

Eclipse offers opportunities to be a light in the darkness

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KERRVILLE—Communities along the [path of the April 8 total solar eclipse](#) are gearing up for the influx of eclipse chasers expected to descend upon the area. But will churches along the path be ready?

Robert Wheat, director of missions for Hill Country Baptist Association, said the annular eclipse of October 2023 offered area churches and local officials a trial run. They distributed eclipse-watching glasses to visitors and offered their facilities as staging areas for first responders.

While the crowds were not as great as some anticipated last October, the upcoming total eclipse is a different matter. Hotels in communities along the path of the total eclipse already are booked to capacity.

“A total eclipse is much more spectacular. A total eclipse is unbelievable,” explained Jeff Stone, an eclipse enthusiast and former NASA employee who attends Trinity Baptist Kerrville, known locally as “the eclipse guy.”

Stone traveled to Mexico for nearly seven minutes of totality in 1991 and to Missouri in 2017 for a bit over two minutes of totality.

He and his wife built their house where they did to be in the path of totality—the path where the moon’s disk completely blocks the sun—for this eclipse. They will be hosting eclipse chasing friends from as far away as Sweden on April 8.

“During totality, which here in Kerrville is going to be 4 minutes and 26 seconds at my house, the sky is going to be so dark, like night,” Stone said.

“You’ll be able to see stars. Granted, you won’t see all the stars that you

normally do, but you'll be able to see the bright stars. And, in the case of this one... you'll also be able to see all the naked-eye planets, and I think that is going to be crazy cool."

Stone described experiencing totality as having a visceral effect, referencing the darkness at Jesus's crucifixion, when the people were shaken to their soul by the darkness in the daytime. He believes totality in an eclipse has the same effect.

In 2017, the last total eclipse that could be seen in the United States gave around 150 million Americans in the path of totality that visceral, awe-inspiring experience.

Crowds coming to Texas

If even 1 percent of that number was as enthusiastic about the experience as Stone and his fellow eclipse chasers have been by totality, then 1.5 million visitors could be heading to the path of totality in April.

An article from [Forbes](#) estimates anywhere from 270,000 to 1 million eclipse-chasing visitors will make the trip to join the 13 million Texans who live in the path of totality.

Hotel and campground bookings bear this estimate out, with Booking.com showing no available reservations in any of the towns in Texas along the path of totality attempted. Texas State Parks [campgrounds along the path](#) have been booked up for months.

The Hill Country of Texas is one of the best locations in the country for eclipse chasers to go for a shot at experiencing totality. The [Old Farmer's Almanac](#) suggests a greater risk of cloudy skies in locations further north and east along the path on April 8.

Junction and Brady offer the best chance of clear skies, but the duration of

totality there will be over a minute less than in Kerrville, which also has a good chance of clear skies, according to an [Eclipsophile](#) post on the April eclipse.

‘Blowing my mind to think about it’

The pull of totality should not be compared to the pull of the annular eclipse in October, Stone noted. The annulus is impressive in its own right, but not like having enough darkness to drop temperatures as much as 10 degrees.

To have skies dark enough to see stars in daytime hours during totality, “is still blowing my mind to even think about it” Stone said.

With so many extra people in the area, mobility will be an issue. Wheat said Hill Country churches are encouraging their senior members to plan ahead.

First responders in the Hill Country worry about the impact traffic may have on patrol capabilities. Churches and members have offered locations around town as staging areas to decentralize CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), where they can access outlying areas more quickly if called.

The concern topping the list for “the eclipse guy?” Restrooms.

The City of Kerrville already has reserved all the portable restrooms available anywhere around, but Stone thinks the lack of public facilities for that many extra people will turn out to be the story of the 2024 eclipse.

And it could offer churches an opportunity to extend hospitality to visitors by making their facilities available.

Eclipse chasers are coming to Texas. Churches in the path of totality might want to think beyond Easter to welcoming these guests and strategize with

local officials on how to help visitors in the name of Jesus, Stone noted.

Resurrection Sunday the week before will focus us on God's power, even over the natural world and death. And the total solar eclipse will offer Texas Baptists in its path a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be a light to thousands of people chasing the dark.

While it may be too late to organize an "Eclipse at the Crosses" [watch party](#) like the one Coryell Community Church in Gatesville has planned, it is not too late to do something.

So, enjoy the eclipse, Stone said. Because, as he did at the crucifixion, "God is going to show us his power again."