

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Get ready to stay up late, for the Total Eclipse of the Moon!

Montréal, December 14, 2010 – Montréal's Nature Museums are inviting everyone to come out on the night of **December 20 to 21, 2010**, and admire the first total eclipse of the Moon in nearly three years. The phenomenon will be clearly visible everywhere in Quebec, both in the city and in the countryside. Get ready to stay up late, or set your alarm to get up very early, because the total phase of the eclipse will occur between 2:40 and 3:53 a.m. EST. It will reach its maximum at 3:16 a.m. EST. The Nature Museums are also inviting all observers to share their comments and photos on their Facebook site, and hope that lots of nightowls will come to the Planetarium to enjoy this rare show live with Planetarium staff and amateur astronomers from the Société d'astronomie du Planétarium de Montréal. Hope to see you there!

Where did the Moon go?

The principle is very simple: the Moon shines by reflecting back to Earth the light it receives from the Sun, like a gigantic mirror in the sky. A total eclipse of the Moon occurs when the Moon crosses the shadow that the Earth casts in space. In theory, when it crosses through this shadow, it should be totally invisible to us. But the Earth's atmosphere acts like a prism, refracting some of the Sun's rays toward the centre of the cone-shaped shadow cast by the Earth. This light takes on a reddish cast as it passes through the Earth's atmosphere, turning the eclipsed Moon varying shades of copper. Other factors influence the hue and brightness of the eclipsed Moon, such as the percentage of suspended particles in the air.

Since this is a relatively unusual phenomenon (the next total eclipse visible in Quebec will be in April 2014), everyone is invited to come watch the show, just twelve hours before the winter solstice. If there are no clouds in the sky, it will be easy to spot the Moon, surrounded by the stars in the Winter Hexagon, and to follow the progression of the eclipse. The final partial phases of the eclipse will finish at 5:01 a.m. EST.

The total eclipse at the Planetarium

We're issuing a special invitation to all Internet users who plan to stay up late that night: look out the window or bundle up and head out onto your balcony or into your yard or the street and let the Moon inspire you! Then, share your thoughts, comments, poems and photographs of this fabulous astronomical phenomenon on the Nature Museums Facebook page.


If you're really keen, come out to the Planetarium to admire this very special occurrence and talk astronomy with the Planetarium staff and amateur astronomers from the SAPM. You can admire the show with the naked eye or use the telescopes that will be available on site. If the sky is overcast or there is a snowstorm, the event at the Planetarium will be cancelled. Coffee will even be served, to keep everyone awake during this all-nighter!

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GENERAL INFORMATION

The Montréal Planetarium is located at
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