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THINGS TO DO

## WhaleFest: Monterey's festival of flippers, flukes and fins



In celebration of the largest mammal on earth, Whalefest Monterey will be held at Old Fisherman's Wharf and Custom House Plaza-Monterey State Historic Park on April 13-14. (Shmuel Thaler – Santa Cruz Sentinel)



By [LISA CRAWFORD WATSON](#) | [newsroom@montereyherald.com](mailto:newsroom@montereyherald.com)

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The Monterey Peninsula is filled with seasonal entertainment opportunities through music and theater, food and wine, classic cars and golf. Yet one of the most dramatic and engaging performances takes place just off the coast. We're talking whales, which offer a festival of flippers, flukes, and fins on the Monterey Bay all throughout the year.

Whale watchers from around the world come to see whales, orcas, dolphins, and seabirds, who congregate in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary to dine on krill and anchovy. The Monterey Bay has been home to 15 species of whales, 10 species of dolphins, two species of porpoise, six species of seals, and one species of sea otter.

Recently, a whale-watching crew reportedly saw a spectacle of six species of cetaceans or marine mammals, including five killer whales, plus humpback whales, a gray whale, Risso's dolphins, Pacific white-sided dolphins and bottlenose dolphins. Up close.

In celebration of the largest mammal on earth, Whalefest Monterey, now in its 14th year as a weekend event of marine-themed exhibits, will be held at Old Fisherman's Wharf and Custom House Plaza-Monterey State Historic Park on April 13-14.

"Whalefest Monterey is not just an event; it's an immersive experience where all ages can learn about the National Marine Sanctuary and the animals who live there. The name 'Whalefest' is meant to be an umbrella over a wide range of information and activities," said event director Mary Alice Cerrito Fettis. "Even if you have two Ph.D.s in marine biology, you're still going to learn something at Whalefest Monterey."



Whalefest Monterey is free, designed to both educate and engage participants through more modalities than lecture, with activities that cater to all ages. (Courtesy photo)

In addition to family-friendly activities and music, says Fettis, Whalefest Monterey dives into a deeper mission of supporting local and national marine organizations dedicated to educating and inspiring the public to protect the Sanctuary. This year, on Sunday, the Stanton Center will host a symposium of experts on marine research and environmental consciousness, with Monterey Bay Sanctuary Foundation board member and former director of the Sea Odyssey of Santa Cruz, Dan Haifley, as master of ceremonies.

“For this symposium, we have reached into all the educational dynamics of learning, including visual, tactile, and auditory experiences,” said Fettis. “We have such an incredible resource of marine experts from more than 18 marine research institutions around our bay from whom to draw speakers who are world renowned for their knowledge.”

Whalefest Monterey is free, designed to both educate and engage participants through more modalities than lecture, with activities that cater to all ages. Participants

can enjoy music and dance provided by Celtic Roads, Hālau Hula Hi'ilani 'O Ke Kai, David Holodiloff, HOLYSEA, Kuumbwa Jazz Honor Band, Michael Martinez, Monterey High School Jazz Band, Nicholas Fettis and His "Orca"stra, Pacific Pop 'n' Jazz, Saxophonia, Stu Heydon and more.

Meanwhile, guests can engage in dozens of interactive displays from local and regional nonprofit organizations, among them, Marine Life Studies, Marine Mammal Center, MBARI, Monterey Bay Eco Tours, Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, Monterey Museum of Art, Monterey Public Library, Monterey Waterkeeper, Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, Paul Watson Foundation, Protect Monterey Bay, Save the Whales and many more.

Research and rescue vehicles on display at Custom House Plaza and at the California Dock at the end of Fishermans Wharf include the Western Flyer, a SWATH (small waterplane-area twin hull) research vehicle operated by the Monterey Bay Aquarium and Research Institute (MBARI), as well as NOAA's (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) research vessel Fulmar. Captained by two females, this Teknicraft hydrofoil-assisted aluminum-hulled catamaran is designed to handle the wave conditions in this area.

Also on display are The Pearl, Monterey Fire's 34-foot aluminum fire boat, and The Current'Sea, Monterey Studies' 40-foot Albin North Sea Cutter research vessel that collects whale information shared with institutions from British Columbia down to Mexico.



Many years ago, a whale festival took place across the Peninsula, from Point Lobos to Pacific Grove. Yet, over time, sponsorship and community engagement seemed to slip out to sea.

“Eventually, Fisherman’s Wharf began looking for a new event to engage and educate the community. As president of the Fisherman’s Wharf Association,” Cerrito Fettis said, “I suggested a Whalefest during one weekend, not all over the Peninsula, and scaled down to be both engaging and manageable.”

That was 15 years ago. Whalefest has since morphed from a simple event, she says, to something quite elaborate, and from 3-4,000 in attendance to 15-20,000 participants.

“Because of the Monterey Canyon, one of the deepest submarine canyons on the West Coast,” Cerrito Fettis said, “the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1992 to protect this resource and provide research and education. And we need to bring attention to what we have here, not only for our local community but for our state and, in general, the world.”

For more information, visit [www.montereywharf.com](http://www.montereywharf.com) or [www.whalefest.org](http://www.whalefest.org), call (831) 238-0777, or email [info@montereywharf.com](mailto:info@montereywharf.com).