

Other scientists have used complex models to make estimates for the Earth alone, but these are not suitable for applying to other planets.

“We compared Earth to eight planets which are currently in their habitable phase, including Mars. We found that planets orbiting smaller mass stars tend to have longer habitable zone lifetimes.

“One of the planets that we applied our model to is Kepler 22b, which has a habitable lifetime of 4.3 to 6.1 billion years. Even more surprising is Gliese 581d which has a massive habitable lifetime of between 42.4 to 54.7 billion years. This planet may be warm and pleasant for 10 times the entire time that our solar system has existed!

“To date, no true Earth analogue planet has been detected. But it is possible that there will be a habitable, Earth-like planet within 10 light-years, which is very close in astronomical terms. However reaching it would take hundreds of thousands of years with our current technology.

“If we ever needed to move to another planet, Mars is probably our best bet. It's very close and will remain in the habitable zone until the end of the Sun's lifetime -- six billion years from now.”

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