

TRAVEL WITH ARTHUR FROMMER'S Budget Travel

Road Trips

"Festivals" that become a "vacation"

Our top 13 picks in the United States

By **Arthur Frommer**
Budget Travel

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When summer comes, America erupts with thousands of outdoor "festivals"—and that's no exaggerated figure: one state publishes a 168-page booklet just to list its own. Which are worth a trip? I've listed 13 favorites, from among the large-scale festivals that aren't simply intended for local consumption. I've also confined myself to festivals taking place each year with regularity, and always in the same month or months:

(1) Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Louisiana: Even on off-days when no special events are planned, New Orleans' French Quarter can still seem like it is festival time. So when Mardi Gras (the apex of the carnival season is "Fat" Tuesday, the day before Ash

Wednesday, which begins Lent, or exactly 46 days before Easter Sunday) hits town soon after the start of each new year, look out! Streets fill with revelers and parading local "krewes" that spend the year creating elaborate and outlandish outfits. In recent years Bourbon Street has begun resembling one enormous Spring Break-style fraternity party, with perhaps the greatest consumption of alcohol of any US festival. Nudity's in ample supply too as young women lift their shirts in front of floats in exchange for beads and trinkets. Still, if you want a festival, you cannot get more festive than Mardi Gras. Information on Mardi Gras can be found in many places, including <http://www.nola.com/>, <http://www.mardigras.com/>, or <http://www.neworleanscvb.com/>, or by calling 800/672-6124.

(2) Tanglewood, in Lenox, Massachusetts: Summer home (all of July, all of August) of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, it consists of daytime rehearsals to which the public is invited, and near-nightly concerts under the stars, of star performers from around the world. In attendance: a vast audience of well-mannered music lovers, who fill

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the picturesque, nearby towns of Lenox, Lee, Stockbridge (of Norman Rockwell fame) and Great Barrington, in the tree-covered Berkshire Mountains of Western Massachusetts. For more information, call the Tanglewood information line at 413/637-1600 or visit <http://www.tanglewood.org/>.

(3) Spoleto, in Charleston, South Carolina: Usually May to early June. In theatres all across that historic southern city (alone worth the trip,) Spoleto adds a hundred more reasons for visiting, in the form of that many high-quality opera, theatre, dance, chamber music and symphonic performances, multiple ones each night. Daytimes, you visit lovingly-preserved mansions of the antebellum south. Write Spoleto Festival, P.O. Box 157, Charleston, SC 29402, phone 843-579-3100, e-mail receptionist@spoletousa.org , or go online to <http://www.spoletousa.org/> to find out more.

Artisans of eight Native American pueblos converge in a giant fair of crafts demonstrations and sales, traditional dances, Indian foods, authentic rituals.

(4) Arts and Crafts of Northern New Mexico, near Santa Fe: Always on the third weekend in July at the Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council Center and Arts and Crafts Site, artisans of eight Native American pueblos converge in a giant fair of crafts demonstrations and sales, traditional dances, Indian foods, authentic rituals. It is the largest and only major Indian-owned

Arts and Crafts Show in New Mexico, and a profound experience (to which I can personally attest) for both visitors and artisans. In recent years, there have also been winter arts and crafts shows sponsored by the Native American group, usually scheduled the first weekend in December. To learn more, contact the Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council, P.O. Box 969, San Juan Pueblo, NM 87566, 505/747-0700, send an e-mail to puebloarts@yahoo.com or link to the Web site at www.artnewmexico.com/eightnorthern/index.shtml.

(5) American Dance Festival, Durham, North Carolina: A gluttonous feast of dancing for more than a month, from early June to mid-July. Leading American dance companies and invited troupes from abroad, appear almost nightly at auditoriums on the campus of Duke University. Contact American Dance Festival, P.O. Box 90772, Durham, NC 27708, phone 919/684-6402, or e-mail adf@americandancefestival.org for the details. The web site also has a full schedule and up-to-the-minute information. Please go to www.AmericanDanceFestival.org.

You'll witness bread-making, shingle-splitting, goose-plucking and cornshucking, plus

(6) Texas Folklife, in San Antonio: the most heavily-attended in the state, this celebration of Lone Star culture takes place in early June on the 15-acre Institute of Texan Cultures. There, thousands of



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foot-tapping, hoe-down dance styles.

representative of the 40 ethnic groups that settled Texas share their traditions, crafts, music, food and dance. You'll witness bread-making, shingle-splitting, goose-plucking and

cornshucking, plus foot-tapping, hoe-down dance styles. Contact:

Institute of Texan Cultures, 801 S. South Bowie St., San Antonio, TX 78205-3296, 210/458-2390 or visit the Web site at

www.texancultures.utsa.edu/tff.

