



# THE 2024 OZSKY STAR SAFARI

COONABARABRAN, NSW, AUSTRALIA

MARCH 8 – 15, 2024

[WWW.OZSKY.ORG](http://WWW.OZSKY.ORG)

## 1. OZSKY OVERVIEW AND BASIC TRIP PLANNING

### A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF OZSKY

The OzSky Star Safari is a unique astronomical observing event (aka “Star Party”) designed primarily to cater for observers travelling from the northern hemisphere to observe the amazing Southern Skies.

A magnificent selection of large, quality telescopes is provided for shared use by all attendees at these events. There is no need to transport your own large telescopes across the world to observe the southern skies in style.

The OzSky “Classic” Star Safari is usually held in March or April each year near Coonabarabran in NSW Australia – “the Astronomy Capital of Australia” under some of the darkest and most spectacular skies in the world.

OzSky is proudly supported by 3RF Australia (Three Rivers Foundation) – an entirely volunteer-based philanthropic organisation dedicated to sharing the southern hemisphere’s amazing night skies with schools, community groups and anyone interested in learning about observing and appreciating the night skies.

OzSky is further enhanced by a select team of dedicated volunteers who generously donate their personal time and knowledge during the OzSky week to help make the OzSky Star Safari a very special and unique observing experience for folks such as you.

In 2024, the OzSky Star Safari will be celebrating its 31<sup>st</sup> Anniversary and we are excited that you can join us.

A detailed history of the OzSky Star Safaris is available on the [OzSky History page](#) on the OzSky website, detailing how OzSky grew from a small event in 1993 into the “bucket list” event it has become today.

Over the past **31 years**, we’ve proudly shared the southern skies with over 500 different people from at least 15 countries including Australia, Barbados, Canada, China, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and at least 34 of the 50 states of USA.



### THE OZSKY MISSION

Our mission is simple: To share the amazing southern night skies with our northern colleagues in a way that’s flexible and easy for all.

In doing so, we hope that you’ll enjoy a unique Australian cultural experience, and more importantly an unforgettable opportunity to experience the grandeur of the southern night skies through some wonderful large telescopes, saving you the hassle and expense of transporting your own large telescopes from one side of the world to the other.

We have more than enough “Eye Candy” available to us here in Oz – The least we can do is share it with you all.

### THE OZSKY LOGO

We’re often asked about our unique OzSky Star Safari logo and what it all represents.

Interestingly, the top section has a double meaning.

First and foremost, it represents the dark night sky with the central Milky Way spanning the entire southern sky from horizon to horizon – a typical night at OzSky!

Secondly, it depicts a stylised “returning boomerang” – a form of traditional hunting tool used by indigenous Australians which returns when thrown properly.

Why is this relevant? Simple – We want you to enjoy your OzSky trip and the southern skies so much that you’ll desperately want to return (with your friends and family) to enjoy it again, and again!

The bottom section of the logo is a kangaroo and a telescope – Why? Because kangaroos are very Aussie and the combination worked artistically. Seriously – who needs a better reason than that?

Additionally, at the very first OzSky event back in 1993, a kangaroo was photographed [*appearing to be*] reading an astronomy-related booklet.



## **SUGGESTED ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DATES**

### **OzSky Star Safari – Official Dates**

When travelling to Australia, plan to check in at the OzSky observing site on the afternoon of Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2024 and check-out from the observing site on the morning of Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2024.

Of course, you're very welcome to arrive at OzSky earlier (or depart later) if that's what suits your schedule, however, the OzSky telescopes and volunteer hosts will be available from the evening of Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March until midnight on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2024, weather-permitting, of course.

If you would like to arrive at OzSky earlier or leave later than the scheduled dates, please advise the OzSky Registrar as soon as possible to enable additional room reservations to be secured on your behalf at Coonabarabran.

### **Aim to arrive in Sydney no later than 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2024**

When organising your itinerary and travel plans, we suggest that you consider planning to arrive in Sydney a few days before the start of the OzSky Star Safari to give you an opportunity to acclimatize yourself to the new time zone.

