Northern Lights Glow Above an Iceland Waterfall

NASA's picture of the day shows how the sun can help paint the night sky.

Colorful northern lights glow above a waterfall at night.

Today, NASA shared a photo of bright northern lights over Skógafoss waterfall in Iceland, according to NASA's Astronomy Picture of the Day. The picture was taken in April 2025. The camera was open for five seconds. That means it caught several seconds of light in one image.

A person standing there would have seen a dark waterfall, a black sky, and curtains of color overhead. The colors looked like they were raining down toward the water. It would not be like fireworks. Auroras move more softly and slowly, like glowing sheets in the sky.

An **aurora** is a natural light show near Earth's poles. The northern lights are auroras near the North Pole. The southern lights happen near the South Pole.

Auroras do not happen every clear night. Several things have to line up. The sun must be active. The sky must be dark and clear. The viewing place usually has to be at a high **latitude**. High latitude means far north or far south on Earth.

That is why Iceland can be a good place to see the northern lights. It sits far north. NASA says the southern lights are harder for many people to see. There is less land in the Southern Hemisphere near the Antarctic Circle. That gives people fewer places to stand and watch.

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The science starts at the sun. The sun sends out solar wind, which is a stream of tiny particles. Some of those particles are **charged**. Charged particles carry a tiny electric push or pull.

Earth has a magnetosphere, which is a **magnetic** shield around the planet. It helps catch some particles from the solar wind. Earth's magnetic field then guides many of them toward the polar regions.

High above the ground, those particles hit gases in the atmosphere. The atmosphere is the blanket of air around Earth. When the particles hit the gases, the gases glow.

Different gases can make different colors. NASA says **oxygen** can glow red or green. **Nitrogen** can glow blue or pink. So the colors in the photo are not paint or clouds. They are clues about what is happening high in the air.

The photo matters because it shows something beautiful and real at the same time. It connects a waterfall on Earth to activity on the sun. It is a reminder that space weather can sometimes be seen from the ground.

Written from reporting by NASA.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. **Would you rather see an aurora in person or study one from a photo? Defend your choice.**

> **A strong answer:** A strong answer weighs wonder, safety, weather, darkness, travel, and what a camera can capture.

2. **Why might a waterfall make this science photo easier for people to care about?**

> **A strong answer:** A strong answer connects a familiar Earth scene with a harder space idea.

3. **If a class could plan one night to look for auroras, what would be the most important things to consider?**

> **A strong answer:** A strong answer uses the needed conditions, such as dark skies, clear weather, solar activity, and location.

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C O Y R N A M E A Y C D
M M L C A I R C P N I N
T T A D O P T G T C L O
T E T G L A U R O R A X
A T I E N I H G O C Y Y
A T T R U E N E E G E G
U N U P A R T I C L E E
E F D N G P E I C R L N
T I E O T H S C C P I R
C N A R G U F E M N H A
Y U U T R C T E T C A T
O R T X E C H A R G E D

AURORA CHARGED LATITUDE MAGNETIC NITROGEN
OXYGEN PARTICLE

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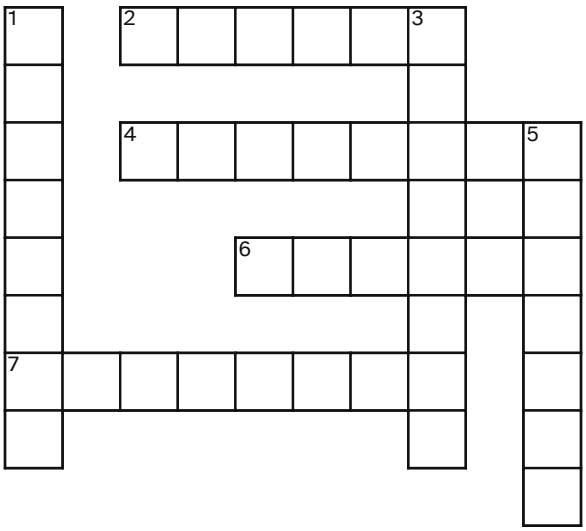

