

Watching the Partial Solar Eclipse

Wednesday, 12 August 2026

A guide to the partial solar eclipse over Switzerland and Central Europe

What Is Actually Happening

On the evening of Wednesday, 12 August 2026, the Moon will pass in front of the Sun, and the resulting eclipse will be visible, at least in part, across almost the whole of Europe, as well as North Africa and parts of North America and the Arctic. As seen from Switzerland, between approximately 90% and 93% of the solar disc will be obscured, depending on location.

A narrow corridor will experience a total solar eclipse: the Moon's shadow first touches down over the Arctic, sweeps across eastern Greenland and the western tip of Iceland, then crosses the Atlantic to make landfall in northern Spain, continuing to the Atlantic coast of Portugal before leaving Earth's surface. The last occasion on which Switzerland experienced an eclipse of comparable depth was in August 1999, when parts of the country saw over 98% of the Sun covered. An eclipse of this magnitude will not recur in Switzerland until 2075.

The Sun is nearly 400 times wider than the Moon, yet it also lies roughly 400 times farther from Earth. These two ratios cancel out almost exactly, so that from Earth's surface the Sun and Moon appear nearly identical in size. No other planet in the solar system has a moon whose apparent size aligns so closely with that of its star — the reason eclipses on Earth take the form they do.

Three main moments to watch for

First contact

This marks the beginning of the eclipse: the instant at which the Moon's edge first touches the Sun's edge, appearing initially as a small dark arc along one side. The change is subtle during the first several minutes and can be easy to overlook without eye protection or a projection method.

Maximum eclipse

This is the peak of the event, when the Moon has moved as far across the Sun's face as it will from a given location. As this is a partial eclipse in Switzerland, the Sun is never fully hidden; nonetheless, the quality of daylight changes noticeably, with a faint chill in the air, muted colours, and a light quality closer to heavy overcast or dusk than to full daylight. In Switzerland, maximum eclipse occurs only minutes before sunset, with the Sun already very low — a few degrees above the west-north-western horizon, at a compass bearing of approximately 288° — so the event may be perceived partly as an eclipse and partly as an unusually dramatic sunset.

A practical method of estimation: facing west-north-west with an arm outstretched, the Sun at maximum eclipse will appear roughly two thumb-widths above the horizon. Any obstruction taller than this within the line of sight will block the view entirely. The most important element of preparation is therefore the choice of vantage point rather than equipment — a lakeside shore, a hill, or any open ground with a clear view toward the west-north-west.

Solar eclipse glasses or another safe viewing method remain necessary throughout maximum eclipse, as the remaining sliver of the Sun is still bright enough to cause eye damage.

Last contact

Last contact occurs as the Moon's trailing edge finally leaves the Sun's disc, which is then restored to its normal appearance. In Switzerland this takes place after the Sun has already set; in practice, the eclipse sets while still in progress, and its true final moment is not visible from the ground, including from the vantage point of the Goetheanum.

Protecting the Eyes

The Sun is never fully covered during a partial eclipse, meaning it is never safe to view directly, at any stage, with the naked eye. Because part of the Sun's disc always remains exposed, the same intense ultraviolet and infrared radiation that makes direct sunlight dangerous on an ordinary day remains present. As the overall light dims, the pupils relax and admit more light, increasing the risk relative to normal daytime viewing. The resulting retinal damage is often painless and can be permanent; the recommended precautions should therefore be observed carefully.

Switzerland's Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) has issued formal guidance ahead of the event. Its recommendations for safe direct viewing are as follows:

- Protective glasses certified to ISO 12312-2:2015 and bearing the CE mark should be worn; both markings should be confirmed on the frame.
- Glasses that are worn, scratched, punctured, or otherwise damaged should not be used, as the filtering layer is easily compromised.
- Filters improvised from coloured film, coloured lenses, or other homemade materials should not be used, as they do not reliably block harmful wavelengths.
- Ordinary sunglasses should not be relied upon, even when multiple pairs are stacked together, as they permit far too much light to pass through.
- Binoculars, telescopes, or cameras should never be used without a proper solar filter fitted over the front lens, as these instruments concentrate the Sun's rays and increase the risk of injury.
- Particular care should be taken with children, ensuring that their glasses are properly sized, fit snugly, and will not slip during viewing.

