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O37 - ASEAN Astronomy Camp (AAC)

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The ASEAN Astronomy Camp (AAC) is a regional youth outreach program organized by the National Astronomical Research Institute of Thailand (NARIT) and the International Training Centre in Astronomy under the auspices of UNESCO (ITCA). Originally established before the COVID-19 pandemic, the camp successfully relaunched in 2025, welcoming students aged 15–19 from across ASEAN and beyond. High school is a critical time for young people, as many begin thinking seriously about their future education and career paths. Moving beyond traditional classroom learning, the AAC provides students with direct access to world-class observatories, cutting-edge research facilities, and space technology that may not be available in their home countries, helping them explore whether a career in science and astronomy is the right path for them. For many, this is their first time stepping into a world-class scientific environment, and that kind of experience can be life-changing.

Over two consecutive years since its relaunch, the AAC has shown strong and growing international interest. In 2025, the camp received 317 applications and selected 42 participants from 11 Asian countries. In 2026, 206 applications came in from 12 countries — including first-time participants from Finland, Italy, the Dominican Republic, and the United Arab Emirates — showing that the program's reach is expanding well beyond ASEAN.

Each edition offers a range of hands-on educational activities designed to spark curiosity and open doors to science careers. Core highlights include stargazing atop Doi Inthanon — Thailand's highest peak — and visits to NARIT's advanced observatories and innovation laboratories. In the most recent edition, new activities were introduced, including Astro Rally — a team-based station rotation game featuring astronomy photo matching, constellation charades, vocabulary guessing, and creative video-making.These collaborative activities were highly well-received, effectively fostering peer learning and science communication skills among participants.

At its heart, the AAC is a platform for connection, where young people from diverse cultures and languages build friendships, discover shared passions, and lay the groundwork for future collaborations — proving that astronomy has the power to bring people together and inspire the next generation of science leaders from the region to the global stage.

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