During this time, you can enjoy any number of optional day tours to see the beautiful City of Sydney and its surrounds. Further ideas and suggestions for things to see and do in Sydney will be offered in future emails.

We will also be holding a very informal pre-OzSky "meet-and-greet" gathering in Sydney on the evening of Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2024. This is entirely optional.

### **Aim to depart Sydney no earlier than 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2024**

For your return journey back home, be sure to book your return airfares to depart Sydney no earlier than the morning of Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2024.

You will be at the OzSky Star Safari at Coonabarabran until the morning of Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March and will not likely be back in Sydney until after your latest flight departs that evening, so it's best to plan to depart the following day – or even later if you have time.

## **PRE-OZSKY MEET-UP IN SYDNEY**

An optional, informal meet-up in Sydney will be scheduled for the evening of **Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2024** to meet and greet your fellow OzSky travellers in person before heading out to our dark sky site on the morning of Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2024 for seven nights under the pristine Southern Skies.

Further details including specific location and time will be sent out much closer to the date.

## **VALID PASSPORT**

Ensure your passport is valid for at least six (6) months beyond the return date for your travel.

If it's not, we strongly suggest that you take steps now to renew your passport, as there is often a long backlog on passport processing, so it's a good idea not to leave it until the last minute.



## **ELECTRONIC TRAVEL AUTHORITY / VISA**

If you are travelling from overseas to Australia, you will likely also need an Electronic Travel Authority (ETA), e-Visitor or Visitor Visa to enter Australia.



For those of you travelling from USA, Canada and a few other countries, your *Subclass 601 Electronic Travel Authority (aka visa)* can be obtained online by visiting the Australian Department of Home Affairs website: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/electronic-travel-authority-601>

At the time of writing, the cost of an application for an Electronic Travel Authority was AUD \$20 and there is a smart-phone app available to expedite the process.

For those of you travelling from other parts of the world, information on the various types of visa available for your country can be found on their visa finder page: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-finder/visit>

When applying for your visa or ETA, one of the questions will be the address you will be staying at. The address is **882 Timor Road, Coonabarabran NSW 2357.**

## **TRAVEL INSURANCE**

You may or may not choose to organize travel insurance for your trip to Australia.



While there are some travellers who never worry about this, some will never travel internationally without having some form of travel insurance, however that decision is entirely up to you.

Perhaps consider checking your existing policies (if any) and find out how much coverage you have overseas and then decide if you feel the need for any additional coverage, particularly pandemic-related cover.

## **GETTING BETWEEN SYDNEY AIRPORT AND SYDNEY CBD**

When you arrive at Sydney International Airport, there are several options available for getting into the Sydney CBD, including:

- [AirportLink train](#)
- [Airport-City shuttle bus](#)
- [Taxi/cab](#) or [Uber](#) or [GoCatch](#)



The AirportLink train departs from directly underneath the International Terminal and delivers you to the heart of Sydney in as little as 12 minutes.

The train fare is approximately AUD \$20 per person – bookings are not required and there is a train every few minutes for most of the day.

There are also dozens of shuttle bus companies offering shuttle services between the airport and most locations around Sydney.

Prices vary from AUD \$15 upwards, per person. Bookings are not required but are generally recommended by all companies.

## **GETTING BETWEEN SYDNEY AND COONABARABRAN ("COONA")**

There are three main options available for getting from Sydney to Coonabarabran ("Coona").

The **train** gives you the option of sleeping or relaxing for a few hours, so you'll be ready to hit the scopes on the first night.

**Flying** from Sydney to either Dubbo or Tamworth is the fastest option, and has several departures daily, however it is also more expensive, and you miss out on the experience and the scenery of the train ride.

Or you can **drive** the whole way. The choice is yours!

Each traveller is responsible for organising their own transport to and from OzSky – Many of us will be making this journey on the morning of Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2024 however many folks also choose to travel to Coona one day earlier than the official start.

