# SOLAR WIND SPARKS DAZZLING LIGHT SHOW

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| Northern Lights over North Dakota on December 24 |  |

**(CNN) --** **A powerful gust of solar wind collided with the atmosphere of Earth this week, producing surprising aurora displays over much of North America.**

"My Christmas present arrived early, an unexpected display of the Northern Lights," observed Lyndon Anderson, a photographer and sky watcher in Bismarck, North Dakota.

"I could actually see a lot of the red that is pictured, what a surprise," Anderson added in reference to the celestial event, which took place on the morning of December 24.

Celestial enthusiasts witnessed the spectacle in much of the northern United States, including the far North.

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"The aurora was filling the whole sky and was very beautiful," Andre Clay of North Pole, Alaska, gushed to spaceweather.com, a NASA-affiliated Web that monitors aurora activity.

Wispy streaks of reds, blues and greens, auroras take place when intense waves of charged particles from the sun strike our atmosphere and interact with different gases.

The displays most often take place in the most extreme northern and southern latitudes. In the north, they rarely extend south of Canada and Alaska, but an occasional blast from the sun will set off auroras as far south as Mexico.

The same solar gusts can rattle the magnetic field surrounding the Earth, disrupting electrical systems in everything from communications satellites to power grids.