

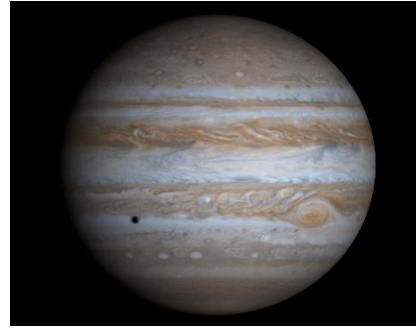
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Jupiter, King of Planets

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After months of absence Jupiter, the King of planets has returned dazzling our night sky with its golden brilliance. On February 6th it will be at its closest approach to Earth, with its face fully illuminated by the Sun. This will be the best time to view Jupiter but it will be visible until mid-July easily found along the ecliptic (the path the sun follows across the sky). Like all planets, its light is reflected from the sun. To ancient Romans, Jupiter (Jove) was regarded as king of the heavens; god of the sky and thunder; in Greek mythology he was known as Zeus. Jupiter is fifth planet from the sun and by far the largest in our solar system, with a diameter of 143,000 km (more than 11 earth diameters!).



It has at least 66 moons, four of which are easily visible through binoculars or a small telescope. Galileo was the first to discover Jupiter's four large moons (1610) - Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto; now known as the Galilean moons. His observations of these four moons proved that not all celestial objects revolve around the earth, as was commonly believed.

Jupiter is a "gas giant". Ninety percent of its mass is hydrogen in gaseous and liquid form. It is uncertain whether there is a rocky core. A telescope reveals tawny bands running parallel to Jupiter's equator. These are weather systems in the upper atmosphere, with wind speeds that can exceed 400 Km/h. and cyclones that can last for hundreds of years. Next clear night or early morning, get out your binoculars and take a look! The 4 giant moons will look like 4 sharp points of light - a sight to behold!

http://solarsystem.nasa.gov/scitech/display.cfm?ST_ID=2283

<http://www.seasky.org/astronomy/astronomy-calendar-2015.html>