

Pacific sees a 'Blood Moon' rising

May 26 2021, by Andrew Beatty



The "Super Blood Moon" as seen from Taipei in Taiwan on Wednesday night.

Stargazers across the Pacific cast their eyes skyward on Wednesday to witness a rare "Super Blood Moon", as the heavens aligned to bring a spectacular lunar eclipse.

The first total lunar eclipse in two years took place at the same time as

the Moon was closest to Earth, in what astronomers say is a once-in-a-decade show.

Anyone living between Australia and the central United States was able to see an enormous, bright, orangey-red Moon if the skies were clear.

The main event took place between 1111 and 1125 GMT—late evening in Sydney and pre-dawn in Los Angeles—when the Moon was entirely in the Earth's shadow.

The Moon darkened and turned red—a result of sunlight refracting off the Earth's rim onto the lunar surface—basking our satellite in a sunrise- or sunset-tinged glow.

Unlike a solar eclipse, the phenomenon was safely visible to the naked eye.

This eclipse was different because it happened during a "Super Moon" when the Moon passes a mere 360,000 kilometres (225,000 miles) from Earth.

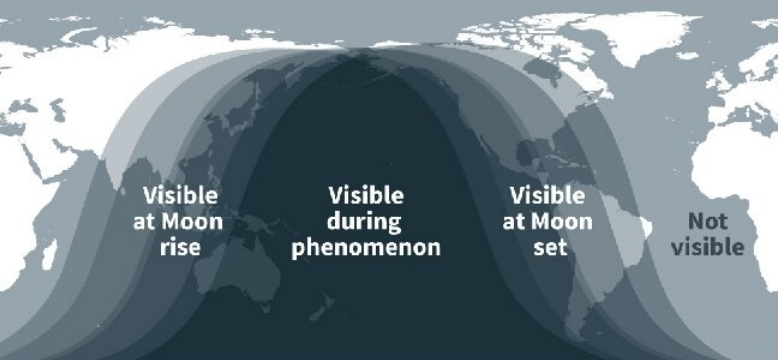
At that point, it can appear 30 percent brighter and 14 percent larger than at its farthest point—a difference of around 50,000 kilometres (30,000 miles).

In Sydney, where a crisp night gave onlookers a clear view, people gathered on the shoreline of the city's harbour to catch a glimpse as the Moon rose over the sails of the Opera House.

Lunar eclipse

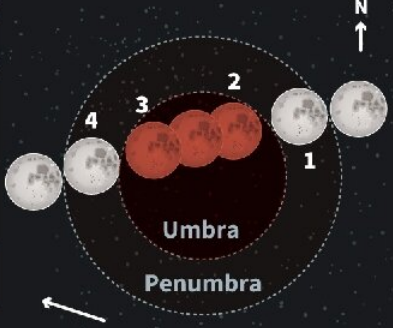
15-minute total eclipse on May 26

Visibility



How it happens

Sunlight filtered through the Earth's atmosphere makes the Moon appear red




Stages of eclipse

Times in GMT

- 0945 ① partial phase begins
- 1111 ② total eclipse starts
- 1126 ③ total eclipse ends
- 1252 ④ partial phase ends

Not to scale

AFP 

Description of the total lunar eclipse on May 26.

"Last time there was a Super Moon, last month, we missed it," Ken Loi, 50, said.

"This time it's with the eclipse as well, so you've got a double whammy so you better catch it before it's too late."

"Interest has been high," said Andrew Jacobs, curator of astronomy at Sydney Observatory, which hosted a viewing event with telescopes and

expert speakers.

Australian airline Qantas performed a one-off, two-and-a-half-hour "Supermoon Scenic Flight" heading east from Sydney over the Pacific for an unobstructed view of the southern sky.

In Hong Kong however the view was partially obscured by cloud.

"It's not as red as I thought. I saw a photo and the Moon was very red, but now it's not that red," said primary school student Chui Yiu-chun, who was trying to catch a glimpse from the city's harbourfront.



The 'Super Blood Moon' peeks through clouds in Hong Kong Wednesday.

Jacobs earlier predicted the best view would be in "Australia, New Zealand, and large parts of the Pacific. New Guinea also gets a good view."

"The Americas see it in the early morning, but they don't necessarily see all parts of the eclipse," he said.

"Europe and Africa and the Middle East are missing out completely, on this particular one."

Lunar eclipses have not always been so warmly received in history. In many cultures both lunar and solar eclipses were seen as harbingers of doom.



Moon gazers gathered by the Sydney Harbour Bridge to see the moon.

The Inca believed a lunar eclipse occurred when a jaguar had eaten the Moon. Some Aboriginal Australian groups believed it signalled someone on a journey had been hurt or killed.

In "King Lear" William Shakespeare warned that "eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us".

But so far no apocalyptic consequences have been recorded from these celestial shows.

The next Super Blood Moon is expected to take place in 2033.

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