ACROSS

2 Air gas that can help make red or green sky lights

4 Having an unseen force that can pull some metals

6 Colored sky lights near the North and South Poles

7 Number showing how far north or south of the equator a place is

DOWN

1 Tiny bit of matter

3 Air gas that can help make blue or pink sky lights

5 Having a tiny electric push or pull

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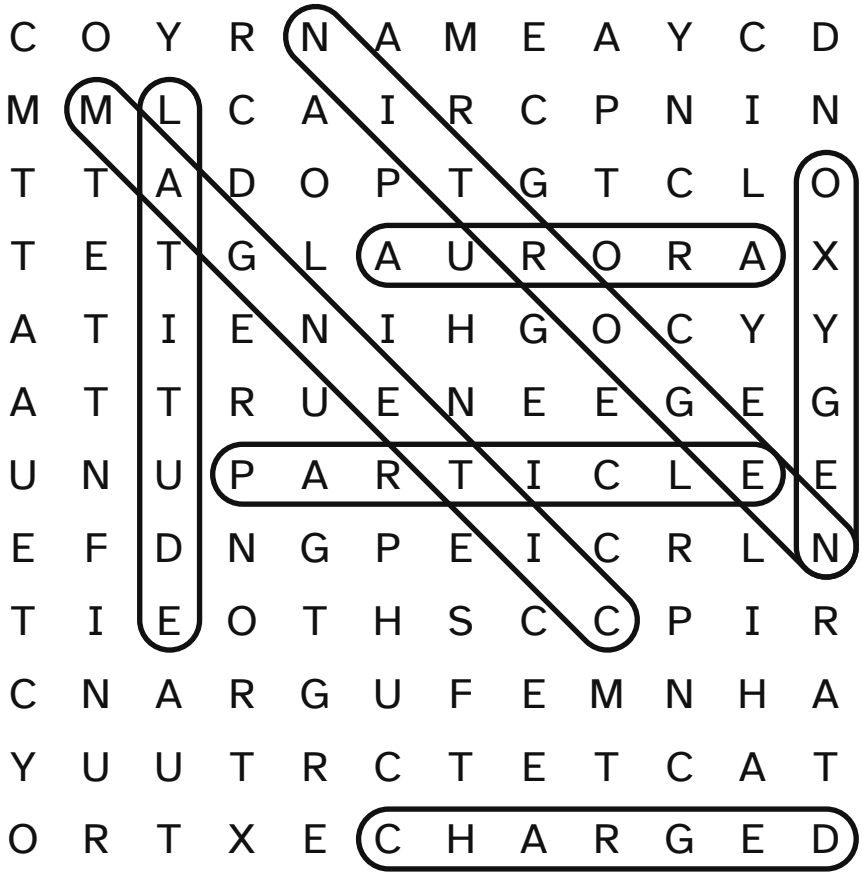
— answer key



AURORA CHARGED LATITUDE MAGNETIC NITROGEN OXYGEN PARTICLE

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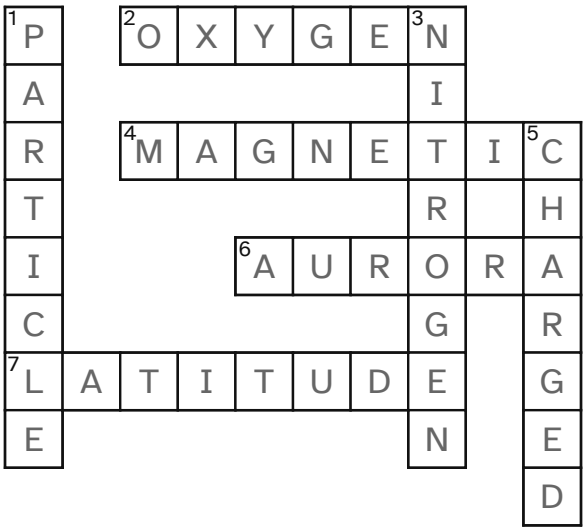
Northern Lights Glow Above an Iceland Waterfall

— answer key



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Where this came from

This article was written for 3andB from the reporting below. It is not a reprint — the wording is ours and the facts are theirs.

NASA

"APOD: 2026 August 27 – Colorful Aurora over an Icelandic Waterfall"

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https://science.nasa.gov/image-article/apod-2026-august-27-colorful-aurora-over-an-icelandic-waterfall/

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The article with a note on each question, a word search, a crossword, and the answer key to both.

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