

Group Tours of the Veen Observatory

Important Information for
Individuals/Groups Requesting a tour of the James C. Veen Observatory

Please read the following before completing Group Reservation Form. Knowledge of the following will ensure both efficient expediting of your request for a group visit and maximum benefit from the experience.

Group Tours of the Veen Observatory can be scheduled Sunday through Thursday evenings, and on some Fridays, from March 15 through November 15 (Because of research and other educational activities, not all dates are available, so groups are urged to have two or more dates in mind before proceeding with the reservation process). Appointments must be made at least three weeks (4-5 weeks preferred) prior to the desired date. A maximum of 30 people can be accommodated at one time, and greatest benefit is realized when groups are kept under 15-20 persons. A primary and alternate cloud date can be selected, with the second date available for a tour of the observatory and substitute program in the event sky conditions prevent telescope viewing on both the primary and cloud date. Visits generally last approximately one and one half to two hours. Unfortunately we cannot offer overnight events. Included with the Confirmation sent to those making reservations will be an Invoice for a non-refundable **\$50 Group Fee** which must be submitted before the visit can take place. To accommodate large groups (over 30 people) two primary and two cloud dates can be scheduled, but a \$50 fee will be required for each pair of dates.

When filling out the Reservation Form, please check the [Group Tours Calendar](#) to see what nights may be available. It is kept up to date. A **Group Confirmation and Invoice** will be sent to you. Once you receive the Confirmation/Invoice, please submit a copy of the form, along with a check/money order for the required fee, to the GRAAA Treasurer (whose name and address appear on the invoice). Next, promptly contact the Lead Host, whose name, phone number and e-mail address (if available) appear on the form. Discuss the nature of your group and any specific needs or requests. Any desired modifications of arrival-departure times can be made directly with the lead host. It is also through the Lead Host that last minute decisions are made about use of the "Cloud Date" if needed. If you have concerns or problems that cannot be met through conversations with the Lead Host, contact one of the coordinators for group tours, James Foerch, (897-9784) weekday evenings, or David L. DeBruyn at the Roger B. Chaffee Planetarium (456-3525) between 9:30 and 4 p.m. on Wednesdays or Fridays.

Visitors should be aware that the observation domes and grounds surrounding the observatory must be kept dark for effective viewing to occur. The stairways are narrow and not accessible to those with disabilities. Floor space within the observing tower is limited. While safeguards are in place to minimize hazards and potential for injury, there is an "assumed risk" in visiting a facility of this type, which is not specifically designed for public accommodation. The Grand Rapids Amateur Astronomical Association and Public Museum of Grand Rapids cannot be held liable for any injuries incurred during Observatory visits.

Come equipped: Flashlights will be helpful for finding your way around in the dark, but should be kept directed toward the ground so as not to interfere with observing activities. Insect repellent or warm clothing (particularly for feet, head and hands) is strongly encouraged during appropriate seasons. Parts of the observatory are heated but the dome and a second large telescope outside the building are both open to the night air. The greatest benefit from the experience is realized when groups are kept to 15-20 persons. A limited number of persons can

be accommodated in the observation tower at one time so larger groups are usually split up and rotated between telescopes and other points of interest.

Bring enough adults to adequately chaperone young guests and stress to these chaperones that they are expected to promptly intervene if there is inappropriate conduct of any kind. (See next item.)

Appropriate conduct is expected at all times. There is to be absolutely no running, loud talking, excessive playfulness or inappropriate behavior of any kind that could be potentially harmful to guests or observatory property, or is detrimental to the enjoyment of the experience by all guests. Please stress this important point to all members of your group. Group leaders are responsible for the conduct of their group members and should make sure that all chaperones are aware of this policy. Any persons not strictly adhering to proper conduct will be asked to leave the premises.

If it is cloudy on the primary date, you can, at no additional cost, visit on one alternate "Cloud Date." If you did not schedule an alternate date at the time you made your appointment, you can still do so through your lead host. However, the date selected must not conflict with other observatory activities.

If it is also cloudy on your alternate "cloud date," groups may take advantage of the option to visit anyway. They will be treated to a 20 minute orientation slide show about the observatory, a tour and demonstration of the principal instruments, and a question and answer session with the assigned hosts. There are several interesting exhibits and video equipment in the building.

Stay in touch with your Lead Host, whose name and phone number(s) and E-mail, if available, appear on the Confirmation/Invoice. Changes in arrival time or length of the visit, and any special requests that can help provide maximum benefit and enjoyment for the group are best handled directly between the guide and group leader whenever possible.

Location: The [online map](#) will help you reach the observatory. The recommended route is Cascade Road south to 36th Street, east on 36th Street 3.9 miles, and north on Kissing Rock Road approximately one third mile. Look for a red star on a mailbox on the right side of Kissing Rock Road at the bottom of a significant dip, along with a green address sign "3308." **There are no other signs on Kissing Rock Road indicating the observatory's location.** Turn right near the mailbox onto the one lane paved road that leads to a wooded area. **IMPORTANT:** Groups with more than several vehicles, and all large heavy vehicles (like school busses) are asked to park in the mowed parking area found on the right before reaching the wooded area and entrance gate. Path lights will guide walkers along the one fourth mile one lane roadway from the parking area to the observatory. Those needing to drive up the one lane road to the building should do so with extreme care. Be aware of a moderate grade, a sharp curve, and close proximity to heavy forest. Drive Dead Slow and be alert for oncoming vehicles, pedestrians, and other hazards. Take care not to damage path lights, and under no circumstances should oncoming vehicles attempt to pass in the wooded area. In winter, the road can be impassable at times. Therefore group visits are seldom scheduled November 15 - March 15.

If you understand this information, please continue to the
[Group Reservation Form](#)