### **Option 1: Train + Drive**

Catch the CountryLink XPT train from Sydney to Dubbo (~6½ hours), then pick up a rental car for the week and drive the last two hours to Coona;



At the time of writing, **return** prices are around:

- AUD \$ 82 per person for "Economy Saver" seats
- AUD \$ 112 per person for "Economy" seats
- AUD \$ 156 per person for "First Class" seats

### **Option 2: Fly > Drive**

Fly from Sydney to either **Dubbo** or **Tamworth**, then pick up a rental car for the week and drive the last two hours to Coona;



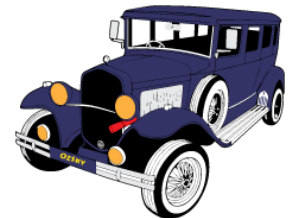
Two airlines, [Qantas](#) and [Rex](#), both fly between Sydney and Dubbo, however only Qantas currently flies between Sydney and Tamworth.

Flight times are approximately 1 hour each way.

Prices vary widely but can sometimes be found from around AU\$130 to \$350 per person each way depending on all the variables that apply when booking airfares.

### **Option 3: Drive all the way**

Pick up a rental car in Sydney and drive all the way from Sydney directly to Coona.



Driving time is about 6 hours' drive each way, plus breaks.

Car rental prices can vary widely, depending on the size of vehicle, duration, inclusions, etc.

Make sure you feel comfortable navigating your way out of the big city on the "wrong" side (well, the left side) of the road.

Once you're out in the countryside, driving is quite straightforward.

## **MAKING YOUR TRAIN BOOKING**

For those of you opting to fly (or drive all the way from Sydney to Coonabarabran), please feel free to disregard this section of the document.

For those of you intending to travel by train from Sydney to Dubbo, enroute to Coonabarabran for OzSky 2024, NSW TrainLink online bookings open 6 months in advance.

Also, please remember you are more than welcome to head to Coonabarabran earlier than the scheduled start date of OzSky – This is becoming a more popular option in recent years as a way of familiarising one's self with the area before the rest of the group arrives.

The NSW TrainLink Express Passenger Train (XPT) departs from Sydney Central Station at 07:19am, arriving at Dubbo early afternoon where you can collect your pre-booked rental car and then continue the drive to Coonabarabran and The OzSky Star Safari.

We recommend planning to secure your seats on the following services, or on alternative dates to suit your travel plans:

**Date:** Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2024  
**Train Service:** Western XPT Train 427  
**Scheduled departure:** 07:19 Sydney Central  
**Scheduled arrival:** 13:45 Dubbo

**Date:** Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2024  
**Train Service:** Western XPT Train 428  
**Scheduled departure:** 14:15 Dubbo  
**Scheduled arrival:** 20:42 Sydney Central

Book online: [NSW TrainLink – Book Online \\*\\*](#)  
Email: [travel.services@transport.nsw.gov.au](mailto:travel.services@transport.nsw.gov.au)  
Telephone: [+61 2 3814 0210](tel:+61238140210)

**\*\* Note:** Online bookings generally open 6 months in advance of your dates of travel, so be sure to set yourself a reminder to check the website around September or October. You may be able to secure your booking earlier by contacting NSW TrainLink directly.

Cancellation of train bookings for overseas travellers sometimes needs to be done by telephone. NSW TrainLink Office hours are usually 7:00am-10:00pm daily (Australian Eastern Daylight Time: UTC+11).



*Catching the train is one of the many ways to travel between Sydney and The OzSky Star Safari*

## **CONSIDER SHARING A RENTAL CAR**

Regardless of whether you're catching the train or flying to Dubbo or Tamworth and then driving the last two hours to OzSky – or driving all the way from Sydney to OzSky, you'll definitely need a car for the week, so you can get around easily while you're at OzSky.

If you haven't already done so, now would be a great time to contact other OzSky folks and consider trying to organise sharing of rental cars.

Not only will it result in a significantly lower rental cost, but it's also a great way to share the driving and to make new friends along the way.

**Important note:** All car rental agencies in Dubbo close early some days, so please consider this restriction when planning your itinerary.

