

Experiencing the April 2024 Eclipse at Sea

by Bob Lunsford - ALPO Meteors Section Coordinator



Credit: Bob King

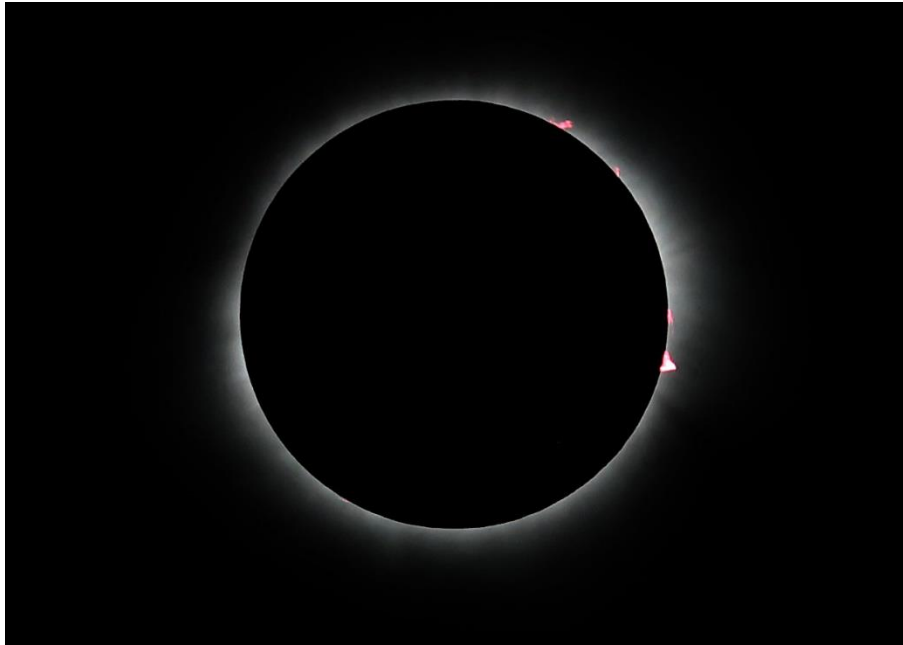
I intended to go to Texas for the eclipse, but I studied the weather data and decided to head to Mexico instead. No, I didn't drive as it would have been difficult to get 100 miles west of Mazatlan. I actually booked a 14-day cruise that was advertised on a previous cruise my wife and I took in late 2022. We got one of the last cabins way down in the dungeon, just above the crew quarters. About six months after booking this cruise I was on Sky & Telescope's website and noticed that one of their eclipse expeditions looked very familiar. It turns out that S&T also booked a large portion of the ship called the Zaandam. They had the best view on the ship, but I managed to find a nice spot at the rear of the ship that gave a great view of the sky plus some shade when desired.

On eclipse morning the sky was full of cirrus and the ship was headed west instead of parallel to the coastline. The captain and crew must have known what they were doing as we found clear skies overhead long before the eclipse started. Just prior to the start of the eclipse the ship reversed course and I had a great view of the onrushing shadow as we were now heading eastward. At the start of totality, the only clouds ringed the horizon with beautiful pink and orange colors. The corona was so bright I had to

do a double take to be certain the sun was obscured. I grabbed my camera and took half a dozen shots, the best of which is attached. I only spent 15 or so seconds on photography and enjoyed the remainder of the eclipse through my 11x80 binoculars.



Credit: Robert Lunsford

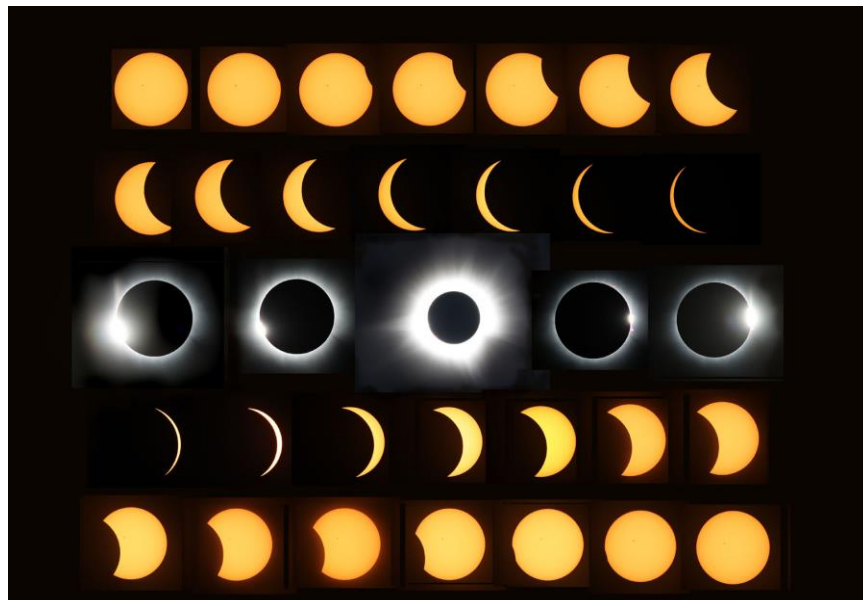


When the prominences appeared, I was blown away by their intensity and bright pink color. The ship was still moving during the eclipse and the scene was so high in the sky I had to put the binos down a couple of times and grab the railing as I was a bit dizzy. The naked eye scene was pretty spectacular too, so nothing was lost! I was looking through binoculars at third contact and got a nice view of the diamond ring effect. I found it amazing how bright things quickly became with less than one percent of the sun showing.

Credit: Bob King

Bob King from *Sky & Telescope* was also on board topside, and I included three of his excellent photos (with permission) as he brought much better equipment than I. He and I also did some stargazing at night following comet 12P/Pons-Brooks and the far southern highlights not visible from our latitudes.

Compared to the 2017 total eclipse, leaving the driving to the ship's captain was a great idea. There was no stress and worry about finding the perfect spot as the captain and his crew did a great job. I wish to thank Holland America for providing such a cruise and I would highly recommend experiencing your next total solar eclipse on board one of these beautiful ships.



Credit: Bob King