Phone cameras warrant a similar caution: the sensor is not designed to be pointed directly at the Sun, and doing so risks damage comparable to that of the unprotected eye. A dedicated solar filter placed over the lens is required for photography as well as for direct viewing.

Three Homemade Methods of Observation

Where glasses are not available in time, indirect projection offers an equally safe alternative requiring only common household items. Each method projects an image of the Sun onto a surface, so that the projection, rather than the Sun itself, is what is observed.

- Pinhole card: a small, clean hole is made in a piece of card or paper. Held with the Sun behind the observer, light passing through the hole falls onto a second card held below, producing a small, sharp image of the crescent Sun. The greater the distance between the two cards, the larger — and dimmer — the resulting image.
- Kitchen colander: an ordinary kitchen colander, held with the Sun behind the observer, casts a pattern of light onto the ground or a wall. Each hole functions as an individual pinhole projector, producing a scatter of crescent images rather than a single one.
- Tree shade: gaps between leaves naturally act as pinholes. During the eclipse, dappled sunlight beneath any tree forms a carpet of small crescents rather than the usual round patches of light, requiring no equipment.

Additional Points of Interest

- Two-week paired eclipses: solar and lunar eclipses occur in pairs roughly a fortnight apart. A 90% partial lunar eclipse — producing a faint “blood moon” effect caused by sunlight refracting through Earth's atmosphere onto the Moon — follows this event on 28 August 2026, visible from Switzerland in the early hours of the morning.
- Wildlife responds during the deepest phase of similarly high-coverage eclipses elsewhere in the world, birds have been observed returning early to their evening roosts and falling silent, apparently responding to the sudden drop in light as though dusk had arrived ahead of schedule.
- Because maximum eclipse and sunset occur only about half an hour apart, terrain plays as significant a role as weather in determining what is visible. Lakeshores and mountains facing west-north-west are likely to be favoured locations for this reason.

The Mathematics and Astronomy Section at the Goetheanum will offer a group viewing activity on Wednesday, 12 August, beginning at 19:00 at the Halde. For further information, contact mas@goetheanum.ch.

Eclipse Timeline for Switzerland and Europe

The times below are calculated for Bern and vary by two to three minutes elsewhere within Switzerland; the eclipse unfolds at essentially the same moment nationwide, in contrast to larger countries where clock times may differ by an hour or more.

Stage	Local time (CEST)	What is happening
Eclipse begins	19:25	Moon first touches the Sun's edge; Sun is 12° above the horizon
Maximum eclipse	20:19	About 91% of the Sun covered; Sun only 3.7° above the horizon
Sunset	20:46	Sun sets still eclipsed, with roughly 36% coverage remaining
Eclipse ends	21:10	Occurs after sunset — not visible from Switzerland

Location	Country	Approx. maximum coverage
Madrid	Spain	99.9% (just outside totality)
Galway	Ireland	up to 97%
Truro, Cornwall	United Kingdom	~95%
Lisbon	Portugal	94.5%
Geneva	Switzerland	92.7%
Lausanne	Switzerland	92.2%
Paris	France	92.1%
Bern	Switzerland	91.4%
London	United Kingdom	~91%
Basel	Switzerland	90.8%
Zürich	Switzerland	90.6%
St. Gallen	Switzerland	90.2%
Brussels	Belgium	89.6%
Edinburgh	United Kingdom	~88%
Berlin	Germany	84.8%
Vienna	Austria	84.8%
Rome	Italy	69.1%

Sources: Royal Observatory Greenwich, eclipse2026.ch, and eclipse-tracking sites including timeanddate.com and [Unistellar](http://Unistellar.com); individual city figures are approximate.

Rudolf Steiner on Eclipses

Select passages from Rudolf Steiner's lectures regarding solar and lunar eclipses.

Rudolf Steiner addressed the subject of eclipses on few occasions and always from an esoteric-spiritual rather than an observational-astronomical standpoint.

1. GA 213 — Dornach, 25 June 1922 — «Sunlight and Moonlight, Eclipses and Man's Life of the Soul», the second lecture of the cycle published as «Menschenfragen und Weltenantworten» («Human Questions and Cosmic Answers»).

