

# What Your Solar Return Means — and How to Make the Most of It

Since this annual event only happens once a year, you'll want to make it memorable — and uniquely your own.

By [Maressa Brown](#) | Published on October 13, 2021



PHOTO: ALEX SANDOVAL

Just like the first day of a thrilling new job or your wedding, there's no guarantee your birthday is going to play out exactly as you had hoped or planned. Really, what in life does? After over a year spent in varied states of lockdown, barely leaving my apartment, my partner and I, vaccinated and optimistic, booked a trip to Maui for my birthday, which happened to fall on Labor Day this year. Yet, like so many travelers, when [Delta reared its ugly head](#) in Hawaii, we made the call to postpone. It was time for a plan B.

Being that we live in Southern California, however, we're grateful

to be surrounded by alternatives that are anything but shabby. So, we pivoted from a tropical island vacation to an abbreviated — but just as well — three-night stay at a five-star, seaside resort Montage Laguna Beach.

To mark my latest trip around the sun, my partner and I fell asleep in a spacious ocean-view suite, noshed on mind-blowing food (coffee-crusting steak, peach creme brûlée, and shrimp nachos are just a few of the dishes I'm still dreaming about), and were treated to restorative massages that utilized vibrational work and heated herbal poultices. We spent hours soaking up the glimmering California sunshine (while slathered with lots of SPF, obviously), took cooling dips in the property's signature mosaic pool as well as the Pacific, and roasted s'mores at a fire pit with a camera-ready, hot pink and lavender sunset as the backdrop.



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Unwinding surrounded by oceanfront, wellness-focused opulence was everything someone born with stelliums (meaning three or more planets in the same sign) in health-conscious Virgo and luxury-loving Leo could have hoped for — especially when it came to celebrating my birthday, aka my solar return (which is when the sun returns to the same exact spot in the sky where it was when you were born). After all, the annual astrological event only happens once a year, presenting a case for marking it in style.

Here's hoping your next solar return comes with fewer pandemic-related roadblocks along the way. Curious to learn more? Read on to learn about the significance of this annual astrological event and how to make the most of it.

## What Is a Solar Return?

When you look at your natal (or birth) chart, you'll note that not only are the planets and luminaries (the moon and sun) located in particular signs and houses but they're also coded with specific degrees and minutes of the sign they're in. For example, in the most basic astrological terms, my sun sign is a Virgo. But more specifically, my sun is at *13 degrees and 12 minutes of Virgo*. And when any planet or luminary comes back to the exact degrees and minutes of the sign it was in when you were born, that's referred to as a "return."

How frequently you experience that return depends on how fast or slow the celestial body moves through the zodiac. The moon (here's the DL on your moon sign), for instance, takes 28 days to complete its cycle through all 12 signs, so you get a lunar return about once a month. Another celestial body, Saturn, the taskmaster planet, takes roughly 29 years to complete a cycle, so your Saturn returns happen when you're around the ages of about 29, 60, and 90. The sun, on the other hand, takes a year to complete its cycle, so you get a solar return every year, generally within a day or two of your actual birthdate. Some years it might fall on your actual birthday. Others, it might be the day before or the day after.

## What Your Solar Return Chart Can

# Tell You

Instead of your birthday being a day that comes and goes, leaving nothing more than a smattering of social media posts in its wake, you can use this annual opportunity as an important moment of self-reflection. Specifically, you can turn to your solar return chart to glean some insight and intel about what's coming up in the year ahead.

What is a solar return chart exactly? It's a snapshot of the sky at the very moment when the sun reaches the precise degrees and minutes of the sign it was in when you were born. It will speak to sun-ruled themes — e.g. your vitality, confidence, interests but also challenges and how you'll exert your will — up until your next solar return. (See: [What to Know About Your Sun, Moon and Rising Signs](#))

The location of a solar return chart is a matter of debate. Some astrologers suggest casting it for the place where you live and spend the bulk of your time, even if you happen to be traveling on that day. Others believe you ought to set it for the location you're physically in on your solar return. (These will then be compared to your natal chart, which is cast for the location where you were born.) Personally, I think there's merit to running any and all of the charts, then seeing what ends up speaking to you the most. The more information, the better.

Here are a few key details to focus on when looking at your solar return chart, which can help you take some meaning from your solar return:

**The sun's position.** Okay, so it's obviously in the same exact spot it was in when you were born; however, it's not necessarily going to be in the same house or making the same angles to other planets and luminaries. (Reminder: Every chart is divided into 12 houses, each ruling a different area of life — and each ruled by one of the 12 signs.) It might have been in your second house of income when you were born (hello, it's me, a self-aware workaholic), but in your solar return chart, it's hanging out in your seventh house of partnership, indicating that this year you may be more focused on one-on-one relationships.

**The sun's aspects to other planets.** You'll also want to see how it's relating to other planets and luminaries. If the sun's cozying up to Venus, the planet of love and beauty, you know that this is a relationship-focused year. Opposing Mars, the planet of action? You'll be super-assertive and competitive over the next 12 months.