Feel free to use this mailing list to contact the other OzSky folks heading to OzSky in 2024 – If you want to drive, but also want to share the costs of rental and fuel, there are likely several other people out there in the group who might prefer to be a passenger, and vice-versa.

Oh, and just remember... we drive on the LEFT side of the road here in Oz!

The mailing list address is: [OzSky2024@OzSky.org](mailto:OzSky2024@OzSky.org).



*Consider sharing a Rental Car with another OzSky colleague.  
It's a great way to share the costs and make new friends!*

## **BOOKING YOUR RENTAL VEHICLE**

When booking a rental vehicle at Dubbo or Tamworth, ask the agent if they can drop off the car at or near the train station if that's how you're getting there, or if they can organise a pickup – this will save you walking through town with all your luggage.

Also, as Dubbo and Tamworth are both regional locations we suggest that you:

- Don't wait until too late to book your rental vehicle as there are often only limited numbers of vehicles available at country locations such as these.
- Make direct contact with the local office of the car rental agency a few weeks/days prior to arrival, to confirm that a staff member will be there at the right time to hand over the keys to you, as some regional rental agencies close early some days.

For your convenience, I have listed the website details for some of the main rental car companies in Dubbo, Tamworth and Sydney, in alphabetical order (*there may also be others*):

- [Avis](#) Dubbo, Tamworth and Sydney
- [Bayswater](#) Sydney (city) only
- [Budget](#) Dubbo, Tamworth and Sydney
- [EuropCar](#) Sydney only
- [Hertz](#) Dubbo, Tamworth and Sydney
- [Thrifty](#) Dubbo, Tamworth and Sydney

## **THE OZSKY STAR SAFARI SITE ADDRESS**

If you use Google Maps on your smart phone or tablet, you can simply enter "[The OzSky Star Safari](#)" as the destination to get real-time, live-traffic, guided directions the whole way.

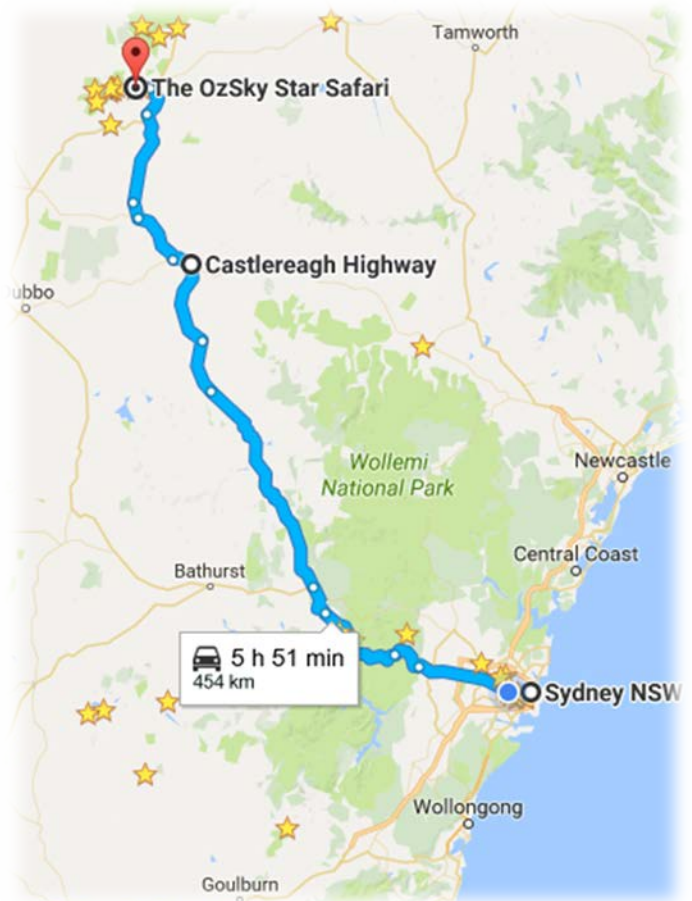


If you don't have global roaming or a local SIM card, be sure to download local "Offline Maps" and start the navigation before you depart your hotel's Wi-Fi so that it downloads all the roads and directions before you go off-line.