Rudolf Steiner offers a central image that solar and lunar eclipses function as «opposite valves» in the normal relationship between the earth and the cosmos. Ordinarily, he says, the light-rays of the sun carry with them the «will-rays» radiating outward from humanity, including undisciplined will, instinct, and impulse, and the sunlight itself "burns up" this outpouring before it can do harm beyond the earth. A solar eclipse blocks the physical sunlight (the moon is dense matter and stops light), but the will-rays are not physical and pass through the moon unimpeded; for the brief duration of the eclipse, whatever ill will is streaming from humanity travels unfiltered into the wider cosmos.

«When there is a solar eclipse, there is an opportunity for the wickedness of the earth to spread throughout all the heavens of the world. Here we have a physical event that certainly has a spiritual dimension.» (GA 213, p. 38)

A lunar eclipse, in this picture, is the reverse valve: rather than something flowing outward from earth to cosmos, it opens a channel through which «evil thoughts» from the cosmos can reach those human beings who are already disposed to be possessed by them.

«These valves, which manifest in the phenomena of the world as solar and lunar eclipses, exist precisely so that what—in the case of a solar eclipse—spreads as evil on Earth can be carried out into outer space in a Luciferic manner [...], while lunar eclipses are designed so that the evil thoughts of the universe can reach those people who are particularly prone to being possessed by evil thoughts.» (GA 213, p. 39f.)

2. GA 121 — «Die Mission einzelner Volksseelen im Zusammenhang mit der germanisch-nordischen Mythologie», Kristiania (Oslo), 1910

In this lecture on Germanic-Nordic mythology, Rudolf Steiner explores the Norse image of the wolf Fenrir devouring the sun as a description of a solar eclipse, and makes the claim that the old clairvoyant image of a wolf pursuing the sun is, esoterically considered, a more accurate rendering of what actually happens than the purely mechanical description that the moon simply moves in front of the sun.

«For the occultist, there is something that is an even greater form of superstition. That is the belief that a solar eclipse occurs when the Moon passes in front of the Sun. From an external perspective, this is entirely correct—just as correct as the story of the wolf is from the astral perspective. The astral perspective is even more accurate than what you find in current books.» (GA 121, p. 160)

Rudolf Steiner makes the point that the moon does not physically block the sun, but that the outer, mechanical explanation is itself only a partial truth, and that the old mythological image, read as a record of a genuine (if pre-intellectual) astral perception, points to something the modern account leaves out entirely

3. GA 148 — Kristiania (Oslo), 2 October 1913

In two passages from the lecture cycle later published as «From the Akashic Record: The Fifth Gospel» («Aus der Akasha-Forschung: Das fünfte Evangelium»), Rudolf Steiner describes what clairvoyant perception registers in plants and animals during a solar eclipse.

«During a solar eclipse, one senses a resurgence of the group souls of plants and the group souls of animals. One experiences it as if all the physical corporeality of plants and animals were fading, and as if everything that embodies the nature of group souls were becoming luminous.» (GA 148, p. 27)

«At the same time, great occult changes are taking place in all living beings—humans, animals, and plants; the entire structure, for example, between the physical body and the etheric body of plants is changing; the whole world looks completely different, and with it, the Earth's aura.» (GA 148, p. 281)

It can be considered that alongside the moral-cosmological picture from GA 213, Rudolf Steiner also describes an eclipse as a moment in which the ordinary relationship between the physical body and the etheric (life) body of plants and animals loosens, and the collective, species-level «group soul» becomes correspondingly more perceptible to clairvoyant sight.

4. GA 201 — Dornach, 1920 — «Entsprechungen zwischen Mikrokosmos und Makrokosmos»

In this 1920 lecture cycle on correspondences between microcosm and macrocosm, Steiner explains the eclipse cycle known since antiquity as the Saros period — roughly 18 years, or 223 synodic months — and delineates a numerical correspondence into human biological rhythm.

«There is a periodic rhythm in eclipses that spans 18 years. 72 divided by 4 equals 18. [...] In connection with the rhythmic activity of the heart, a person has, on average, not only 72 years of life, but also an average of 72 heartbeats and 18 breaths. That, in turn, is a quarter.» (GA 201, p. 215)

He points out that the same 4-to-1 ratio that relates the roughly 72-year average human lifespan to the 18-year Saros eclipse cycle also shows up in the ratio of resting pulse beats to breaths per minute (about 72 to 18, i.e. 4-to-1), displaying the relationship and broader principle that cosmic and bodily rhythms mirror one another.