

What is Whalefest Monterey?

Whalefest Monterey is unique among all the “Whalefest” events in the world as it combines science, the arts and history. It’s a 2-day free event set around Monterey’s Old Fisherman’s Wharf and the adjacent Custom House Plaza, designed to inspire, educate, explore and empower attendees of all ages. It features exhibits from dozens of local and national non-profit organizations related to marine science, sustainability of land and sea, and the environment.

Whalefest Monterey Symposium:

Whalefest Monterey features a Symposium where world renowned scientists from local marine science research institutions share their latest research findings (not limited to whales) with the general public. The Symposium also covers other topics, such as the history of the various local fishing cultures. All presentations are professionally recorded and posted on the Whalefest YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UckT222sMxS9PK30L7_3_Crg/featured

National Marine Sanctuaries:

In 2022, we also celebrated the 50-year anniversary of the National Marine Sanctuaries and the 30-year anniversary of the founding of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The latter featured a fascinating presentation from former Congressman Sam Farr and Dan Haifley about the story behind its creation, in which former U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta was also instrumental. Whalefest Monterey and its founder and Chair, Mary Alice Fettis, were the 2021 recipients of the Sea Star Award for Education from the Monterey Chapter of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

Other Whalefest Monterey Activities:

Other activities at Whalefest Monterey include arts and crafts demonstrations of the ancient Japanese art of Gyotaku, and the Portuguese whalers’ art of scrimshaw. Both cultures played an important role in Monterey history. In addition, there are local history walks and the “world famous” abalone races. We usually have several research and U.S. Coast Guard vessels at the dock or on display, some open for visitor tours. For entertainment, there is an array of outstanding live music, including local professional musicians and school jazz bands. A standout is the “Orca-stra” which combines original music by Nicholas Fettis played on keyboards with locally recorded humpback whalesong. A true meeting of art and science!

Virtual Whalefest Monterey 2021:

In 2021, Whalefest Monterey went virtual by producing a total of eight entertaining and informative hours of live stream “television” programming that featured a little bit of each of the parts that make Whalefest Monterey what it is. This includes research presentations, short films about related non-profit organizations, history talks, crafts demonstrations, and of course, an excellent offering of music. The Virtual Whalefest Monterey 2021 is also posted on YouTube.

Event Attendance:

Although there is no way to count the number of attendees as it is a free festival with many entrances, there is always a large crowd that fills the Whalefest Monterey site, nearby parking lots and restaurants.

Various estimates range from 10,000-15,000 attendees for the weekend. Thanks to the statistically valid attendee surveys we conducted, we have determined some demographics. In 2023, about half of the Whalefest Monterey attendees travel from outside of Monterey including about 8% from out of state or foreign countries. 30% spend three or more days here, exploring the area and spending money in the local economy. About 29% of the attendees are current students. Overall, the attendees are highly educated: over three quarters of them have attended college, and over 27% of attendees have graduate degrees.

Whalefest Monterey also brings in youth from underserved communities, such as science workshop students from South Monterey County, Salinas and Seaside Boys and Girls Clubs, as well as foster care children and their court appointed special advocates (CASA).

We take great pride in providing a free event that is both fascinating and entertaining for all ages! Over the years, Whalefest Monterey has received national and international coverage from the media. The event is highly respected by marine scientists and tens of thousands of people who want to learn about and protect our oceans. All activities and programs are financed through grants, sponsorships and donations and otherwise made possible with a small army of dedicated volunteers. We appreciate all generous support!