

Saturn

Gas Giant

Year = 29.4 Earth Years

Day = 10.7 Earth Hours

9 times the size of Earth

Radius = 36,183 miles

886 million miles from Sun

Gravity = 34.3 ft/s²

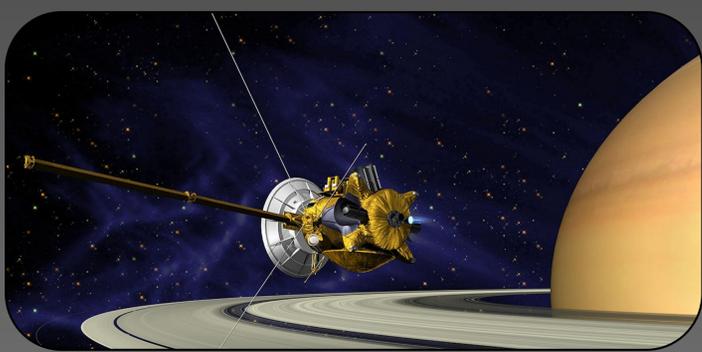


Image Courtesy of NASA

Four Spacecraft have visited Saturn, beginning in 1979. The most recent, called Cassini, orbited the planet for thirteen years before being steered towards the planet to probe its atmosphere before its destruction. Cassini also carried a probe, Huygens, that landed on Titan, one of Saturn's moons. Cassini-Huygens was a joint venture by NASA, the European Space Agency, and the Italian Space Agency, named for astronomers Giovanni Cassini and Christiaan Huygens.

Saturn is the second largest planet in our solar system and is easily recognizable from its iconic rings. Like Jupiter, Saturn is a large ball of mostly hydrogen and helium gas. The planet is also surrounded by over sixty known moons. Its core is made of iron and nickel and enveloped by liquid metallic hydrogen. The whole planet is less dense than water, which means if there was an ocean of water big enough it would float!



Image Courtesy of NASA

Saturn's rings are theorized to be pieces of comets, asteroids, and broken moons that have been torn apart by the planet's strong gravity. The system extends 175,000 miles out from the planet's surface. As wide as they are, their vertical height reaches only about 30 feet.

Dutch Astronomer Christian Huygens is credited with discovering the first of Saturn's moons Titan. While Saturn is not suitable for life as we know it, Titan may be. It is the only place besides Earth where there are liquids in the form of rivers, lakes, and seas.



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