

URANUS

Uranus, the seventh planet from the sun, was discovered in 1781 by astronomer William Herschel. He wanted to name it *Georgium Sidus* after King George III but the scientific community chose to support astronomer Johann Elert Bode's suggestion of Uranus, the Greek god of the sky.

Uranus is the 3rd largest planet in the solar system and 63 Earths could fit inside it. It has 27 known moons and 13 known rings with the inner rings being narrow and dark and the outer rings being brightly coloured.

While no spacecraft has studied Uranus at length Voyager 2 did fly by in January 1986. From this scientist know that Uranus takes just over 17 hours to rotate once (a day) and that this rotation is east to west and on an angle of 97° so it is on its side which is unique of any planet.

Uranus takes 84 Earth years to complete an orbit of the Sun (a Uranian year) at a distance of 2.9 billion kilometres. This distance means it is very cold and its surface is a dense fluid of icy water, methane and ammonia around a small rocky core. Its atmosphere is made mostly of hydrogen, helium and methane.

Does Uranus deserve to be the butt of so many planet jokes? Of the facts listed below choose which are true and which are false and decide for yourself.

1. Uranus is really big and is the 3rd largest planet in the solar system. T / F
2. Uranus has rings with the inner ones being darker than the outer ones. T / F
3. Uranus is blue because of the methane in its atmosphere. T / F
4. Uranus is 10x windier than Earth with gusts of up to 900kms per hour. T / F
5. Its atmosphere contains hydrogen sulphide and methane so it smells like rotten egg, gas or farts. T / F
6. Uranus is covered in diamonds formed from methane. T / F
7. Uranus is the coldest planet in the solar system as parts of it see the sun once every 84 years. T / F
8. Other than a flyby NASA has never been to Uranus and has no plans to visit. T / F
9. European Space Agency is sending a probe to Uranus to study it in more detail. The probe will be called Uranus Pathfinder. T / F
10. Uranium was named after the planet Uranus. T / F

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Uranus is named after the Greek god of the sky. It is the seventh planet from the sun and the 3rd largest planet. It has 27 moons and 13 rings with the inner rings being narrow and dark and the outer rings being brightly coloured. The atmosphere on Uranus is made mostly of hydrogen sulphide, helium and methane so it appears blue but it smells like rotten eggs. Can you colour the picture below to show this unique planet which rotates on its side.

