

# Preparing for dark times: Total solar eclipse arrives 6 months from today (August 21<sup>st</sup>)

- [By Valerie Schremp Hahn St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#)

[http://www.stltoday.com/lifestyles/preparing-for-dark-times-total-solar-eclipse-arrives-months-from/article\\_4108929d-9070-5ed4-9ce4-305f6e57b784.html](http://www.stltoday.com/lifestyles/preparing-for-dark-times-total-solar-eclipse-arrives-months-from/article_4108929d-9070-5ed4-9ce4-305f6e57b784.html)



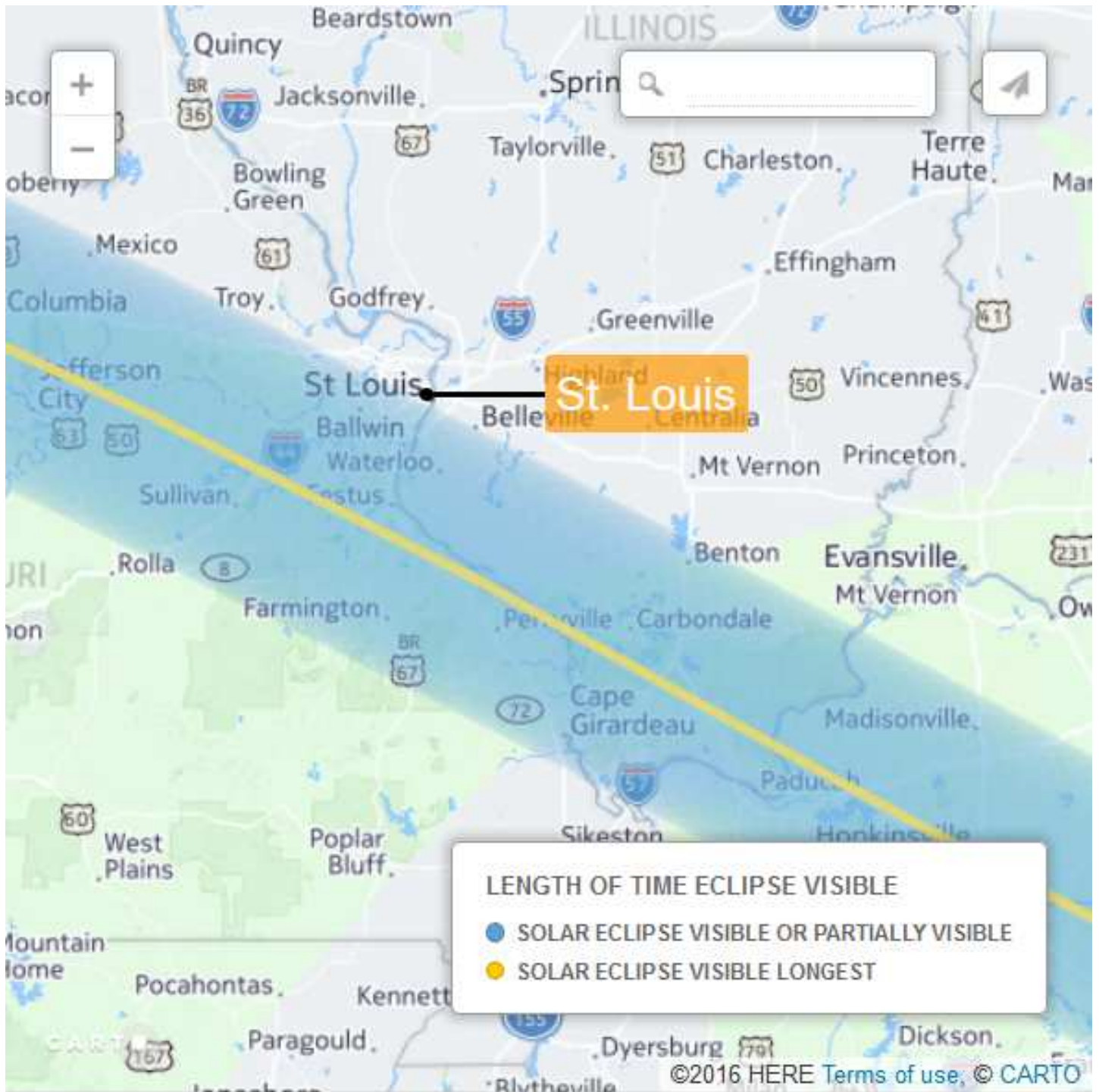
A total solar eclipse is seen in Belitung, Indonesia, on Wednesday, March 9, 2016. The total solar eclipse was witnessed along a narrow path that stretched across Indonesia while in other parts of Asia a partial eclipse was visible. (AP Photo)

If you haven't already, you might want to mark your calendars for six months from today, and make a special notation for oh, say, early afternoon, depending on your location. You're in for one of the darker, stranger experiences of your life on this planet.

A total solar eclipse — the first one in the continental United States since 1979, and the first one for most of the St. Louis area since 1442 — arrives on Monday, Aug. 21. The partial eclipse will start in late morning and end in early afternoon, with the total eclipse within the 1 p.m. hour.

You may or may not have heard about the eclipse already — but folks at the Bloomsdale bank in Herculaneum and their City Hall have. They're selling viewer glasses for \$1. Southern Illinois University Carbondale will

celebrate with a weekend of events to culminate in a public viewing at Saluki Stadium. Scientists are working with NASA to send up weather balloons to collect data. Emergency responders are drafting traffic plans to figure out how to deal with thousands of sungazers congregating in one area at the same time.



