

Solar eclipse mania spurs festivals, tours, sold-out hotels

April 4 2017, by Beth J. Harpaz



In this May 20, 2012, file photo, the new moon crosses in front of the sun creating an annular eclipse over West Mitten, left, and East Mitten buttes in Monument Valley, Ariz. Destinations are hosting festivals, hotels are selling out and travelers are planning trips for the total solar eclipse that will be visible coast to coast on Aug. 21, 2017. A narrow path of the United States 60 to 70 miles wide from Oregon to South Carolina will experience total darkness, also known as totality. (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson, File)

Get ready for solar eclipse mania. Destinations in the path of the Aug.

21 eclipse, which will be visible in the U.S. along a narrow path from Oregon to South Carolina, are going wild with plans for festivals, concerts and viewing parties .

Hotels in Casper, Wyoming, are charging five times their usual rates. Rooms at Idaho's Sun Valley Resort have been booked for years.

An eclipse tour in Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains National Park sold out in 10 minutes. The Smokies are among 20 National Park sites that will experience the [total solar eclipse](#), from sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina to Wyoming's Grand Tetons. "We are expecting record visitation," said NPS spokesman Jeffrey Olson.

Hopkinsville, Kentucky, population 32,000, and Carbondale, Illinois, population 23,000, expect 50,000 visitors each. The destinations, 140 miles apart, will experience about 2 minutes and 40 seconds of total darkness, among eclipse sites with the longest duration. Events in the region include an "Eclipse Con" festival, concerts and tailgate parties.

South Carolina's Clemson University also expects 50,000 people at a campus event that will feature astronomers and other experts. Twenty thousand people will gather in the Ochocho National Forest for Oregon Eclipse 2017, with music, yoga, theater, art installations and more. Wind River Reservation in Wyoming hosts "bring back the sun" ceremonies.



In this Aug. 31, 1932, file photo, eclipse watchers squint through protective film as they view a partial eclipse of the sun from the top deck of New York's Empire State Building in New York. Destinations are hosting festivals, hotels are selling out and travelers are planning trips for the total solar eclipse that will be visible coast to coast on Aug. 21, 2017. A narrow path of the United States 60 to 70 miles wide from Oregon to South Carolina will experience total darkness, also known as totality. (AP Photo, File)

A Pink Floyd Tribute band plans a "Dark Side of the Moon" concert in Jefferson City, Missouri. The South Carolina Philharmonic in Columbia

offers "Star Wars Musicclipse." Sylva, North Carolina, has a "Moonlight Madness" run.

ECLIPSE CHASERS

Sharon Hahs and her husband, Billy, have chased 14 eclipses around the world from Mongolia to South Africa. They'll see this one from a family farm in Missouri, not far from their St. Louis home.

"There is nothing else in our universe that looks like a total solar eclipse," said Hahs. "The air gets cool. You have 360-degree dusk. Nature sounds really happen: the cock crows, birds get quiet. We even had a horse cross our viewing area to return to the stable."



In this May 20, 2012, file photo, people view an annular solar eclipse as they look towards the setting sun on the horizon in Phoenix. Destinations are hosting festivals, hotels are selling out and travelers are planning trips for the total solar eclipse that will be visible coast to coast on Aug. 21, 2017. A narrow path of the United States 60 to 70 miles wide from Oregon to South Carolina will experience total darkness, also known as totality. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin, File)

Michael Allen of Southampton, England, is a "keen amateur astronomer" who considers the eclipse "a once in a lifetime opportunity." He can't travel alone because he has cerebral palsy and epilepsy, so his brother Nick is accompanying him on a three-day tour to Nashville with eclipse-viewing at the Kentucky border.

Jack Bohannon of Anchorage, Alaska, plans to see the eclipse in Nebraska as the "culmination of a summer-long RV trip" with family. "We were originally going to book an RV park in the eclipse path in Wyoming, but everywhere was full," he said.

HOTELS

In small or remote destinations, hotels and campsites in the path of totality are completely sold out. But bigger cities still have openings. As of March 25, Nashville hotels were only 54 percent booked.



