

Milky Way

By Khuyen Nguyen

Now, you must be thinking, "Milky Way? Isn't that what I had at lunch?" Well, this Milky Way is a very different one, and it definitely cannot fit in your lunch box! The Milky Way is the name of the **galaxy** in which our solar system is located.

So, what is a galaxy? It is a collection of stars, dust, and gas usually concentrated around a nucleus, or a center point. There are 3 kinds of galaxies: spiral, elliptical and irregular. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is classified as a **spiral galaxy**. In a spiral galaxy, the stars, gas, and dust are gathered into arms spiraling away from the center. Our star, the Sun, is located at the edge of the Orion spiral arm.



Now think, we live on planet Earth, and it takes about a day to fly just around the planet, by plane! Our planet is just one small part of a solar system consisting of 8 other planets and the Sun. How much time would it take to travel around all of those? Now, what if I told you that there are 200 billion stars, all with solar systems of their own, in the Milky Way? That is how big the Milky Way is. It is about 100,000 light years across and 1,000 light years thick.

If you live in a place where the night sky is very dark, sometimes you can actually see the Milky Way as a large band of bright stars across the sky. We are able to see this view because we're located near the edge of the Milky Way and can gaze across it to the other spirals. Now, the next time you go look up at the stars in a dark night sky, do not forget to look for the Milky Way and think of those stars far, far away!