

Our Solar System

Let's imagine for a moment that we can leave the Earth behind and explore the solar system that surrounds it. We call it the solar system because everything in it is centered around the Sun, and solar means something to do with the Sun.

The **Sun** is a star just like many of the stars that you can see in the night sky.

Just many times closer to us. In fact, the Sun makes up more than ninety-nine percent of the mass of the solar system.

The Sun is so big that it's more than one hundred times wider than the Earth. And if it were a giant jar you could fit more than one million Earths into it.

More than that, the Sun is what holds the solar system together.

Its massive gravity is what keeps the Earth and all the other planets circling around it instead of drifting off into space.

The Sun is also what allows us to live on Earth. Without the Sun there would be no heat. There would be no light. The Sun gives us heat and light because it's always burning. It's a giant ball of gas.

As we move away from the Sun, the first planet we will encounter is **Mercury**.

Mercury is the smallest planet in the solar system. Much smaller than Earth, and one of only five planets you can see from Earth using nothing but your eyes. Of course, it won't look much like a planet. It looks more like a bright star.

Next it's **Venus**, the second planet. Some people call Venus Earth sister because the two planets are very close in size and gravity.

But they are very different on the surface.

First of all it's very hot. Venus is the hottest planet in the solar system. Venus might not be fun to visit. But it's beautiful to look at.

It's the second brightest object in the night sky. The only thing brighter is the Moon.

After Venus comes **Earth**. The third planet from the Sun. As far as we know, Earth is the only planet to have living things.

Let's leave Earth again for a moment though. And visit **Mars**, the fourth planet from the Sun.

Mars is known as the red planet. Mars is smaller than Venus and the Earth but larger than Mercury. It is cold and rocky, with a thin atmosphere made of carbon dioxide and oxygen. There is water ice on Mars.

Jupiter comes next, the fifth planet in the solar system.

Jupiter is the largest planet and is something called as « a gas giant. »

It's called this because it's really big and made mostly of gases.

Jupiter is so big that you would have to place 11 Earths into it just to stretch across its middle. People cannot land on Jupiter because it's made of gas, there is no ground to land on.

Even if there was somewhere to land, Jupiter is covered by terrible storms. Much stronger than even the strongest storms on Earth.

One storm that we know about can be seen from Earth, we call it the « great spot », because that's what it looks like, and it has been going on for at least 200 years.

After Jupiter comes **Saturn**, another gas giant. Saturn is famous for its beautiful rings, although they look solid from a distance, the rings are actually made from many many small ice particles as well as rocks and dust.

After Saturn comes **Uranus**, the seventh planet from the Sun. Uranus is another gas giant but it is much smaller than Saturn and Jupiter. Uranus is covered in blue clouds made of methane which give it its lovely colour.

Very similar to Uranus is **Neptune**, the eighth planet from the Sun. Neptune is another gas giant, and like Uranus it has methane in its atmosphere so it also looks blue.

That leaves us with eight official planets in our solar system. Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.
Good bye till next time....