Venus sighting excites stargazers

In Singapore, 5,000 people gather to watch planet creep across face of sun

SKYWATCHERS worldwide gazed in awe yesterday as a small black dot crept across the face of the sun. They were watching Venus make its transit across Earth’s nearest star in one of astronomy’s rarest spectacles.

In Singapore, nearly 5,000 people gathered to catch a glimpse of the celestial show at the Science Centre Singapore and the National University of Singapore (NUS). They queued to look through telescopes and peered at the sun through darkened safety visors. There will not be another Venus transit for more than 100 years. The next one is due on Dec 11, 2117.

Enthusiasts were armed with powerful telescopes and cameras to record the spectacle, which began at 6:09am yesterday and ended at 12.50pm Singapore time. Science Centre chief executive Lim Thir Meng said: “They want to have a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

Project engineer Joakim Michael Mathews, 29, who took the day off work to watch the transit at NUS, said: “To those who know how to appreciate it, the view is spectacular.”

Housewife Rachel Teng, 43, was there with her sons Samuel, six, and Ethan, 12. “I read about it in the papers and we knew we had to come down because my children were really excited.”

Mr Andrew Melia, the Science Centre’s resident astronomy expert, said observing the transit would help scientists calculate the distance from Venus to the sun – making it easier to determine the size of the entire solar system.

For Europe, the Middle East and South Asia, most of the event happened overnight, and enthusiasts had to make do with the transit’s final moments at sunrise. Australia presented one of the best vantage points.

Online streams with footage from telescopes around the world also proved popular for the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) and other observatories. A Nasa stream midway through the transit had nearly two million views.

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