

FEATURES

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Picture perfect: Site designer Antoine Mergier used locally sourced natural materials to build the entire site. With a layout designed to integrate and respect the natural environment, the design of the festival site took over one year of preparation and thousands of hours of work.

ECLIPSE HUNTERS FROM THE SAME PLANET

It is said that observing the spectacular transition of the moon between the sun and the earth is an event that all of us should experience at least once in our lives.

Margeye

CONTRIBUTOR/PALU

For this reason I traveled to Palu, Central Sulawesi, to view the total solar eclipse — drawn by a sense of curiosity to the spectacular show of nature.

In the early hours of March 9, a little more than one hour after sunrise, a small black arc started to conceal the sun. The arc slowly increased in size until eventually the sun was completely covered.

Less than an hour later, for 2 minutes and 5 seconds, the sky darkened, ready to awaken over the following 80 minutes as the Moon's shadow swept over us, revealing again the power of the most important source of energy for life on Earth.

Although, on average, this celestial phenomenon occurs only once every 375 years in the same location, a total solar eclipse occurs somewhere around the world approximately once every 18 months, fascinating locals and attracting thousands of enthusiastic people from all over the world who have made this event the passion of their life.

These are the eclipse chasers — an international and diverse group of individuals who travel to repeatedly experience the arguably unforgettable life-changing event. "There is more to science in the understanding of a total solar eclipse" said fervent eclipse chaser Dr. Kate Russo, an Australian psychologist based in Belfast.

Russo has been chasing eclipses since 1999. For the last five years, she has been studying the reactions of people who experience the natural wonder, collecting interviews and writing about the awesome power to change people that totality seems to have.

She also helps to prepare communities within the path of totality for what is to come. Russo came to Palu to witness her 10th total solar eclipse and to talk at several events in the region, including a seminar at the Tadulako University in Palu on the Islamic and astronomical understanding of the eclipse phenomenon and at the Eclipse Festival, an international gathering of eclipse chasers.

"Media tends to focus on the scientific aspects of this event, often neglecting to in-

experience of her life. "So many emotions surface; fear, joy, tears [...] it is so powerful. I will never miss another one," she said.

As the temperature dropped gradually from 31°C to 25°C, the light dimmed and the surrounding environment became quiet.

During totality all was still; surrounded by thousands of people who screamed in awe and chanted mantras, no sound disturbed my ears, all senses enraptured by the majestic alignment of the two celestial bodies which unfolded before my eyes.

I felt as if I were in a timeless era in which there was a perennial twilight and an intimidating primordial humbleness burdened by no concept of space, no day or night. Feeling insignificant in my body and overwhelmed by the beauty of the landscape, I looked around; people were hugging and kissing, feeling the need to hold each other. Some were crying profusely, shedding tears of joy as they felt the infinity of that moment and a connection with humanity and the Universe.

"I remember seeing an eclipse when I was a child," said Cyril, who was 10 years old when a total solar eclipse occurred over France in 1999. "I was fascinated, but I mostly remember the excitement of the adults. I did not think this one would have been so powerful".

Children can enjoy the experience but, until they develop a sense of identity, are unlikely to be impacted as profoundly, Russo further explained.

"A total solar eclipse touches our sense of self, connects us to all of humanity, and allows us to experience a unique outsider perspective on the insignificance of our position in the Universe," she said. "Experiencing totality has reminded me of the importance of truly living our lives".

After experiencing the two longest minutes of my life, the Moon continued on its journey between the sun and the earth, following the same smooth rhythm that it had throughout the first part of the process, this time to reveal the full power and brightness of the sun.

Unable to feel my body but feeling a sense of connection to everyone, I walked into the crowd and a couple of smiley strangers stopped to ask "Where are you from?" In that moment, the question seemed completely irrelevant.

Eclipse chasers: Over two thousand people flocked to the Eclipse Festival in Palu, Central Sulawesi, one of the few locations in Indonesia where the total solar eclipse on March 9 was fully visible.



Eclipse festival: International artists, musicians and performers entertained over two thousand locals and foreigners during the five-day Eclipse Festival in Palu, Central Sulawesi.

In the air: The Eclipse Festival featured three stages, a workshop and conference space, a F&B area and countless of specially built corners to appreciate the view overlooking the city of Palu, the surrounding hills and the sea.



In the moment: Solar eclipse chasers watch the eclipse. Each total solar eclipse is unique depending on the size of the shadow and the weather.





form those living within the path of totality of the fully immersive nature of the experience," she said.

"Seeing the geometrical science in its purest form, in action and real time, is amazing," said Nicola, an Australian.

Nicola began to plan her trip to Palu when she witnessed a total solar eclipse in Cairns, Australia, in 2012, and experienced what she described as the most humbling

I looked at them in bewilderment, spontaneously answering: "From your same planet" and walked away, feeling that there were countries no more. Earth had become a single united entity where all human beings live: a space beyond borders and socio-economic and or ethnic tensions.

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