(7) Civil War Re-Enactments, Indiana: From a multitude of choices in the Hoosier state, I like those long-standing, yearly re-enactments and re-creations of Civil War events, battles, conditions and fashions in Hartford City, Indiana (mid-October). After re-enacted infantry charges across large, open fields, you can tour cabins, walk around an old jail or visit the saloon. Contact Orville Uggem at 765/348-4319 or e-mail owu@netusa1.net to find out more. You can also get information via mail by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Blackford County Civil War Re-enactment Club, 3219S SR3, Hartford City, IN 47348. The Web site for Hartford City's "Civil War Days" festival can be found at <http://www.hartfordcitycwdays.com/>.

(8) Three California Entries: In this giant state with hundreds of yearly events, the year's major contenders for out-of-state attention seem to be: the **Orange County Fair** in Costa Mesa (two weeks in mid-July; a series of historic re-enactments, together with exhibits, livestock competitions, and home/fine arts/citrus displays; phone 714/708-FAIR; Web: <http://www.ocfair.com/>); **Old Spanish Days Fiesta** in Santa Barbara (early August; a 79-year-old festival of parades, carnivals, rodeos, dancers, and Spanish marketplaces; phone 805/962-8101; www.oldspanishdays-fiesta.org); and the outstanding **California State Fair** in Sacramento (mid-August through early September; one of the largest agricultural displays in America, with carnivals, exhibits and top-name entertainment; phone 916/263-FAIR, Web: <http://www.bigfun.org/>).

(9) Oregon Shakespeare Festival Ashland, Oregon: In southern Oregon, near the coast, a ten-month-a-year presentation of Shakespearean and other classic dramas, that reaches its peak scheduling in July and August, filling three theatres. Highly popular and therefore requiring long-in-advance reservations, partly because most tickets are \$21 to \$58. You'll find Elizabethan-style architecture and restaurants throughout the town, bookshops focusing on Shakespeare, and all the other associations with the Bard you'd expect in a city that is today America's capital of Shakespeare (Connecticut's once-larger Stratford festival no longer exists). For information and tickets: Oregon Shakespeare Festival, P.O. Box 158, Ashland, OR 97520, 541/482-4331, <http://www.orshakes.org/>.

(10) Rodeo of the Ozarks, Springdale, Arkansas: Early July, five hundred contestants vie for prizes in this authentic rodeo; the four-day festivities start with rodeo parades, stagecoach rides, and evening

shows. Contact The Rodeo of the Ozarks, P.O. Box 1909, Springdale, AR 72765, 479/756-0464. Link to basic information on the rodeo at www.arkansasusa.com/city/spr/rodeo.html.

(11) National Cherry Festival, Traverse City, Michigan: A week in early July, Michigan's largest and most famous yearly event, in an attractive resort town at the foot of Grand Traverse Bay. The weeklong festival features parades, jazz and band competitions, sports events, nonstop live musical entertainment, and—most important—cherries from the city's surrounding orchards, served up in every conceivable way by every restaurant and cafe. More than 500,000 attend each year, and most of the events and activities are free. Contact the National Cherry Festival, 108 W. Grandview Parkway, Traverse City, MI 49684, 231-947-4230, e-mail info@cherryfestival.org, or visit <http://www.cherryfestival.org/>.

Performances of 30 bands from morning till night (recently, Doc Watson, the Schankman Twins, Gopher Broke) plus 24-hour-a-day off-stage "jamming."

(12) Thomas Point Beach Bluegrass Festival, Brunswick, Maine: It may be narrow in its appeal, but it's a potent draw for lovers of that special music from West Virginia and the Great Smokies, who have four full days in late summer— to delight in hearing world-famous legends of Bluegrass, a veritable orgy of unique Appalachian rhythms. Performances

of 30 bands from morning till night (recently, Doc Watson, the Schankman Twins, Gopher Broke) plus 24-hour-a-day off-stage "jamming." After celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2002, the festival is on hiatus but will be back in 2004 (dates are Sept. 2-5). Contact: Thomas Point Beach Bluegrass Festival, 29 Meadow Road, Brunswick, ME 04011, 877/TPB-4321 or 207/725-6009, <http://www.thomaspointbeach.com/>.

(13) Columbia Gorge Bluegrass Festival, Stevenson, Washington: Still another, but one of the best, of the nation's several Bluegrass (music) celebrations, this one takes place in late July, in the majestic Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Apart from the awesome setting, and many presentations of leading Bluegrass performers, the festival incorporates dancing each evening, contests, and discussion workshops in Bluegrass. Contact The Columbia Gorge Bluegrass Festival, P.O. Box 846, Stevenson, WA 98648, phone 509/427-8146 or e-mail bluegrass@columbiagorgebluegrass.com for the information you'll need. On the Web, you can find more information at <http://www.columbiagorgebluegrass.com/>.

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