most events hosts engage support from partners, that 90% of visitors reported learning something about lunar science or exploration at the event they attended – and that learning about the Moon increased their interest in lunar and planetary science and exploration. Hosts valued being part of a larger global event [3].

5. Lunar Exploration and Celestial Observation

2019 marks the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon landing and the 10th anniversary of LRO in lunar orbit. International Observe the Moon Night presents an opportunity to celebrate these anniversaries and discuss past, present, and future lunar exploration in communities around the world. The event also provides a stepping stone to further celestial observation, and space science broadly.

6. Summary and Conclusions

International Observe the Moon Night events can be tailored locally to meet the needs and interests of diverse audiences in diverse locations. We invite you to join in the next International Observe the Moon Night on October 5, 2019.

References

- [1] Wasser, M.: 10 ways to observe the Moon for International Observe the Moon Night, 15 October 2018, <https://go.nasa.gov/2IYN0X>.
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- [3] Buxner, S., Bakerman, M., and Joseph, E.: LRO mission public engagement evaluation—International Observe the Moon Night 2018 final evaluation report, May 2019.