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Family Guide to Oregon's Summer Music Festivals



Summer is here and with it comes a trio of family-friendly music festivals. The Oregon Country Fair, Pickathon and the Northwest String Summit all offer great opportunities for parents and kids of all ages to play, listen to great music and enjoy the well-earned beauty of an Oregon summer.

The Oregon Country Fair, July 8–10, Veneta

The Oregon Country Fair is the granddaddy of Oregon festivals. Ostensibly a music festival, this is not the kind of event with big-name headliners, or even with a focus on music. The Oregon Country Fair is all about the experience. There is even an entire crew of volunteers whose sole

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mission is to create “ambiance.” In essence, the Country Fair is like a family-friendly Burning Man.

Established in 1969 as a fundraiser for a Eugene alternative school, the fair now dazzles up to 45,000 visitors with experiential creative art experiences. Eugene native, lifelong participant and fair volunteer Dena Zadoff says, “If you looked at a photograph of me and my family at the fair from 1972, it would look nearly identical to now.” The fair has captured and preserved part of Oregon history and made it accessible to all.

Jeremy Cohen is an 11-year Oregon Country Fair volunteer veteran. His two daughters have grown up going to the fair and look forward to their yearly pilgrimage to Veneta, a 12-mile journey from Eugene. Jeremy recommends that first-time fairgoers chill out in one or two areas. “The biggest mistake people make is trying to get it all in, in one day,” he says. Cohen thinks it best to choose a couple of events or shows to catch, and otherwise find a nice shady spot to hang out with your kids. The Cela Mela Meadow has a kid’s entertainment tent and lots of wide-open space for kids to run around. Cohen also encourages families to take advantage of the on-site childcare. At only \$2 an hour for a max of two hours per day, kids are treated to a kind of hippy summer camp wonderland during childcare time. “My kids would be thrilled to stay in childcare all day if they could,” he said. Kids under 10 are admitted free with a paying adult.

Pickathon, August 5-7, Happy Valley

“Family-friendly” does not do Pickathon justice. Since its inception eighteen years

Music Festival Family Survival Guide

Summer festivals can be tricky to navigate with kids, so here are some suggestions to make the most of the festival season.

- **Be where you are**
Taking kids to a music festival is more about hanging with your kid than catching a great band. Try to go with the flow and limit your expectations. The day will go much better if you can just enjoy whatever experiences come to you.
- **Take friends**
Go to the festival with another family or two. This way you can trade off childcare and actually listen to a couple of shows. It will also give your children some built-in playmates, and that is fun for everyone.
- **Bring gear**
Of course you will bring hats, water bottles and sunscreen to combat the summer sun. But you also might want to consider things to make the day more fun — like bubbles, a Frisbee, dress-up outfits, glow sticks, a blanket and a way to schlep all your gear.

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ago, Pickathon has strived to welcome kids, and encourages parents to bring them along — so much so that children under 12 attend free.

There is a kids' tent that features a revolving door of circus acts, Music Together classes, NW Trackers activities and kid-oriented music acts. Around the kids' tent there is space for Frisbee throwing, juggling and a lively game of tag. Older kids have the run of the farm, weaving in and out of camping and music areas and experiencing a safe freedom.

Because Pickathon takes the music part of "music festival" seriously, there are plenty of small quiet spaces to listen to a great band and not be overwhelmed by the crowd. Pickathon limits the total number of festivalgoers to only 3,500 (less than one-tenth the size of the Oregon Country Fair), so it never feels too big or overwhelming. Long-time Pickathon attendee Richard Melling said, "There is an incredible diversity of musical styles at Pickathon. What they have done with the setting is amazing." Melling specifically noted the magic of the Woods Stage, which is nestled in shady trees and features hammocks in which listeners can relax and sway to the music. Perfect for a rest — and possibly a tuneful nap.

Northwest String Summit, July 14–17, North Plains

Northwest String Summit is a bluegrass-lover's paradise. There are great bands to listen to all day and well into the night. Once the official offerings are over, jams break out all over the camp and play until dawn. Hanna Allen will be attending her fifth Northwest String Summit this year and recommends Family Camp if you plan to camp at the festival. The community respectfully enforces quiet sleeping hours in the Family Camp; not so much everywhere else. Allen recommends bringing extra blankets and headphones, so the kids can fall asleep during evening shows.

