



Evening sky in December 2016

High in the southern sky, the bright star Achernar marks the end of the celestial River, the constellation Eridanus. The River originates close to Rigel, the bright star depicting a foot of Orion, the hunter, which is found lower in the east. Above the north-east horizon is the great square, formed by four fairly bright stars, in the constellation of Pegasus, the Flying Horse. Andromeda, the constellation lower and to the right of Pegasus, contains the Andromeda galaxy. At a distance of 2.3 million light years this galaxy is the furthest object you can see with your unaided eyes – a faint smear of light on moonless nights.

Planet Mercury, Venus and Mars are above the western horizon after sunset. Venus shines as the brilliant evening star in Capricornus. Mercury is below it closer to the horizon in Sagittarius and Mars can be seen above Venus in Aquarius.

The Moon is in the evening sky until 14 Dec, and again on 31 Dec. On 3 Dec, it can be seen as a slender crescent, 6 degrees from Venus and on 5 Dec, it appears only 3 degrees from Mars. On 31 Dec, a thin crescent Moon, accompanied by Venus and Mars, make a beautiful sight on the last evening of the year. Summer solstice is on 21 Dec.