



From a Sea Turtle Release to an Outhouse Race, These Ten Fourth of July Traditions Celebrate America Like No Other

Revelers typically mark Independence Day with a barbecue and fireworks show, but these festivities across the country offer quirky alternatives

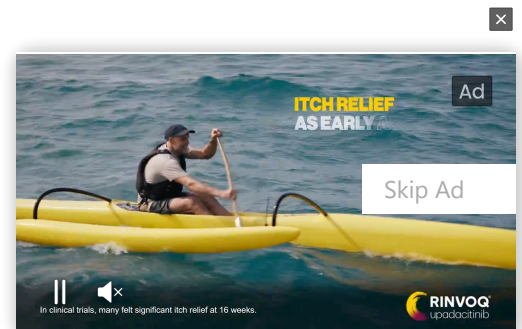


Laura Kiniry | Travel Correspondent

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Two people wearing hot dog hats line up to watch the Nathan's Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest on July 4, 2025. Adam Gray/Getty Images

Plenty of wonderfully quirky, unusual and one-of-a-kind Independence Day traditions are taking place across the United States to mark its semiquincentennial birthday. The annual Nathan's Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest in Coney Island, New York, may be one of the most famous. We've pulled together ten additional celebrations that are worth checking out. From outhouse races in Vermont to an annual sea turtle race in Florida, here are some of our favorite ways to commemorate the country.

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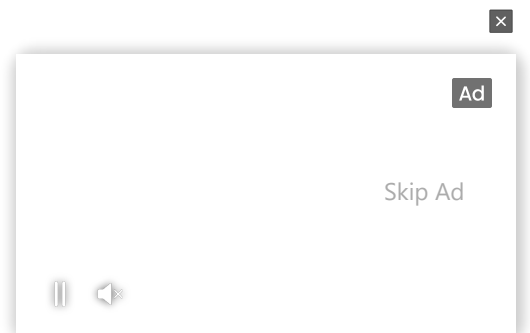
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Key Lime Pie-Eating Contest, Key West, Florida

Think you have what it takes to devour a nine-inch Key lime pie in record time? Then head to Key West, Florida. Spanish explorers introduced the dessert's small, intensely tart fruits to the region centuries ago, where they've been prevalent ever since. The pie-eating contest is a central component of Key West's five-day Key Lime Festival, which takes place annually over the July 4 holiday. It's also quite a spectacle. When the clock starts, 25 competitors dive headfirst (literally!) into devouring the whipped-cream-topped delicacy—without using their hands—in what they hope to be record time. Attorney Trey Bergman of Houston, Texas, holds the record, having scarfed down a pie in a hardly believable 40.57 seconds in 2018.

The contest is free to attend, and will take place at Key West's Southernmost Beach Café on July 4, 2026, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Fence-Painting Contest, Hannibal, Missouri





Boys competing in the Fence Painting Contest splash whitewash on a fence near the former home of American writer Mark Twain in Hannibal, Missouri, in 1969. UPI/Bettmann Archive/Getty Images

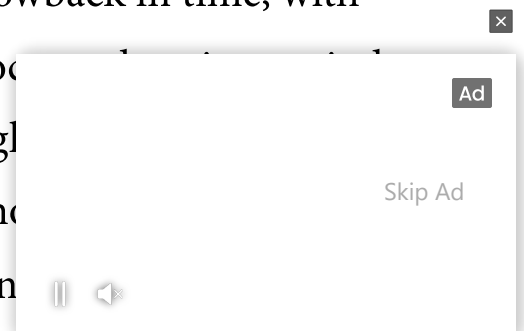
Samuel Langhorne Clemens, also known as Mark Twain, spent his boyhood years in Hannibal, Missouri. In fact, this Mississippi River town was a direct inspiration for the author's classic novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2026. Hannibal's long-running National Tom Sawyer Days festival honors the book—as well as his creator—with an array of entertaining events, including everything from a frog jumping contest inspired by “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” to a small town carnival.

One of the festival's biggest crowd-pleasers is its annual fence-painting contest. Participants dress up like Tom Sawyer, in straw hats, rolled-up pants and suspenders, and compete to paint a designated section of a fence as quickly as possible, providing even covering as they go. It's an ode to a famous scene in the novel in which Tom lies to his aunt Polly and must whitewash a fence as punishment. Judging is based on the authenticity and creativity of each contestant's costume, the speed of their work, and the overall quality of their painting.

The contest takes place right outside the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum, where the writer once lived. Anyone 5 years old and up can compete.

