

# Mars: The Red Planet

Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun and is the second smallest planet in our solar system. Mars is sometimes called 'the Red Planet' because of its colour. The atmosphere on Mars does not have enough oxygen for us to breathe.

## Did You Know...?

- Mars was named after the Roman god of war. The month of March is also named after him.
- A Mars day is called a 'sol'.



A "true colour" photograph of Mars taken by the OSIRIS instrument on the European Space Agency (ESA) Rosetta spacecraft in February 2007.

## Missions to Mars

It is important to launch a mission to Mars at the right time because Earth and Mars are always moving. Sometimes, Mars is closer to Earth than at other times. Choosing the shortest distance is a good idea because the journey will need less fuel.

## Why Mars?

Mars is the safest planet to travel to because:

- its soil contains a little water;
- it gets enough sunlight to use solar power;
- there is some gravity to help us to walk;
- a day on Mars is almost the same length as on Earth.

### Mars Quick Facts

|                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Size:</b>           | 6,779km                 |
| <b>Moons:</b>          | 2                       |
| <b>Length of year:</b> | 687 days                |
| <b>Length of day:</b>  | 24 hours 37 minutes     |
| <b>Temperature:</b>    | between -140°C and 30°C |
| <b>Atmosphere:</b>     | 95% carbon dioxide      |

Humans want to find out if there might be life on other planets and scientists believe that Mars is the best planet for life, apart from Earth.

### The Mars Rover

The Curiosity rover is a robotic car which is exploring the surface of Mars right now. It was launched on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2011 and landed on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012. The main goals of the rover are to:

- study the planet's climate and what it is made of;
- search for water;
- find out whether Mars could have ever supported life.



A self-portrait taken by NASA's Curiosity rover.

# Mars: The Red Planet Questions

1. Tick the correct response.

We cannot breathe on Mars because the atmosphere does not have enough:

- air
- carbon dioxide
- atmosphere
- oxygen

2. Find and copy the correct word to complete the sentence.

Mars is named after the Roman god of \_\_\_\_\_.

3. Which of these are reasons why Mars is a good place to explore? Tick **two**.

- Mars gets enough sunlight to use solar power.
- A day on Mars is very short.
- There is no gravity on Mars.
- There is a little water in the soil on Mars.

4. Tick the correct response.

The Curiosity rover was launched on:

- 26<sup>th</sup> November 2011
- 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011
- 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012
- 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012

5. How many moons does Mars have?

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6. What is a day called on Mars and how long is it?

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7. What is the Curiosity rover trying to find out?

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# Mars: The Red Planet **Answers**

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Mars is named after the Roman god of **war**.

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5. How many moons does Mars have?

**Mars has two moons**

6. What is a day called on Mars and how long is it?

**A day on Mars is called a 'sol' and it is 24 hours and 37 minutes long.**

7. What is the Curiosity rover trying to find out?

**The main goals of the rover are to:**

- **study the planet's climate and what it is made of;**
- **search for water;**
- **find out whether Mars could have ever supported life.**

