

# Solar eclipse: Thousands gather in Australia and Indonesia to witness 'mind-blowing' rare event

The remote town of Exmouth in northwest Australia was one of the best vantage points to witness the celestial event, with a partial eclipse also seen in Indonesia and East Timor.

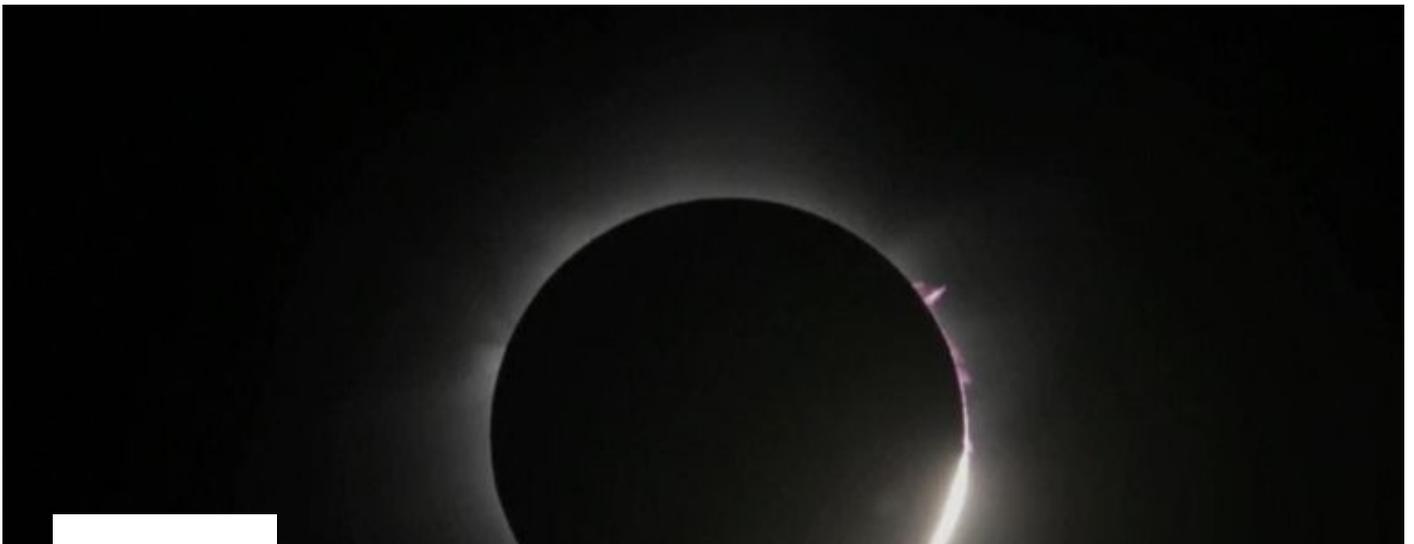
By **Siba Jackson**, news reporter

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## Thousands of stargazers gathered in a remote Australian town to witness a "spectacular" rare solar eclipse.

About 20,000 people descended on Exmouth, which has a population of just 3,000, after the town was promoted as one of the best vantage in the country to see the celestial event.

The [eclipse](#) plunged parts of Australia's northwest coast into darkness around midday local time on Thursday, with the temperature suddenly dropping 5C (9F) as the moon's shadow enveloped the region.

Crowds arrived days in advance to secure the best viewing spots, camping on a red, dusty plain on the edge of the town with cameras and viewing equipment pointing skywards.

Retired British astronaut [Major Tim Peake](#), who watched the eclipse in Exmouth, described the experience as "surreal".

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He told Sky News: "It was the last few moments when it suddenly got very dark very quickly, very cold, all the wind stopped, the animals went quiet, birds went down to roost, (it was a) very spooky almost eerie, surreal experience, it was unbelievable.

"It was amazing to be surrounded by thousands of people and just to see that emotional human response to such an unnatural situation, watching it go dark in the middle of the day," he added.

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NASA astronomer, Henry Throop, who was also among those assembled in Exmouth, hailed the eclipse as "mind-blowing".

