

# How did the Milky Way get its name?

## **Summary:**

The Milky Way got its name from ancient myths and legends. In many cultures, people believed that the Milky Way was a pathway made by the gods or the spilled milk of a goddess. The name “Milky Way” comes from the Latin word “Via Lactea,” which means “milky road” or “milky path.”

## **How Did the Milky Way Get Its Name?**

Imagine looking up at the night sky and seeing a bright band of stars stretching across it. That’s the Milky Way! But have you ever wondered how it got its name? Well, let me tell you a fascinating story.

## **Ancient Myths and Legends:**

Long, long ago, before there were telescopes or space probes, people looked up at the night sky and saw the same stars we see today. But they didn’t know what the stars really were, so they made up stories to explain them. In many ancient cultures, people believed that the Milky Way was a pathway or road made by the gods.

## **The Spilled Milk of a Goddess:**

One popular myth about the Milky Way comes from Greek mythology. According to the ancient Greeks, the Milky Way was formed when the goddess Hera, the queen of the gods, was breastfeeding her baby son Hercules. Legend has it that Hera was startled while feeding Hercules, and a jet of her milk sprayed across the sky, creating the band of stars we now call the Milky Way.

## **Via Lactea:**

The Milky Road: The name “Milky Way” comes from the Latin words “Via Lactea,” which mean “milky road” or “milky path.” The ancient Romans thought that the Milky Way looked like a road made of milk stretching across the sky. They believed that this milky road was created by the goddess Juno, who spilled milk while nursing her son, the god Mars.

## **Other Names for the Milky Way:**

While “Milky Way” is the most common name for our galaxy in English, people in other cultures have their own names for it. For example, in Chinese mythology, the Milky Way is called the “Silver River,” and it’s said to be a celestial river separating two lovers, the cowherd and the weaver girl, who can only meet once a year on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month.

## **Exploring the Milky Way:**

Today, we know that the Milky Way is not just a band of stars in the sky—it’s a vast spiral galaxy that contains billions of stars, including our own Sun. We live inside the Milky Way galaxy, so when we look up at the night sky, we’re seeing our cosmic home!