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Northwest Folklife Festival: 2024 Guide for Seattle-Area Families

Memorial Day weekend fest is fun and super family-friendly

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PHOTO: Crowds soaking up the sun at Folklife. Photo: courtesy Northwest Folklife

May weather is always a gamble, but rain or shine there is one thing my family can count on this month — Seattle's beloved [Northwest Folklife Festival](https://www.parentmap.com/calendar/53rd-annual-northwest-folklife-festival) (<https://www.parentmap.com/calendar/53rd-annual-northwest-folklife-festival>). For 53 years, Folklife has been kicking off summer with its free, family-friendly festival at Seattle Center on Memorial Day weekend.

Every year my family heads to Seattle Center to enjoy the [huge selection of music and dance performances](https://nwfolklife.org/festival/schedule/in-person-schedule.html) (<https://nwfolklife.org/festival/schedule/in-person-schedule.html>) and lots of opportunity to get hands-on. This year the festival theme is Meraki, a Greek word that means doing things with passion, soul and love. What passion will your family discover this year?



Taiko performs at Northwest Folklife in 2023. Photo: courtesy Northwest Folklife

[Folklife Festival performances](https://nwfolklife.org/festival/home.html) **[\(https://nwfolklife.org/festival/home.html\)](https://nwfolklife.org/festival/home.html)**

If you're bringing kids to this year's Northwest Folklife Festival, here are my recommendations for can't-miss family programming.

More Music @ The Moore

The Vera Project is one of Seattle's best resources for teens, and this year they're hosting this [performance of up-and-coming young musicians](https://www.stgpresents.org/ece/more-music) (<https://www.stgpresents.org/ece/more-music>). In a few years, your kids may be saying, "I saw them back when ..." (Friday, 5:45 p.m., at the Vera Project)

Cowboy Andy & The Salamanders

Beat the crowds and tickle your little ones with this early kindie rock performance. (Saturday, 11 a.m., at the Mural Amphitheater)

Penguin Productions “The Effect”

I know teens will enjoy this completely youth-driven production about two volunteers in a clinical drug trial falling in love. (Saturday, 1:30 p.m., at the Vera Project)

Youth Rising Showcase

Start your day with performances by the Indian Classical Youth Ensemble and the Montlake Elementary Choir, and show your kids that they’re never too young to make music and share it with the world. (Sunday, 11 a.m., Cornish Playhouse)

Neon Brass Party

Keep an eye out for this Seattle-based marching band playing all kinds of booty-shaking grooves on brass. (Sunday, 4:30 p.m., parading around the Center)

Kindiependent Showcase

With upbeat sounds and energetic performances, Seattle kindie rock faves Brian Vogan and his Good Buddies, and The Not-Its! play back-to-back sets. My kids have loved them both for years. (Monday, 11 a.m., Fountain Lawn)

The Geoducks

Finish the festival with this impressive teen trio as they perform a dozen instruments (including keyboard, mandolin, banjo, guitar, melodica, fiddle and bass clarinet) in their mostly acoustic set combining jazz, klezmer, classical and bluegrass genres. (Monday, 5:15 p.m., at the Artist at Play Welcome Stage; also hosting a Bluegrass Jam at 1 p.m. Sunday)



The Geoducks jamming at Folklife. Photo: courtesy Northwest Folklife

More Northwest Folklife Festival family fun

Threads of the people

A newer addition to Folklife, [Threads of the People](https://nwfolklife.org/assets/media/pdf/Threads%20of%20the%20People_Info%20Sheet.pdf) (https://nwfolklife.org/assets/media/pdf/Threads%20of%20the%20People_Info%20Sheet.pdf) in the Exhibition Hall focuses on fashion as folk art with a mix of runway shows, workshops and demos, vendor booths, displays, and material swaps.

Kuleana Corridor

Kuleana is a Hawaiian term which loosely translates to “responsibility.” New to Folklife last year, [Kuleana Corridor](https://nwfolklife.org/assets/media/pdf/Kuleana%20Corridor_Info%20Sheet.pdf) (https://nwfolklife.org/assets/media/pdf/Kuleana%20Corridor_Info%20Sheet.pdf) focuses on food and sustainability. Swing by to meet and learn from the organizations Sustaining All Life, Beacon Food Forest, and A Resting Place.