**The rising sign/ascendant of the chart.** The sign on the ascendant speaks to how you'll approach your world in the year ahead. For example, if you have showy, fixed fire sign Leo on the ascendant, you might be feeling more like a go-getter, and thrive on luxurious experiences (like five-star beachside vacations) and time in the spotlight. Or if the ascendant is in the opposite (or sister) sign — in this case, quirky, fixed air sign Aquarius — you might be focused on technology, prioritizing humanitarian efforts, and spending more time with groups of friends.

**The planet that rules the ascendant of the chart.** Every sign is "ruled" by one — or in some cases, two — planet(s), which fuel the sign's basic purpose and energy. For example, both Gemini and Virgo are ruled by Mercury, which makes them both supercommunicators. Consider the ruler of the rising sign in the return chart. As my wonderful and wise mentor, April Elliott Kent of Big Sky Astrology, explains in her guide to working with solar return charts: "The placement of this planet and its transits (including retrograde periods) throughout the year are usually very descriptive of what drives you this year."

**The big picture.** We, astrologers, use solar return charts during annual readings, so if you want an in-depth analysis that involves seeing how your solar return interacts with planetary transits over the course of the year, you'll do best to meet with a pro — or order a written solar return report, such as this one by Mary Shea, author of *Planets in Solar Returns*. (If you want to do it the quickie way, you can also generate a free solar return chart on CafeAstrology.com after signing up for a free account.)

## The Best Way to Mark Your Solar Return

We tend to think of birthdays as an annual opportunity to reflect, connect, and dream about what lies ahead, and all of that is still true when you view the passing of another year through the lens of astrology. There's no set prescription or recommendation for celebrating a solar return. It could come and go while you put your head down and work hard to hit a deadline, only to enjoy your favorite meal or a slice of cake at the end of the day. It could also be a day in which you make up for months of sitting on the couch by eating chocolate-covered strawberries with your S.O. while taking in beyond Instagram-worthy beach views. Or it might be a mixed bag.

## My Solar Return 2021

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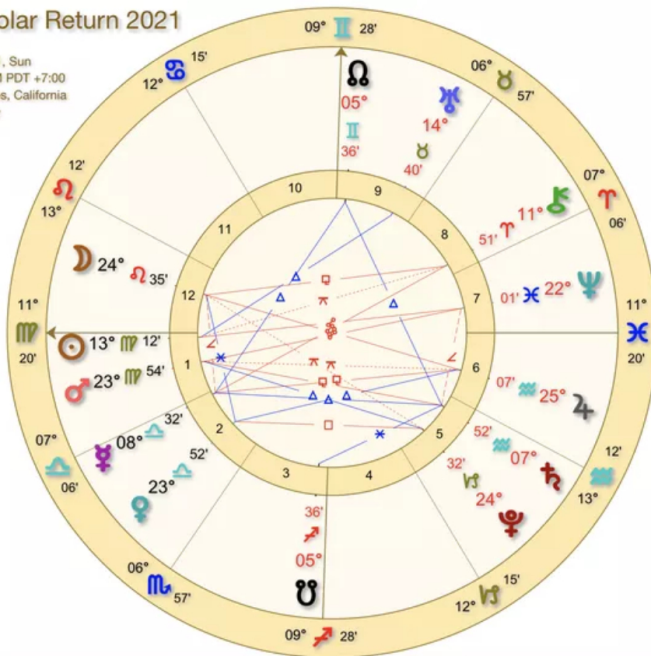


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Here's how I found meaning in my solar return chart for 2021-2022: The sun is almost exactly conjunct the ascendant in Virgo, meaning it's going to be a big year for putting myself out there in the world and honing my self-image and brand. This is especially true in terms of writing, given that the rising is Virgo whose ruler is messenger Mercury. The sun also closely trines (meaning, forms a 120° angle to) game-changer Uranus in Taurus, in the ninth house of higher learning (which also oversees publishing), speaking to an opportunity to lean into my individuality and break new ground. And the moon is in confident Leo in the twelfth house of spirituality, which I see as illustrative of the "behind-the-scenes" self-work I'll be doing this year.

This all adds up, as I'm currently working on my first book. Overall, my solar return chart paints a year ahead that's packed with creative, fulfilling, and industrious work related to my career. And knowing that, in the year ahead, I'll be putting my nose to the grindstone to make lifelong dreams come true inspired me to take a restful step back to reflect, recharge, and recalibrate via this birthday getaway before getting back on what's looking like an exciting but busy road ahead.

If my solar return staycation taught me anything, it was that — just like a new moon serves as a moment to get clear on a specific, powerful goal — your astrological birthday can be a valuable opportunity to take a step back from the daily hustle, go somewhere serene, spend time with the people who you feel most yourself with, and tune into your intuition and your heart. It's a moment made for reviewing and releasing where you've

been over the past 12 months and allowing yourself to dream about what the next 12 could look like. (After all, this sort of self-reflection is the most valuable part of exploring astrology.)

