

# Flying observatory achieves 1st science flight

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(AP) -- A U.S.-German infrared observatory mounted in a jumbo jet has flown its inaugural science flight, a mission to better understand how stars form.

The highly modified Boeing 747SP jetliner completed the flight Wednesday morning, returning to its base at Palmdale in the Mojave Desert after 10 hours of cruising at high altitude.

The 100-inch-diameter telescope targeted the star-making factory Orion nebula and a young forming star cluster 3,000 light-years from Earth.

It's the first of three science flights planned before Christmas and marks the start of a 20-year observing campaign.

The joint [NASA](#) and German Aerospace Center project is called the Stratospheric [Observatory](#) for Infrared Astronomy, or SOFIA for short.

**More information:** SOFIA mission: <http://www.nasa.gov/mission-pages/SOFIA/index2.html>

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