

A noctilucent masterpiece

August 9 2011, By Jason Major



Noctilucent clouds over Reykjavík. © Örvar Atli Þorgeirsson. Credit: Örvar Atli Þorgeirsson

Night-shining “noctilucent” clouds create a magical glow in the night skies over Reykjavík, Iceland in this beautiful photo by Örvar Atli Þorgeirsson, taken on August 6. In the foreground is “The Sun Voyager” (Sólfar), an iconic steel sculpture located on the city waterfront representing a Viking ship.

Örvar did not set out to photograph this rare atmospheric phenomenon but had instead intended to shoot aurora triggered by recent solar outbursts.

“The forecast on the 6th of August was predicting extreme aurora activity,” Örvar says in his Flickr description. “Even though it was very early August and the [night](#) would not get fully dark I went out as the aurora can be seen in deep twilight conditions. I saw the aurora for 1 – 2 minutes that night. I did not get a good picture of it though. Instead we witnessed this even rarer phenomenon called noctilucent clouds.”

Noctilucent clouds are extremely high-level clouds made located in the mesosphere, around 76 to 85 kilometers (47 to 53 miles) high... nearly at the very edge of space. (Most commercial airplanes fly between 6 and 7 miles high.) They are high enough to reflect sunlight coming from beyond the horizon long after night has fallen over the land below. They usually appear as a wispy web of blue, white, purple and orange tendrils stretched across the sky.

“These clouds were extremely beautiful to look at and reminded me of the [aurora](#) but were much more stationary and had this beautiful blue color.” – Örvar Atli Þorgeirsson

Noctilucent clouds are mainly visible at latitudes between 50° – 70° north and south during the months of June and July. This means Reykjavík, located right in the middle, can get great views. (Of course it helps to have a talented photographer like Örvar to capture them so nicely!)

Oddly enough noctilucent clouds are a relatively recent phenomenon, only having been recorded for about 120 years. They have been connected with space shuttle passages through the upper atmosphere, and it's even been suggested that they may be associated with the 1908 Tunguska impact.

Read more about noctilucent [clouds here](#).

Source: [Universe Today](#)

Citation: A noctilucent masterpiece (2011, August 9) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-08-noctilucent-masterpiece.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.