

# Visiting Other Planets

Scientists have learned a lot about the other planets in our solar system. One major thing they have learned is how hard it would be to travel to any of them.

There are eight planets in our solar system. Mercury is the planet closest to the sun. It is also the smallest planet. Venus is the planet second closest to the sun. It is the hottest planet. Earth is the third planet from the sun, and the only planet that we know for sure is home to living creatures. Some people once thought there might be people living on Mars, the planet next to Earth, but we now know there are not. Scientists have sent two robotic spacecraft, called *Spirit* and *Opportunity*, to explore Mars. These spacecraft have sent a lot of information about Mars back to Earth.

Jupiter is a **massive** planet. It is bigger than all the other planets combined! But Jupiter is not solid, like Earth. It is made of gas. It also has four large moons. Saturn is another planet that is made of gas. It is famous for its rings. Saturn's rings are made of chunks of ice. Uranus is a planet of **intense** cold. It is the coldest planet. Neptune looks blue in color. It is the planet with the strongest winds.

Will people ever get to visit other planets? We do not know yet. Some people are planet **fanatics** and really want to visit other planets. But sending people to other planets would be a huge job. The ships would need enormous engines that could produce great amounts of **power**. Landing and surviving on other planets would take **unprecedented** levels of technology, or things that haven't been invented yet. It would be impossible to land on a gas planet, for example, because there would be no solid ground to stand on.

These days, many scientists are interested in **cosmic** space. Cosmic space is beyond our solar system. It includes stars and other faraway objects. But scientists are still talking about sending people to another planet. Some groups are studying how to send a ship to Mars that has people on board. Such a trip would be the **culmination** of years of work. The scientists who plan this trip would be the **elite** in their field.

Trips to other planets may be possible someday. Some of the most skilled scientists on Earth are looking into new kinds of engines that could produce the necessary speed. For human beings looking for an adventure that is out of this world, a voyage to another planet would be the **ultimate** experience.

**COMPREHENSION** Which planets are the hottest and coldest? Which words give you an idea of how difficult it would be to visit another planet?







# Anna the Artist

Anna had a big, fancy room in a **luxurious** hotel, but she could not wait to go outside. She and her parents were on vacation in Costa Rica, and this morning they had awakened early to go to a national park. Anna loved painting pictures of trees, birds, and animals. She knew she would find many ideas for her art in the park.

A little while later, they walked through the park gates. The sun was wonderfully hot on Anna's skin. She could hear the calls of birds and insects all around. The leaves on the trees were as green as jewels. There were big, beautiful flowers everywhere. Anna felt as if she were in an **opulent** land fit for a queen.

As Anna walked, she tried to remember every detail of the shapes and colors in the forest. Anna wanted her painting to be an **expression** of how the forest made her feel.

"Look!" The guide pointed up as he led Anna and her parents through the forest. "It's a Blue Morpho butterfly!"

Anna's eyes shot up toward the trees. She saw a flash of blue wings shining in the sun. Anna had seen pictures of Blue Morpho butterflies in books, but the real thing looked even brighter and more **gorgeous** than the photographs. The lovely butterfly reminded Anna of an **elegant** lady dressed up for a fancy dinner.

Next, the guide pointed out a yellow and black spider. The spider sat on a web made of thin, **delicate** threads. The middle of the web was **decorated** with a beautiful zigzag pattern of threads.

Finally, they saw a group of four monkeys resting in the top of a tree. One monkey used its long fingers to carefully comb another monkey's fur until it was **immaculately** smooth and clean.

Later, Anna and her parents went back to their hotel room. While her parents napped, Anna painted. She spread out her paper and tools. She worked for hours. That night, Anna showed her parents the painting she had made. In the painting was a blue butterfly, a spider on a web, and a family of monkeys. The painting glowed with bright colors.

"Anna, this is wonderful!" said her mother. "Your **artistry** and skill will help us all remember our trip to Costa Rica for a long time to come."

**COMPREHENSION** How does nature inspire Anna's painting? What words help you understand the beauty of the forest in Costa Rica?