*Use the interactive map above to see where the total solar eclipse will be visible the longest. Zoom out to see the path for the entire nation, or search for your address in the search box in the upper right. (You'll need to use the link at the top of the article for the map to work interactively)*

Graphic by Carl V. Lewis/Post-Dispatch.

Even Ozzy Osbourne, the Prince of Darkness, is in on the eclipse action: He's performing at a "Moonstock" music festival in Carterville, Ill.

And an unlikely yet enthusiastic mix of librarians, astronomers, optometrists, city administrators and others meet monthly in St. Louis to talk plans and how to get others — such as school districts, police departments and bosses who like productive employees — to make plans, too.

“They told us it wasn’t if people came, it was when they were coming,” said Barb Lowry of her first meeting with the St. Louis Eclipse Task force in 2015. She’s the director of sports and event marketing for the city of Festus. “I remember coming back, and telling our city administrator, ‘I don’t want to sound like Chicken Little and say the sky is falling, but I want my hard hat.’ We’ve been busy ever since.” Festus is planning a weekend festival leading up to the eclipse.

Here’s why the eclipse matters here: Everyone in the continental U.S. will see at least a partial eclipse, but only those within a path that’s about 70 miles wide will see a total eclipse. The moon will move directly in front of the sun, covering it for a short time — up to 2 minutes and 40 seconds in places such as De Soto and 2 minutes, 38 seconds in Carbondale.

Only the south and west half of the St. Louis area will experience the total eclipse, which means Chesterfield will get about 1 minute, 20 seconds of totality, and Clayton up to 30 seconds. Downtown and the St. Louis Science Center — where the task force regularly meets — will get none.

The path of the total eclipse will move in a northwest to southeast direction across the country, from Oregon to South Carolina. In Missouri, that means the path runs from St. Joseph to Cape Girardeau. In Illinois, it cuts across a southwest chunk of the state, with cities such as Waterloo and Chester in its path.

“It is going to be actually really dark, like the night of a full moon,” explains Don Ficken, an amateur astronomer who is the head of the task force. “It will be like a hole in the sky. The edge is called the corona. Temperatures will drop about 10 to 15 degrees, you will have animals going back to their homes, thinking it’s night.

“When totality happens, it will get like dead quiet. It’s going to be like a 4-D movie. It’s almost a sensory overload, when it comes down to it.”

Bob Baer traveled with a student to Indonesia to see a total solar eclipse in March 2016, partly to prepare as the co-chair of the eclipse steering committee at SIUC.

“It was 23 hours of plane rides, but it was absolutely worth it. And this is coming from someone who doesn’t like to fly. I’ve heard people say it’s life-changing, and I completely understand now. It’s beautiful.”

Experts caution it’s never a good idea to look directly at the sun — hence, the optometrists on the task force — and you will need special eclipse viewing glasses to see the partial eclipse. But in totality, it is safe to see with the naked eye.

Cities, tourist sites and schools are jumping on the bandwagon. Parkway and Rockwood schools will be in session that day and are planning eclipse lessons. They have bought 24,000 pairs of viewing glasses for students and faculty. Dunklin School District in Jefferson County plans a day off. And while it’s the first day of classes at the University of Missouri-Columbia, professors will be allowed to make up the day later if they want to let students out to view the eclipse.

Campsites at Missouri State Parks within the path are still available, and the department is marketing a special Katy Trail bicycle ride, which also follows the eclipse path. Nearly all the state parks in Illinois along the path are booked, except for more than 8,000 sites available at the World Shooting and Recreational Complex in Sparta, which has plenty of parking and wide, open space, says DNR spokesman Ed Cross.

Cities that see the tourist potential have jumped aboard, with St. Louis and Perryville partnering to offer special eclipse packages (hotel and coach included) and marketing to tourists worldwide. Trish Erzfeld, the Perry County tourism director, speaks regularly with Kate Russo of Belfast, Ireland, an expert on eclipse planning.

A Perryville Solarfest leading up to the eclipse will include science-themed vendors, a mobile planetarium and special accommodations for planes at its airport. Erzfeld compares the eclipse to a giant lottery jackpot that generates excitement as the drawing nears. "I think as the media catches on and more people talk about it, it's just going to grow and grow and grow," she says.

Jo Schaper is the head of the solar ambassador volunteers and designated

"science geek" for the city of St. Clair, which is hosting a four-day "Get Your Eclipse on Route 66" festival. The festival will feature everything from a car show to solar ambassadors trained to talk to visitors about the world above. The path of totality passes over Route 66 in St. Clair, directly above the town's VFW hall, she said.

Schaper and her husband are amateur astronomers, and she remembers how her parents woke her in the middle of the night when she was little to watch a lunar eclipse. "It's fascinating," she says. "I always wanted to see one of these, and I never knew it would come right to me."

And if you miss this eclipse? Another one's coming on April 8, 2024. It will hit southeast Missouri and Southern Illinois but miss St. Louis.

And, never fear, another one will pass over St. Louis. It will even hit most of the local northern parts the 2017 eclipse misses.

That date? June 3, 2505.

*Note: Jo Schaper's title has been updated to more correctly reflect what she does.*