

[Webware](#)

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Slooh brings the heavens to your browser

by [Elsa Wenzel](#)

Slooh is a do-it-yourself stargazing service that puts you behind powerful telescopes in real time. With Slooh's help, you can see a disco-ball-like cluster of stars, a sunflower galaxy, Comet Lovejoy, and other wonders from an observatory atop a Canary Island mountain--all from the comfort of your chair at home.



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Slooh can be pretty cool once you get the hang of it, but the Flash-based Mission Interface should be more intuitive. Pop-ups label the various features (unless you turn them off), which is somewhat helpful. But to no avail, I kept clicking arrows around the lens, and I couldn't satisfy the urge to drag around the view.

Nevertheless, Slooh is fun already, and its social networking element can add depth and education to the experience. Slooh's users include newbies and professional astronomers in 70 countries. You can chat, share images, and rate the current sky conditions. One amateur

I found the most dazzling views by following Slooh's suggested astronomical points of interest. Guided missions happen at 9:00 p.m. (Universal Time) nightly. The longer you hang out, the riper the images get. Impressed by the blood-red Trifid Nebula, 5,500 light-years away in the Sagittarius constellation? Slooh lets you snap, save, and show off three pictures at each stop in space.

By contrast, the [HubbleSite](#), which just won a Webby Award, offers images that may be processed a million times to achieve jaw-dropping crispness, but they're not live. Slooh is more beginner-friendly

even identified a known asteroid. Slooh also offers podcasts on iTunes, hosted by luminaries, such as comet hunter David Levy and author Phil Harrington. Blogging is coming soon.

Unfortunately, Slooh is free of charge for only a week, and a bit costly at \$99 per year thereafter. But a family full of science fans might find it a great value. Because Slooh's founder, Michael Paolucci, wants to make the service more accessible, he's working to give it away to school children in India and Iran.

Slooh is adding telescopes in Chile, with the long-term goal to provide 24-hour coverage of the Earth. Unlike so many dynamic Web services that allow you to network and navel-gaze with a select group of people, Slooh connects you to the vastness beyond our terrestrial, wired world. That's partly why Slooh co-sponsored the surreal Yuri's Night party that [kept me up until dawn](#) at the NASA Ames research center last month. That event, like Slooh, was built with the starry-eyed aim of getting more people to celebrate space exploration as an extension of caring for the home planet. I'm excited to see how the Slooh community will evolve around what O'Dea called the "celestial campfire."



Slooh puts you eye-to-eye with the Black-Eye Galaxy, among others.