If you're using other mapping software or a dedicated GPS Navigator, you can enter "**882 Timor Road Coonabarabran**" as the destination to obtain directions.

Note: Timor Road is sometimes also known as "National Park Road" or "John Renshaw Parkway" on some maps.

- [Sydney Airport to The OzSky Star Safari](#)
- [Dubbo Airport to The OzSky Star Safari](#)
- [Tamworth Airport to The OzSky Star Safari](#)
- [Coona Clocktower to The OzSky Star Safari](#)



## **ACCOMMODATION BOOKINGS – SYDNEY**

When choosing your accommodation in Sydney, keep in mind that you can often find some great deals on airfare + accommodation packages if you take the time to look around online.

There are countless hotels available in and around Sydney ranging from budget right through to luxury and everything in between – a simple internet search will reveal a myriad of options to choose from.

Sydney Central Train Station is where the train departs for Coonabarabran. If you are planning on taking the train option, we generally suggest considering accommodation in that area.

If you are flying home immediately after the OzSky Star Safari, you should plan at least one night in Sydney after you return from OzSky and then fly out the next morning, otherwise you may find yourself needing to leave OzSky a day early, as it's almost impossible to get back to Sydney in time to catch any of the regular flights on the same day.

## **ONSITE ACCOMMODATION DURING OZSKY**

For those of you staying in one of the on-site rooms at OzSky, tentative reservations have already been made on your behalf.

The on-site accommodation is quite basic but is extremely convenient for a group such as ours, with exclusive access to the entire motel site, complete control of the on-site lighting, and the rooms are only 60-100 yds from the observing field and the telescopes.

Most rooms have one Queen bed, one Single bed and two double bunks, and whilst the rooms can easily accommodate up to seven guests per room, we usually only assign three individuals per shared room to ensure greater comfort.

All rooms include an ensuite bathroom with toilet & hot shower, air-conditioning, small refrigerator, microwave, tea & coffee making facilities, basic kitchen, table and chairs.

Gas-powered BBQs are also available in several locations around the property, and a small electric cooker is available in most of the rooms.

Daily room service is not offered, however fresh towels are always available upon request, should you require a change during the week.

There is also one coin-operated clothes washer and one clothes dryer available for shared use by all guests, so be sure to time your clothes-wash accordingly.

The cost of your accommodation is usually split between each person staying in your room and is payable directly to the motel prior to your departure. At the time of writing, nightly rooms rates were as follows:

- AU \$120 per room (for 2 people)
- AU \$135 per room (for 3 people)

So, when a room is split between three people, your individual accommodation costs will usually be around AU\$315 for the entire week plus any meals or drinks you might enjoy during the week.

## **ON-SITE ROOMING ASSIGNMENTS**

Final room assignments for those of you staying on-site will be published much closer to the starting date of OzSky and will generally be randomly assigned unless specific requests have been made to share with certain people.

Rooming assignments are not final and may be altered if desired, wherever possible.

## **LIMITED ON-SITE WI-FI AVAILABILITY**

Please note: although Wi-Fi is available for guests staying on-site at the motel, the remoteness of the location results in the speed and bandwidth of that connection being extremely limited and sometimes non-existent.

Because that single limited connection will be shared across everyone in our group, do not be surprised if you sometimes go several hours (or even days) without being able to connect.

Faster, more reliable internet connections are available in the nearby town of Coonabarabran, so if you need to establish a strong connection for any reason, it is recommended that you plan a daily trip into town to make those connections.

Please do not rely on the on-site Wi-Fi.

## **OFFSITE ACCOMMODATION DURING OZSKY**

For those of you who are staying off-site, we would **strongly recommend** organising and booking your accommodation in Coonabarabran as soon as possible as those hotels and motels often fill to capacity, sometimes several months in advance.

There are several options available – from budget right through to a 4-star hotel – as well as numerous B&B type lodgings to suit everyone's desires and budgets.