

April's Total Solar Eclipse

The sun is about to pull another disappearing act across North America, turning day into night during a total solar eclipse.

The peak spectacle on April 8 will last up to 4 minutes, 28 seconds in the path of total darkness — twice as long as the total solar eclipse that dimmed U.S. skies in 2017.

This eclipse will take a different and more populated route, entering over Mexico's Pacific coast, dashing up through Texas and Oklahoma, and crisscrossing the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic and New England, before exiting over eastern Canada into the Atlantic.

The eclipse will allow many to share in the “wonder of the universe without going very far,” said NASA's eclipse program manager Kelly Korreck.

The moon will line up perfectly between the Earth and the sun, blotting out the sunlight. It will take just a couple hours for the moon's shadow to slice a diagonal line from the southwest to the northeast across North America, briefly plunging communities along the track into darkness.

Fifteen U.S. states will get a piece of the action, albeit two of them — Tennessee and Michigan — just barely.

Don't fret if you don't have front-row seats. Practically everyone on the continent can catch at least a partial eclipse. The farther from the path of totality, the smaller the moon's bite will be out of the sun. In Seattle and Portland, Oregon, about as far away as you can get in the continental U.S., one-third of the sun will be swallowed.

By a cosmic stroke of luck, the moon will make the month's closest approach to Earth the day before the total solar eclipse. That puts the moon just 223,000 miles away on eclipse day.

Full solar eclipses occur every year or two or three, often in the middle of nowhere like the South Pacific or Antarctic. The next total solar eclipse, in 2026, will grace the northern fringes of Greenland, Iceland and Spain.

There won't be another U.S. eclipse, spanning coast to coast, until 2045. That one will stretch from Northern California all the way to Cape Canaveral, Florida.