In this May 20, 2012, file photo, some 250 people line the fence line at the Petroglyph National Monument near Albuquerque, N.M., to watch the annular solar eclipse. Destinations are hosting festivals, hotels are selling out and

travelers are planning trips for the total solar eclipse that will be visible coast to coast on Aug. 21, 2017. A narrow path of the United States 60 to 70 miles wide from Oregon to South Carolina will experience total darkness, also known as totality. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan, File)

Don't assume lodging is sold out because a travel booking site says so. Call hotels directly to ask.

Many hotels are offering eclipse packages. Nashville's Loews Vanderbilt package includes eclipse viewing glasses, commemorative T-shirt, Uber gift card and bar credit. Hotel Jackson in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, has an "eclipse concierge" to help guests plan their \$699-a-night stay.

Consumers in Oregon have complained about hotels canceling reservations they made long ago, claiming rebranding or new ownership, then charging much higher rates for rebooking.

LOCATION AND WEATHER



In this March 7, 1970, file photo, Ginnie Bailey reaches for her eclipse viewer from her father Robert Bailey of Valdosta as the eclipsed sun begins to burn through a cloud cover that has all but obscured a view of the total solar eclipse in Valdosta, Ga. Destinations are hosting festivals, hotels are selling out and travelers are planning trips for the total solar eclipse that will be visible coast to coast on Aug. 21, 2017. A narrow path of the United States 60 to 70 miles wide from Oregon to South Carolina will experience total darkness, also known as totality. (AP Photo/Joe Holloway, Jr., File)

As the moon moves in front of the sun, daylight will yield to darkness

from Oregon to South Carolina along a path 60 to 70 miles wide. The path of totality will also cut across broad swaths of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee, along with corners of Kansas, Georgia and North Carolina, and a tiny chip of Iowa. Totality will first hit Oregon around 10:15 a.m. Pacific time. South Carolina will experience the final moments of total darkness at 2:49 p.m. Eastern time.

Some spectators are heading to mountains and forests to experience the eclipse in a natural setting.

"Think of an eclipse as an incredible short night," with "a rapid sunset and then sunrise," said Sara Morris, an ornithologist and biology professor at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York. "Birds go back to roost. Animals that are active during the day will stop foraging and put themselves in a place of safety."

Destinations that offer easy highway access have an advantage in bad weather: You can drive elsewhere to seek clear skies. "Clouds are the enemy of eclipse chasers," said Hahs. "If one can move, one should."



In this June 10, 2002, file photo, Lise Richardson, left, views a partial solar eclipse with her daughters Sophia Richardson, center left, and Samantha, 6, right, at Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles. Destinations are hosting festivals, hotels are selling out and travelers are planning trips for the total solar eclipse that will be visible coast to coast on Aug. 21, 2017. A narrow path of the United States 60 to 70 miles wide from Oregon to South Carolina will experience total darkness, also known as totality. (AP Photo/Krista Niles, File)

The driest section of the eclipse path is from eastern Oregon to western Nebraska but "even the driest places on Earth experience clouds, fog and rain," said Brady Phillips at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which is developing an online weather map for the eclipse.

SAFETY

When the sun is completely blocked by the moon, its rays can't hurt your

eyes. But the period before and after totality is dangerous—even when it seems dark—because viewing even a sliver of the sun as it slips in and out of view can damage retinas. Sunglasses are useless. Viewing through telescopes or cameras without proper filters is also unsafe before and after totality.

So be sure to buy eclipse glasses, but don't spend a lot: \$1 glasses with paper filters are fine.



In this May 20, 2012, file photo, the annular solar eclipse produces flare through

a lens in Alameda, Calif. Destinations are hosting festivals, hotels are selling out and travelers are planning trips for the total solar eclipse that will be visible coast to coast on Aug. 21, 2017. A narrow path of the United States 60 to 70 miles wide from Oregon to South Carolina will experience total darkness, also known as totality. (AP Photo/Ben Margot, File)



In this May 20, 2012, file photo, the annular solar eclipse is seen as the sun sets behind the Rocky Mountains from downtown Denver. Destinations are hosting festivals, hotels are selling out and travelers are planning trips for the total solar eclipse that will be visible coast to coast on Aug. 21, 2017. A narrow path of the United States 60 to 70 miles wide from Oregon to South Carolina will experience total darkness, also known as totality. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski, File)

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