

New exhibition, website guide visitors through the evolving universe

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Most stars form close together in nebulae - large cosmic clouds of gas and dust that act as stellar nurseries. The nebula IC 410 is located 13,000 light-years from Earth and spans 15 light-years. This visible-light photograph was taken with the Megacam instrument on the MMT telescope atop Mount Hopkins, Arizona. Credit: Harvard-Smithsonian CfA

The cosmos constantly changes. Stars are born, live out their lives, and die - sometimes calmly, sometimes explosively. Galaxies form, grow, and collide dramatically. A new exhibition and website, developed jointly by the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (SAO) and the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, reveal the dynamic and evolving universe through breathtaking photographs and informative

captions.

"The Evolving Universe" explores how the stars, galaxies and universe undergo the same stages as [life on Earth](#): from birth, to maturity and, eventually, to death. This remarkable journey from present-day Earth to the far reaches of space and time will be on view in the [museum](#) in Washington, D.C., through July 7, 2013.

A worldwide audience also can experience the [exhibition](#) through its website, located at www.mnh.si.edu/exhibits/evolving-universe . All of the images featured in the museum gallery can be downloaded in high-resolution jpegs or PDFs formatted in poster size.

"Anyone can select their favorite space photo, download it, and take it to their local copy shop to print it," said Smithsonian [astrophysicist](#) Jonathan McDowell, who played a lead role in developing the exhibition.

Visitors to the exhibition or website can choose one of two paths to explore the cosmos. They can begin close to home with our solar system and move outward to the farthest reaches of the universe. Or they can begin 13.7 billion years ago at the moment of the Big Bang and move forward in time to the present day. Along their journey they will learn how a variety of telescopes and instruments, many developed by SAO, reveal the fascinating history of the expanding universe.

"We've all seen the amazing pictures from NASA's probes in our own solar system," said McDowell. "I'm excited about bringing to the public the remarkable images of the broader universe that we astronomers have been exploring with our telescopes. I hope that with this exhibition visitors will take away an appreciation for our larger cosmic neighborhood."

"The Evolving Universe" is located on the second floor of the [National](#)

[Museum of Natural History](#), between the Minerals Store and the Korea Gallery. For more information about the museum, visit it at www.mnh.si.edu .

Provided by Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics

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