Hands-on fun

There's lots to see at Northwest Folklife, but there's lots to do, too, and I'm excited for all of it. Fine art may be a "don't touch" experience for kids, but folk art is participatory. Don't miss the many workshops in dance, music and other arts. Many are not specifically aimed at kids, but plenty welcome all ages. A few to note include:

Sun Moon Star Drum hands-on drum workshops for all ages (Saturday, noon; Sunday, 3 p.m., in the Rhythm Tent)

Family Dance (Monday, 2:05 p.m., Alki Court Stage)

Baby Jam's interactive music, stories and movement for kids (Sunday, 11 a.m., in the Jam Tent)



Catch inspiring performers of every age at Folklife. Photo: courtesy Northwest Folklife

Wandering around

With too many stages to count and events scattered throughout lawns and pavilions, Northwest Folklife is a great event to attend without an agenda. Giving your kids the time and freedom to follow their own inclinations removes a lot of the stress of attending such a large event, and it's more in keeping with the spirit of the

festival, which encourages folks to pursue what captivates them. You'll find music and dance showcases every day ranging from Filipino to Hungarian to Croatian to Irish to Turkish and more. Can't decide? Check out Meraki Showcase programs' sampler of cultural performance:

Saturday, 11 a.m., Cornish Playhouse

Saturday, 7 p.m., Bagley Wright Theatre

Sunday, 2:30 p.m., Cornish Playhouse

Packing a lunch is a great way to save money, but the food stands and trucks have plenty to offer when you get hungry. In my experience, treats like hot dogs, gyros, strawberry shortcake or even fried PB&J are part of the festival experience, and it makes it special for kids too.



Just one of the many food trucks offering meals and snacks to keep your crew happy. Photo: courtesy Northwest Folklife

Shop The Uncommon Market and the Handmade Craft Market for treasures made by local vendors and craftspeople. The Maker's Space (<https://g05ibhp4.modx.dev/assets/media/pdf/Maker's%20Space%20Info%20Sheet.pdf>) offers craft demonstrations and workshops, including some kid-focused options like 3D collaborative artmaking and Dusty Strings' instrument petting zoo. The sidewalks are lined with face painters, caricature artists, and even painters who can write your name on a grain of rice, while Window Gallery displays myriad visual artworks.

Check out the [Folklife festival virtual schedule](https://nwfolklife.org/festival/schedule/virtual-schedule.html) (https://nwfolklife.org/festival/schedule/virtual-schedule.html) if you can't make it in person.

Whether you attend Folklife for a few hours or spend the whole weekend there, Folklife Festival is a true Pacific Northwest family tradition, and my family wouldn't miss it for anything. Have fun making those memories!

If you go to Northwest Folklife Festival ...

Where: The [2024 Northwest Folklife Festival](https://www.nwfolklife.org/festival/) (https://www.nwfolklife.org/festival/) takes place at [Seattle Center](https://www.google.com/maps/place/305+Harrison+St,+Seattle,+WA+98109/@47.6219385,-122.3539327,122.351744) (https://www.google.com/maps/place/305+Harrison+St,+Seattle,+WA+98109/@47.6219385,-122.3539327,122.351744).

When: Memorial Day Weekend, Friday–Monday, May 24–27, 2024

Cost: Suggested donation of \$20 per person, per day, but all are welcome.

More info: Check out Folklife's [extensive and detailed daily in-person schedule](https://nwfolklife.org/festival) (https://nwfolklife.org/festival)

Getting there: Expect the whole lower Queen Anne neighborhood and surrounding area to be extra busy during distance away and walk. For tips, check out Seattle Center's [getting here page](https://seattlecenter.com/vis) (https://seattlecenter.com/vis)

Editor's note: This article was originally published several years ago and was most recently updated on May 16, 2024 with this year's family-friendly concerts and events at Seattle's Northwest Folklife. ParentMap authors [Nicole Persun](https://www.parentmap.com/node/7407) (https://www.parentmap.com/node/7407), [Elisa Murray](https://www.parentmap.com/author/elisa-murray) (https://www.parentmap.com/author/elisa-murray) and [Kari Hanson](https://www.parentmap.com/author/kari-hanson) (https://www.parentmap.com/author/kari-hanson) contributed to this article.

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