

The Milky Way



The Milky Way consists of many nebulae, gas clouds and countless stars. And in the middle of it all is our solar system- the sun and all the planets.

Because of the appearance of the Milky Way, the Greeks used to think that milk was spilt there in the sky. In fact, there are billions of stars that blur into a white band when seen with the naked eye.

The Milky Way, a barred spiral galaxy, comprises of about 100 to 300 billion stars. We can only see 6,000 from Earth. The others are too far away or not bright enough to be seen. On the other hand, we can see stars that lie outside the Milky Way - mostly above or below our Earth. It is even possible to observe some stars of neighbouring galaxies from our planet.

Our Milky Way is about 100,000 light years wide and 3,000 light years high. In its interior is called a bulge. This is the centre of a spiral galaxy. The bulge forms beyond the plane of the disk and is very bright. There is usually a black hole behind it that attracts the stars. There are much larger galaxies than ours. Compared to the many billions in the universe, the Milky Way is only medium-sized.

Animation of the Milky Way

The galaxies

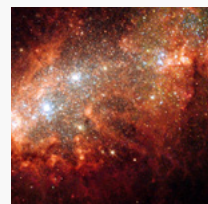
Galaxies are gigantic assemblies of stars. We cannot guess how many stars there are in the universe. There are probably millions of galaxies, each with billions of stars.

We ourselves live in a galaxy, the Milky Way. But it is not possible for us to see what this galaxy looks like from the outside. We can only guess. The Milky Way is a barred spiral galaxy. But there are the following other types of galaxies:



Elliptical galaxy

It is circular or elliptical in shape, has no spiral arms and is otherwise without a solid structure.



Irregular galaxy

There is no special shape here, just a cluster of stars



Spiral galaxy

The number of spiral arms can vary and the galaxy rotates clockwise or counterclockwise



Cartwheel Galaxy

Many stars on the outside and in the centre, only a few in the middle

