



TOP

Friday's Full Moon Occurs Once Every Three Years!

JULY 31ST 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

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This Friday much of the world will have the opportunity to view a "blue moon." Despite its name, the moon itself will not be blue.

A blue moon occurs every three years when we experience two full moons in a single month.

Full moons typically occur every 29 days, according [NASA's National Space Science Data Center](#), but since most months are 30 to 31 days long, it is possible to have two full moons in a month every 2 1/2 to three years.

There was a full moon on July 2 and July 31 will see the second - two very average-colored full moons.

Blue-colored moons do exist, but they only occur "once in a blue moon."

For a moon to take on a blueish hue, it is typically due to smoke or dust particles in the atmosphere such as during a volcanic eruption or forest fire, according to [NASA Science](#).

In 1883, an Indonesian volcano named Krakatoa exploded and scientists likened the blast to a 100-megaton nuclear bomb. Plumes of smoke rose to the top of the Earth's atmosphere and the moon turned blue.

Basically, if either a fire or an eruption produces ash or oily smoke containing a significant amount of 1-micron particles, the moon appears blue.

The most recent blue-hued moon was seen in Edinburgh, Scotland in September 1950, caused by ash from forest fires burning in Alberta, Canada.

The modern phrase associated with two full moons in a single month is attributed to a 1946 *Sky & Telescope* article entitled *Once in a Blue Moon* by James Hugh Pruett.

Before Pruett wrote his article, a “blue moon” referred to the third blue moon in a season, however, Pruett misinterpreted the information, according to *Sky & Telescope*, and the 1946 version of the magazine adopted his more modern definition.

A popular radio program, called *StarDate*, referenced the two full moons in a month definition on Jan. 31, 1980, and it experienced widespread adoption.

So, yes, the lunar experience on Friday is based on a misinterpretation of the original definition of a “blue moon,” neither of which have anything to do with the moon’s color.

Regardless, it’s a good excuse to get outside and view a somewhat-rare occurrence.

The last time we saw two full moons in month was in 2012 and we will not see the event again until 2018.

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Moon photo by local photographer Jimmy Sisk of Charleston, MO.

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