

Delta eclipse flight: Here's what it was like

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At 35,000 feet over the U.S. the air was thick with anticipation and excited chatter as everyone pulled out their phones hoping to get a photo.

Gray shadows entered the blue sky, turning it a rich slate as the moon started to eclipse the sun.

The moment everyone had been waiting for was here—totality.

Before even getting into the air Delta Air Lines treated passengers to an experience. As they arrived at gate E15 at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport for Flight 1010 to Detroit, they were met with a celestial-themed balloon arch, a red carpet and music.

Flight attendants in purple and gray passed out eclipse-viewing glasses the airline produced in collaboration with Warby Parker—paper shades but with blue-and-white star path drawings on the front and "Eyes on the Sky" written inside.

Delta workers wore T-shirts emblazoned with "Climbing the Cosmos," the airline's slogan for the pair of flights from Austin and Dallas that would be in the path of the eclipse 35,000 feet in the air.

People were excited, and the gate party only heightened the anticipation. Most passengers flew to Dallas that morning or the night before just to turn right around, all to experience totality in a way few others could.

If I'm being honest, flying isn't my favorite. The way the plane inclines at takeoff, the unpredictable mid-flight turbulence, the slight teetering as the pilot tries to line up the plane to land all make my stomach drop. Add in an uncommon, somewhat disquieting astronomical phenomenon like an eclipse, and my nerves ahead of this flight were on edge.

But when your editor asks if you want to see a solar eclipse from 35,000 feet in the air, the only answer is "Of course."

Flights are usually just the utilitarian part of a journey, taking you from point A to B. But Monday, the flight was the main attraction.

Delta runs a route from Dallas to Detroit regularly, but adjusted the

[flight path](#) in order to maximize the time passengers would be in totality, a once-in-a-generation experience here in North America. The next time there will be a [total solar eclipse](#) over the continent is in 20 years.

Warren Weston, a lead meteorologist for the airline, said the plane would fly parallel to the eclipse and then cross paths. The plane traveled at more than 500 miles per hour, about a third of the speed of the eclipse. The shadows would chase the plane for an hour, then overtake it—that would be when we were in totality.

Once on the plane, every seat had a goody bag with a hat, socks and other apparel. There were also themed snacks—a Moon Pie and specially branded Sun Chips. The Airbus A321neo carried about 200 passengers.

As the wheels left the tarmac just after 1 p.m. Dallas time, the plane erupted into applause. People tracked the eclipse's path on their seatback TVs as it caught up to us.

As it covered Dallas in total darkness, the sky around the plane, now over southeast Missouri, started to turn gray. About 45 minutes into the flight, attendants came on the speaker to announce we were 10 minutes from totality.

But unlike on the ground, the plane was never fully dark. As it fell more into shadow, people started asking, "Do you see it yet?"

And a truth began to dawn on us—maybe a plane isn't the best viewing spot for an eclipse. With glasses or without, it was hard to see the phenomenon.

Some passengers got a better view than others, as evidenced by the photos that people began AirDropping throughout the cabin. Even if

some didn't get a good view, at least they had a photo from someone who did.

The plane was only in totality for about three minutes, the pilot announced afterwards. People craned their necks out the window, or for the middle and aisle seat occupants, around their fellow passengers. But on a plane, you are limited by small windows and angles that require some contortion to see the horizon.

From my vantage point from an aisle seat close to the right wing of the plane, the eclipse felt at times like a sunset, at other times like an unexpected storm that darkened the clouds, minus the turbulence.

The pilot banked starboard and port, trying to give both sides of the plane equal viewing time.

But the same reason that people shelled out hundreds of dollars to try to see the eclipse from the air was the thing that made the viewing experience a bit disappointing—its ephemerality.

Though the eclipse was fleeting, the experience will last in the lives and memories of those on the plane.

A man who never takes time off got to check an item off his bucket list.

A mom will bring back memorabilia and stories for her daughter.

A couple got engaged mid-flight.

Upon landing in Detroit, passengers stepped into a party. Astronaut Scott Kelly addressed the crowd, saying that we had all had an experience that in his thousands of hours of flight time he had never had.

Avi Mirchandani traveled from Antelope Valley in California, going on the eclipse flight spur of the moment. He saw a window seat open up Sunday and booked it immediately.

He then drove an hour and half to Los Angeles to hop on a red eye to Dallas. Once arriving in Detroit after the eclipse, he turned right around back to California.

"It was a lot of fun," Mirchandani, 37, said. "It was a very different thing than I'd typically be doing on a Monday at work."

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