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Sky gazers in North America will be treated to the rare sight of a full crimson moon in the wee hours of Saturday morning due to a total lunar eclipse.

The lunar spectacle will appear in the sky on Dec. 10, at 6:06 a.m. Pacific Time and remain visible for 51 minutes. The phenomenon, not expected to be witnessed again until 2014, will be seen in its entirety from Alaska, Hawaii, Australia and parts of Asia.

Those on the west coast of the United States and Canada will be able to witness the early stages of the total eclipse just before dawn.

According to Sky & Telescope magazine, "From roughly Arizona to the Dakotas, the moon sets while it's still totally eclipsed. In the Central time zone the moon sets while still only partially eclipsed, before the total stage even begins. And those farther east miss out completely."

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The phases of the total lunar eclipse:- A lunar eclipse occurs when the Earth, Sun and Moon all align. The Moon passes behind the Earth so that Earth blocks sunlight from reaching the Moon.

The entire process is set to begin at 4:46 a.m. PT, when the moon first enters the umbra, the darkest part of the Earth's shadow.

Over the next couple of hours the Earth's shadow will creep across the moon's surface, until it is fully covered.

Totality will start at 6:05 a.m. and end at 6:57 am, while the final traces of the Earth's shadow will pass at 8:15 am after the moon has sunk below the horizon.

At the height of the eclipse, as the moon moves deeper into Earth's shadow, the indirect sunlight passing through Earth's atmosphere will give it a spectacular red or orange hue.

"I expect this eclipse to be bright orange, or even copper-colored, with a possible hint of turquoise at the edge," Atmospheric scientist Richard Keen of the University of Colorado told NASA.

The "selenelion" effect:- During this celestial event, people in North America can get to experience the rare "selenelion" when the sun and the moon are seen together in an eclipse.

Though the sun and moon are in a perfect 180-degree line with Earth during a lunar eclipse, an illusion called atmospheric refraction causes astronomical objects to appear higher in the sky than they are in reality. A lunar eclipse occurs when the Earth, Sun and Moon all align. The Moon passes behind the Earth so that Earth blocks sunlight from reaching the Moon.

"This effect actually lengthens the amount of daylight for several minutes or more each day; we end up seeing the sun for a few minutes in the morning before it has actually risen and for a few extra minutes in the evening after it actually already has set," reports Space.com.

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