

Black Rock Desert, Nevada, U.S.

Burning Man

By Tom Kirvan

NEVADA EVENT DRAWS THOUSANDS TO COLOSSAL FESTIVAL IN THE DESERT

To many participants, it is a rite of passage.

To countless others, it is a state of mind.

By all accounts, the annual Burning Man event in Nevada's Black Rock Desert is not your garden variety summer festival. Instead, it is perhaps best described as an immersive art event within the framework of a massive outdoor gallery featuring experimental art, towering sculptures, and "mutant vehicles" (heavily modified art cars) that will take place this year from August 30 to September 7.

The event, which is staged annually in a pop-up metropolis called Black Rock City located roughly 120 miles north of Reno, is viewed by many as a spiritual or transformative journey to step away from the commercial world, to discover your authentic self, and to form deep, immediate connections with others.

Burning Man attracts approximately 70,000 to 80,000 participants each year. The festival's population is capped by a permit issued by the Bureau of Land Management to mitigate environmental impact and safety. The temporary metropolis takes a week to construct and is fully removed, following the principle of "leave no trace." The event culminates on the Saturday evening of the final weekend with the ceremonial burning of a large wooden effigy known as "The Man."

The Burning Man phenomenon began on a San Francisco beach in 1986, where founders Larry Harvey and Jerry James burned a symbolic wooden man in a bonfire ritual on the summer solstice. It has since evolved from a small gathering into a massive global cultural movement with a temporary city. In addition, there are more than 80 regional events each year, attended by more than 100,000 people.

The event has grown to encompass monumental art installations, theme camps, and global community hubs. The 2026 event centers around the theme "Axis Mundi," exploring interconnectedness and humanity's relationship with the natural world.

Burning Man is seen as a social experiment, operating on a gift economy where no money is exchanged – except for the purchase of ice or coffee. Participants are asked

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Image credit: NorthSky Films (2024 September 5). Nevada, USA - A large octopus shaped installation with fire effects captivates a crowd at Burning Man festival. Participants in colorful attire enhance the vibrant night scene [Photograph]. Shutterstock. Retrieved August 27 from [Shutterstock](#)

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to give their time, food, skills, or creations to others unconditionally. The event is guided by 10 principles: radical inclusion, gifting, decommodification, radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, leaving no trace, participation, and immediacy.

The underlying ethos has been tested in recent years by extreme weather, including the 2023 massive mud floods, followed in subsequent years by dust storms and high heat. And yet, Burning Man survives despite the high costs of building a temporary city in the remote Nevada desert.

Burning Man is organized by the Burning Man Project, a nonprofit organization that generates the vast majority of its revenue through ticket sales to the annual desert gathering, strictly avoiding corporate sponsorships, product sales, and commercial advertising to maintain its core principle of decommodification. The term means removing a good, service, or labor from the commercial market so that access to it depends on human need rather than the ability to pay.

To make ends meet, the Burning Man Project also relies on charitable gifts from a range of supporters, as base ticket prices historically cost less than the actual per-person production expense, according to organizers.

This year, the centerpiece of the event will be Cryptomeria – otherwise known as “The Man Pavilion.” Designed by Alexander “Zander” Rose, The Man Pavilion features root-like paths, a spiral staircase rising nearly 60 feet, and a double helix walkway.

Adding to the Burning Man experience will be a collection of monumental art and theme camps. Thousands of participants help create experimental sculptures, large-scale interactive art installations, and elaborately modified vehicles scattered across the city.

The week-long event is also highlighted by ceremonial burnings of various sculptures, culminating in the highly anticipated burning of The Man Pavilion on the evening of Saturday, Sept. 5. The Temple burn is scheduled for Sunday, Sept. 6 at approximately 8 PM PDT.

Ticket prices range from \$550 to \$3,000 per person, reflecting the cost of putting on the event, according to organizers.

“Building Black Rock City is a communal effort,” organizers say on the official ticketing site. “The 2026 ticket prices are scaled to make Black Rock City accessible to all who wish to participate. According to their marketing materials, when you purchase a higher-priced ticket, YOU are: helping more people experience the magic of Burning Man, funding Honoraria art grants, and underwriting Black Rock City operational costs. The world needs more creativity and connection, so thank you for being that spark!”



Image credit: NorthSky Films (2024 September 5). Nevada, USA - A large wooden Temple at Burning Man with spire like elements glows warmly at sunset. Participants with bicycles gather around, enhancing the festival atmosphere [Photograph]. Shutterstock. Retrieved August 27 from [Shutterstock](#)