Your solar return can also reflect all of the terrain that the sun rules in astrology: your core identity, confidence, self-esteem, self-image, sense of self, identity, and life path. In other words, you can mark this occasion in your own way and make it exactly what you need. As a Virgo, my instincts are to be of service and cultivate wellness, so on my birthday, that's exactly what I did — for myself.

Sure, your solar return chart serves as a bit of a weather report for what might lie ahead, but you get to make the final call on what you'll do with a chance of rain or an abundance of luminous sunshine. Similarly, you get to decide where and how you ring in your own personal new year.

On our last day at the Montage, while blissfully floating from the hot tub to my poolside lounger, a fellow traveler who was sunbathing with her friend caught my eye and said, "You're so pretty!" And hours later, two other hotel guests (who may or may not have secretly been the aunts in *Practical Magic*) gushed that my boyfriend and I were a gorgeous couple inside and out. It seems that taking a timeout from everyday life and treating myself to a sun-drenched solar return break had visible, warm, and glowy effects. And I'd venture to guess that it also had something to do with trusting that, no matter where my sun lands from year to year, I'm precisely where I'm meant to be.

*Maressa Brown is a writer and astrologer with more than 15 years of experience. In addition to being Shape's resident astrologer, she contributes to InStyle, Parents, Astrology.com and more. Follow her [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) at @MaressaSylvie.*

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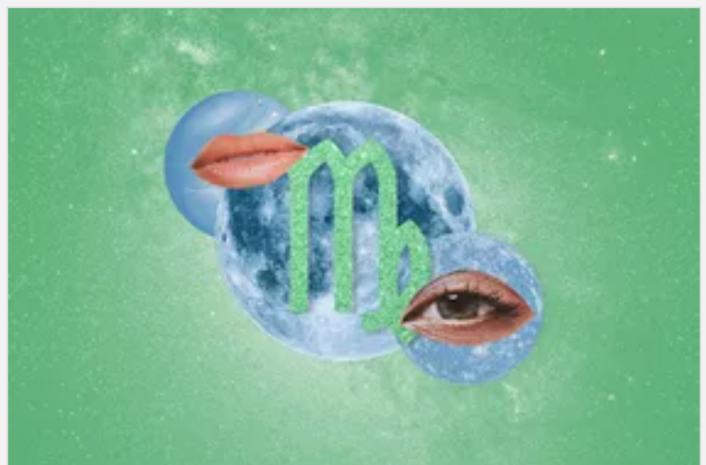
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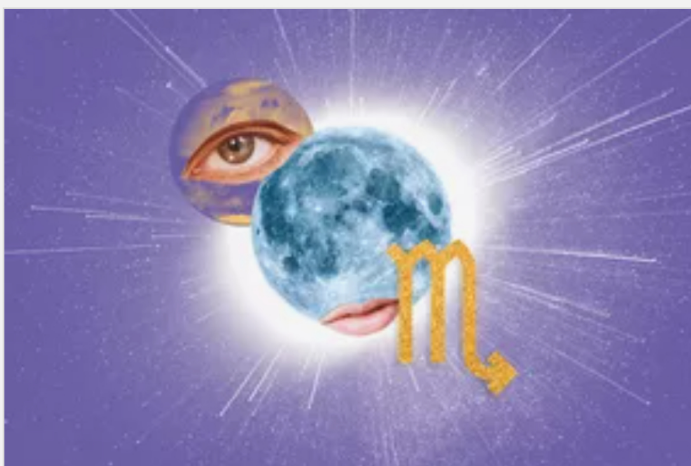
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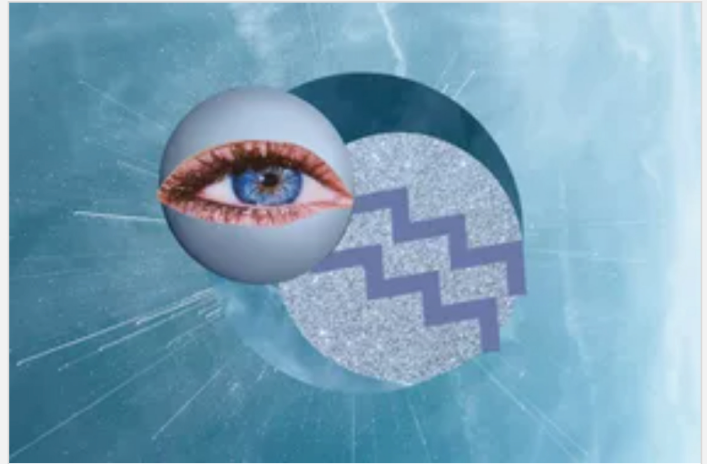
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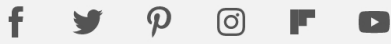
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