

# Eclipse hunters chase sun to tropical Australia (Update)

November 12 2012, by Madeleine Coorey

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The sun is covered by the moon during a total solar eclipse in the Indian city of Varanasi in 2009. Tens of thousands of people were flocking to Australia's tropical north Monday to watch a rare total solar eclipse, a phenomenon officials say has not been seen in the region in 1,300 years.

It lasts for barely two minutes, but the chance to witness the eerie spectacle of day turning briefly to night in a solar eclipse has brought thousands of shadow chasers to Australia.

Eclipse-hunters have flocked to Queensland's tropical northeast to watch the region's first total solar eclipse in 1,300 years on Wednesday, booking out everything from hot-air balloons to dive boats to view the lightshow.

"I think it's something extraordinary," said French tourist Annie Hautefeuille, who has come to view the eclipse which will occur as the moon passes between the earth and the sun, casting a shadow path on the globe.

The magic moment is when the moon completely covers the sun and it will last for a maximum on the Australian mainland of 2 minutes and 5 seconds, with the best vantage points in Queensland state.

For Hautefeuille, the opportunity to be in the top viewing spot was too good to miss, particularly after she saw one in western China several years ago.

What she will be looking for, when the sky darkens, the temperature drops and the moon becomes a black spot during the totality of the eclipse, will be the corona of the sun—its gassy outer atmosphere which curves out in a pattern usually formed by its magnetic field.

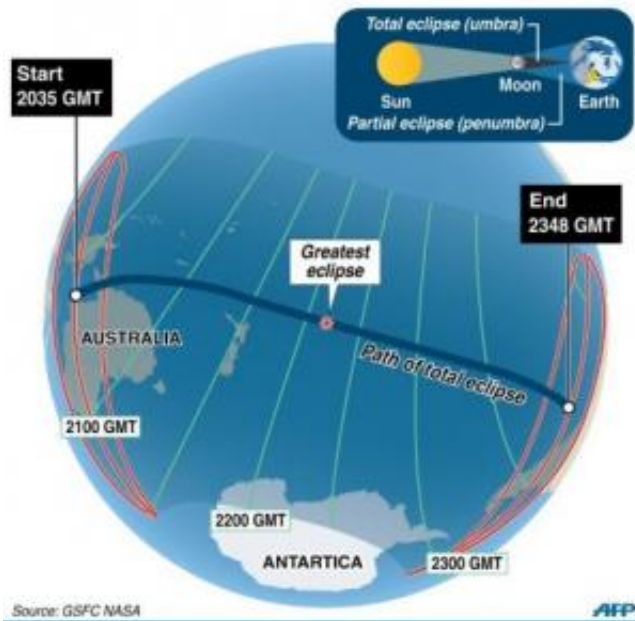
As the earth is bathed in a surreal twilight, she will also be hoping to see prominences—pink loops often seen flaring out from above the sun's upper surface.

"I heard it's described as an astronomic orgasm and I thought it was worth seeing," she recalled.

Hautefeuille is one a growing band of so-called eclipse hunters who travel the globe to view the event, even if it means journeying to places such as Easter Island, or Libya or Zimbabwe.

## Total solar eclipse of November 13

Starts in Australia and ends in the South Pacific



Tens of thousands of people were flocking to Australia's tropical north Monday to watch a rare total solar eclipse, a phenomenon officials say has not been seen in the region in 1,300 years.

"It's nature's greatest natural phenomenon and more and more people are becoming more aware of it," said Dick Cijffers, managing director of Journeys Worldwide which runs specialist eclipse tours.

"When you go on your first eclipse you are termed to be an eclipse virgin.

"This is a relatively short eclipse but we will still find even in a short space birds will fall asleep."

Birds, confused by the strange coming of night, often lose their bearings and fly into buildings.

The shadow path of the eclipse will start near sunrise in the Northern Territory east of Darwin and travel to the east coast, passing over the Queensland tourist towns of Port Douglas and Cairns.

The Queensland government estimates that 50,000-60,000 people have travelled to the region—which boasts the world-famous Great Barrier Reef—for the event.

Accommodation is solidly booked—from five-star hotels to camping grounds.

And officials are hoping the eclipse—which is expected to be viewed by millions around the world—will be a boon to a tourism industry struggling after floods in 2010 and the impact of the high Aussie dollar.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland chief executive Rob Giason said the eclipse had brought many tourists, with high interest from Japan, the United States and Britain.

"Many of these people have seen a number of eclipses in various parts of the world and are basically chasers of the eclipse phenomena," he told AFP.

"It's been fantastic for us after a number of lean years to have this traffic but also the opportunity for us to showcase this part of the world."

The eclipse has prompted a series of events around it, including a festival and a marathon which will be held after the moon completes its eclipse journey shortly after 6:30am local time.

Lachlan Walker, general manager of the Sheraton Mirage at Port Douglas, said his hotel started taking group bookings from star-gazers two years ago.

"We've certainly struggled with the challenges of the high Australian dollar... so it's great to have an event like this in the low season," he said.

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