Bring along a wagon with a shade hood that can carry all your stuff and double as a mobile napping station for younger kids. Don't forget headphones and extra blankets for late night shows, so the little ones can sleep while you listen.

- **Take the shuttle**

The Oregon Country Fair has a free shuttle from Eugene directly to the entrance of the fair. Pickathon has a free shuttle from the Clackamas Transit Center MAX line. Pickathon also encourages cycling out to Pendarvis Farm and organizes a free gear shuttle. Save on parking fees and avoid the hassle of parking at the festival by taking a shuttle.

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"I love the community. It's a wonderful place where I meet new people all day long for four days, but I feel like I already know them," Allen said. Like Pickathon and Oregon Country Fair, Northwest String Summit has a kids' area with traditional crafts, parades, games and music workshops, as well as board games and books to entertain the little ones. Kids 10 and under attend Northwest String Summit free.

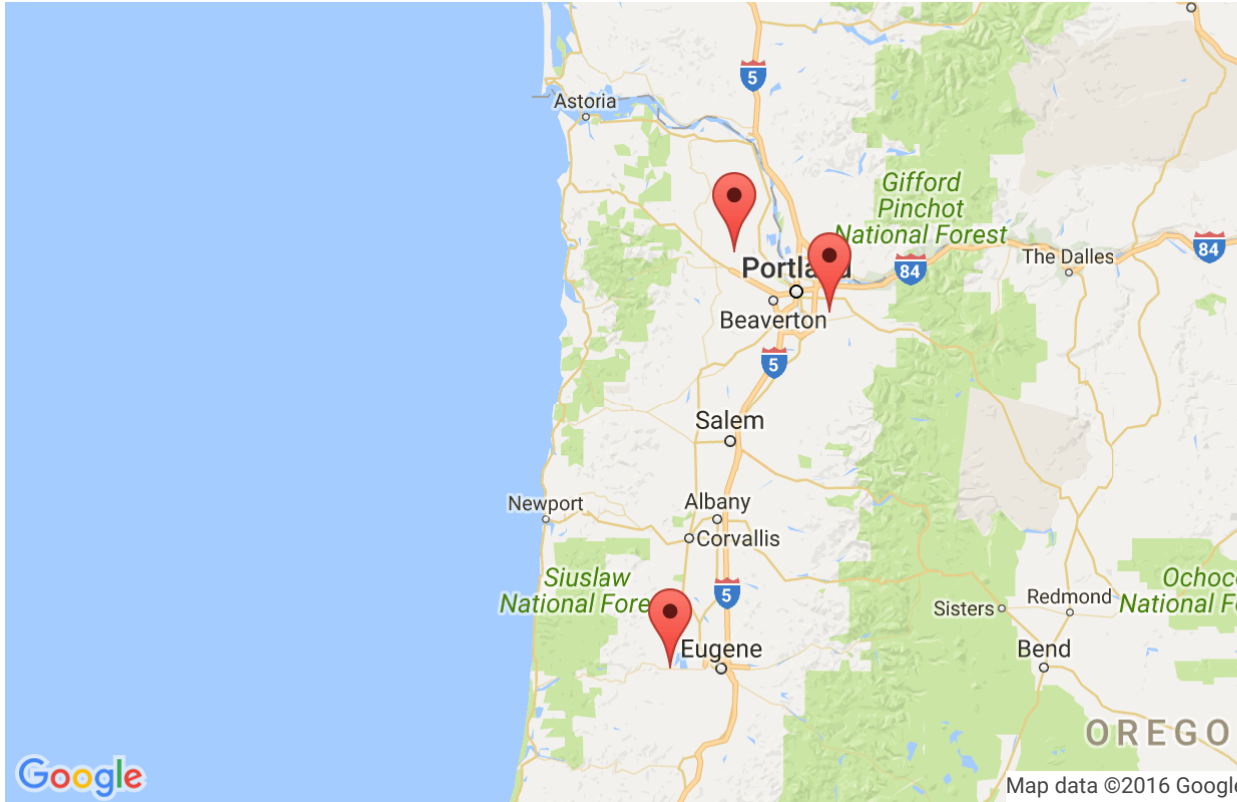
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Ariel Frager



Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that specializes in treating children, adolescents and families. She lives in Portland with her husband, son, dog and kitty cat.



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