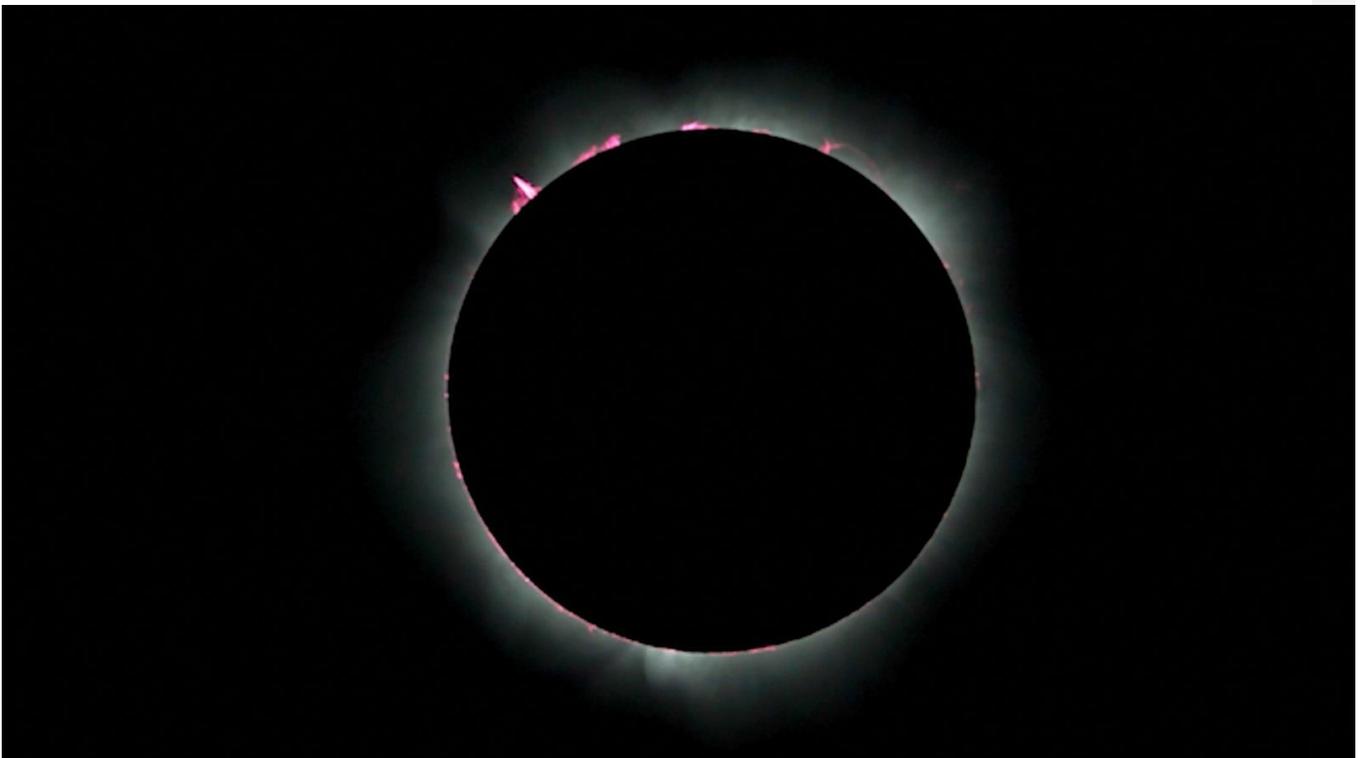
"It was so sharp and so bright, you could see the corona (the outermost layer of the sun's atmosphere) around the sun there," he said.

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"It's only a minute long, but it felt like a really long time. There's nothing else you can see which looks like that. It was just awesome. Spectacular."



The total solar eclipse seen in Exmouth

Mr Throop, from Washington, said Jupiter and Mercury were also visible, adding: "Even seeing Mercury at all is pretty rare. So that was just awesome."

Meanwhile another stargazer, Julie Copson, travelled more than 600 miles (1,000km) from the west coast port city of Fremantle to witness the phenomenon.

"I felt so emotional, like I could cry," she said.



The eclipse seen in Exmouth, Australia

### **'Crazy phenomenon'**

The eclipse was a "hybrid" not seen since 2013. This means, depending where viewers stand, the moon covers the sun in a total eclipse or obscures the centre leaving a "ring of fire" in an annular eclipse.

Hundreds watched the eclipse, partially obscured by clouds, at the Jakarta Planetarium in Indonesia's capital.

The call to prayer echoed from the city's mosques when the eclipse phase began - with Muslims saying eclipse prayers as a reminder of God's greatness.



The eclipse seen in Padang, West Sumatra province, Indonesia



A rare hybrid solar eclipse is observed at Jakarta Planetarium in Jakarta, Indonesia

The eclipse, tracked from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, was also visible from East Timor, located east of Australia and Indonesia.