

Visiting ESO's Office in Santiago

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Astronomers travelling to Chile to observe with ESO telescopes are encouraged to include a visit to ESO's office in Santiago. With the recent completion of the new ALMA building (see Figure 1), there is now a vibrant scientific community of more than 100 astronomers, fellows and students at the ESO premises in Santiago. ESO's Office for Science in Chile is happy to provide accommodation and *per diem* for visiting astronomers who wish to give a science talk and interact with ESO and ALMA staff. If interested, please contact Michael West (mwest@eso.org). We look forward to welcoming you to Santiago!



Figure 1. The hand-over ceremony for the new ALMA offices at the ESO premises in Santiago. Tim de Zeeuw (ESO Director General, left) and Thijs de Graauw (ALMA Director, right) exchange the key.

Café & Kosmos Events in Munich

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On a Monday evening such as the 5th of July this year, the trendy bar Café Jasmin in the Schwabing district of Munich is full inside, despite the hot air and blazing Sun that would normally invite people to enjoy a beer outside in a tree-shaded



Credit: A. Griesch/MPP

Figure 1. An interested crowd in lively discussion with the physicist Stefan Stonjek from MPP at the first Café & Kosmos event.

garden. Although we are in the midst of the international football season, these people did not gather to watch another game of the World Cup; oddly enough, these are members of the public interested in science, and in our Universe in particular. They are here to listen and discuss with ESO astronomer Markus Kissler-Patig, the fundamental question: Are we alone in the Universe?

Subsequent science cafés have confirmed the success of the first event that took place on 31 May 2010, when Stefan Stonjek, a physicist from the Max-Planck-Institut für Physik (MPP), discussed *The Big Bang in the Tunnel*, covering the latest details about the CERN Large Hadron Collider (see Figure 1). The complex topic of string theory was aired by Ilka Baumgartl and Marco Baumgartl from the Excellence Cluster in September and the subject of the black hole at the heart of the Milky Way was discussed by Stefan Gillessen from the Max-Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics in November. The series is entitled *Café & Kosmos* and is a joint initiative between ESO, the Excellence Cluster Origin and Structure of the Universe, and the Max-Planck Institutes for Physics, Astrophysics and Extraterrestrial Physics.

The idea is to bring science directly to the general public in the Munich area in the relaxed atmosphere of a bar.

For many, research is “far away” and happens behind the closed doors of laboratories. Admittedly, there are many science magazines in print or on television and some newspapers have a page about science, but the contact between science and the public is often very indirect. Many scientific institutions organise open days, which are often very successful, but these take place only once a year at most. Public conferences on scientific themes are also often popular, but they generally follow the same academic scheme: the scientist speaks and the public listens. Direct exchanges between scientists and the public seldom take place.

The *Café & Kosmos* initiative aims to bring researchers and non-scientists together, and to do so in places where people typically meet, share their thoughts, discuss business and debate about big and small things. Thus a pub in the centre of the city of Munich was chosen for the meetings; a place where communication traditionally takes place. With *Café & Kosmos*, we want to give

people the chance to speak directly with scientists about current fascinating scientific themes.

The proposed themes for *Café & Kosmos* come from astrophysics, cosmology and particle physics, and are on topics of great interest for non-scientists, such as “What are black holes?”, “What do we know about dark matter?”, “Why did CERN build the LHC?”, “What do we know about planets outside our Solar System?”, and so on. The discussions are held in German. These and other topics are discussed in the relaxed atmosphere of a pub — every first Monday of the month. The duration of the discussions is initially about one and a half hours, although our first two experiences have shown us that many people tend to stay for much longer.

For more information on the *Café & Kosmos* series, including the list of future speakers, please go to <http://www.cafe-kosmos.org>.

It is a pleasure to thank Aleks Vulic, owner of *Café Jasmin*, for his permission to use his premises for these interactive sessions, as well as the speakers.

New Staff at ESO

Jean-Philippe Berger

I have been at ESO as a VLT staff astronomer, on leave from the Laboratoire d’Astrophysique de Grenoble (France), for about 10 months. I came to Santiago with my wife Stephanie and our three children Clara, Lucie and Axel.

I remember my very early fascination with ruins that later turned into a deep interest in human civilisations and especially their dawn and dusk. This has never left me. I believe the connection between

my passion for history and astronomy occurred in a remote Spanish village when I was approximately ten years old. My uncle had a TV (our family did not) and I watched an episode of the well-known science fiction series *Cosmos* 1999. It came as a revelation that man could travel into space and reach remote parts of the Universe. I immediately became interested in rockets and space shuttles. Finding and studying new civilisations seemed to be a realistic project and it took me a few years to accept that current technology was

barely capable of flying to the planets in the Solar System. Then at the age of 13 I received a book from my uncle: *Le Ciel* by Jean-Claude Pecker. This was the true revelation that one could “travel” in space thanks to telescopes and an imaginative brain.

Even though I continued to follow history lectures throughout my academic career, my educational path slowly but surely shifted towards science and technology and the final call to become an astronomer came during my short