

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Public Invited To View Solar Eclipse At NASA's Official Location At UVI

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The U.S. Virgin Islands will experience a solar eclipse during the mid-afternoon on Monday, Aug. 21. The Moon will pass directly between the Earth and the Sun, blocking out about 90 percent of the Sun's surface as viewed from the Virgin Islands.

The University of the Virgin Islands' Etelman Observatory and UVI's Physics program students and faculty will host an eclipse-viewing event from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 21, at UVI's Sports and Fitness Center on the St. Thomas Campus. UVI has been designated as the only official NASA viewing location for the eclipse in the Caribbean.

The University invites the public to view the “Great American Solar Eclipse,” which it has been called by popular media outlets. This total eclipse of the Sun, in which the Moon blocks 100 percent of the Sun, will be visible from a 70-mile wide path that stretches all across America, beginning in Lincoln City Oregon, crossing the U.S. mainland throughout the day and last being visible on the continent in Charleston, South Carolina. The last time a total solar eclipse was visible to such a large portion of the U.S. was 100 years ago.

While the Virgin Islands are not within this so-called “path of totality,” the territory is quite close. The eclipse passes about 150 miles northeast of St. Thomas. The territory will see most of the Sun blocked by the Moon. The last time a solar eclipse passed so close to the USVI was 19 years ago.

“It is extremely important to be aware that looking directly at the Sun without eye protection, even when it is partially eclipsed, can damage your eyesight,” said Dr. David Morris, assistant professor of Physics and Etelman Observatory director at UVI. “Looking at the Sun through binoculars or a telescope, even during an eclipse, will cause permanent eye damage, and possibly blindness.”

“We strongly encourage you to visit UVI to view this awe inspiring event,” Dr. Morris said. Telescopes will be set up on the UVI soccer field, which is behind the Sports and Fitness Center. UVI Physics and Astronomy faculty and students will be on-hand with proper eye-protection to make viewing the eclipse a safe and exciting experience for all.

There will be a limited supply of solar-eclipse glasses as well as special solar-telescopes designed for viewing the Sun safely, and other telescopes equipped with special protective filters to allow safe viewing of the Sun. “We will also be demonstrating the use of pinhole cameras and telescope-projection techniques for viewing the eclipse indirectly, by casting an image of the Sun on a screen rather than viewing it directly with your eye,” said Dr. Morris. The University will send members of the Etelman Observatory Solar Physics research team and UVI physics students to the path of totality in Charleston, South Carolina. These researchers will be live-streaming video of the moment of total-eclipse from Charleston at 2:47 p.m. Visitors to UVI will be able to watch the total eclipse by video on a large-screen set up in the UVI Sports and Fitness Center, weather permitting in Charleston.

In St. Thomas, the eclipse will begin at 2:14 p.m., when the Moon will begin to block out the edge of the Sun. The eclipse will reach its maximum in the USVI when about 90 percent of the Sun will be blocked out at 3:36 p.m., and from that point, the Sun will become less and less obscured until the Moon completely unblocks the Sun, at 4:47 p.m.

If you have any questions or would like further information please contact Professor David Morris at dmorris@uvi.edu. Also, please visit NASA's Official Eclipse viewing location map for more information about the viewing at the Sports and Fitness Center and other events taking place around the country.