Gold Rush-Style Party, Columbia State Historic Park, California

Celebrate July 4 like California's original 49ers, the 19th-century prospectors who flocked to the West Coast following the discovery of gold, in this open-air living history museum. The entire park is a throwback in time, with plenty of restored buildings from the 1850s and docents in period clothing and reenacting what life was like. Although you can visit any day of the year, the Fourth of July takes it to another level. Activities start with a morning flag-raising ceremony, followed by a parade, dancing in the street and a bevy of 19th-century-style games. You can take part in an egg relay race, watch a watermelon-eating contest or try your hand at nail pounding, which involves driving a nail into a wooden



block with as few strikes as possible. One of the afternoon's most popular events is its greased-pole climb, where participants attempt to scramble up a slippery, vertical wooden log, hoping to claim a prize at the top.

The Lebeau Zydeco Festival, Lebeau, Louisiana



Zydeco is a joyful, syncopated music genre that blends Afro-Caribbean and R&B traditions. slobo/Getty Images

Get ready for some high-energy two-stepping at this [annual Creole heritage celebration](#), which occurs every July 4 at the Immaculate Conception

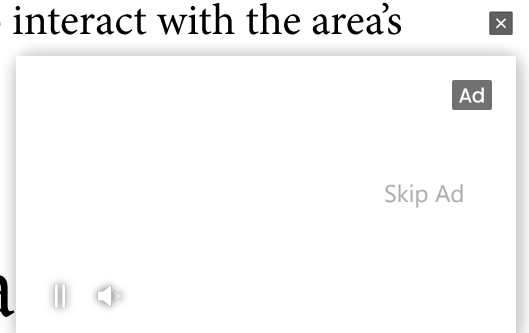
Catholic Church in Louisiana's St. Landry Parish. Zydeco is a joyful, syncopated music genre that blends Afro-Caribbean beats, the blues, and R&B traditions. It's also one that originated here, in southwest Louisiana, the heart of Creole culture. Dance to the accordion and *frottoir* (similar to a washboard) sounds of local Zydeco bands; enjoy plates of sumptuous pork backbone, a local specialty; or set up a lawn chair and simply watch the festivities unfold.

Oatman Egg Fry, Oatman, Arizona

Each Fourth of July at high noon, Oatman, Arizona, is the site of a holiday competition that's absolutely sizzling! After all, this "living ghost town" along Route 66 is legendary for its sweltering summer heat.

At its annual Oatman Egg Fry, competitors have 15 minutes to fry an egg using only solar power. They can utilize objects such as magnifying glasses, mirrors and aluminum foil to harness the sun and bring the cooking surface to the 158 degrees Fahrenheit required for frying an egg. The person who cooks their egg fastest is crowned the winner. The day's other events include outdoor gunfight re-enactments and the chance to interact with the area's free-roaming wild burros.

Sea Turtle Release, Big Isla

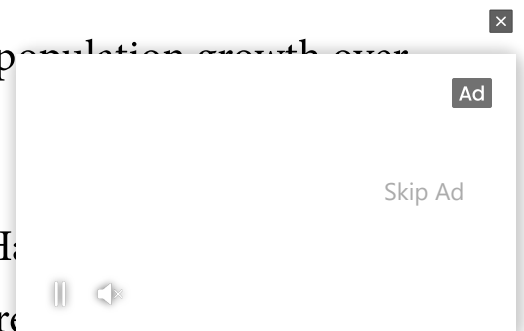




On Turtle Independence Day, the Mauna Lani resort releases sea turtles that were hatched at the Oahu-based Sea Life Park. [Mauna Lani, Auberge Collection via YouTube](#)

Every July 4 since 1989, the Mauna Lani Auberge Resort on Hawaii's Big Island has celebrated Turtle Independence Day. This annual tradition honors the islands' beloved green sea turtles (*honu*), which are deeply revered in Native Hawaiian culture. The day's big event, at 9 a.m., is the release of sea turtles that were hatched at the Oahu-based Sea Life Park and raised in its saltwater ponds. Each sea turtle is microchipped before its release so that researchers can track its movements and monitor population growth over time.

The event also includes hula dancing, traditional Hawaiian ceremonial beach procession involving local children, and the turtles are set free into the Pacific. Researchers will also be on hand to share



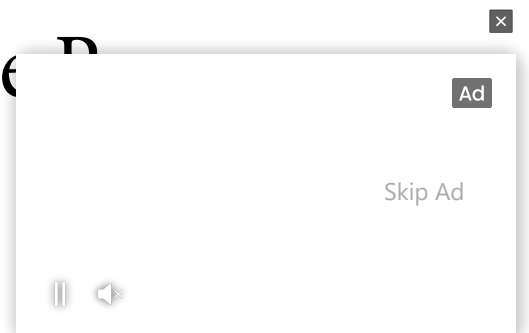
information about the sea turtles and the islands' decades-old conservation efforts to protect them.

Bend Pet Parade, Bend, Oregon

Started in 1924, Bend's legendary Fourth of July Pet Parade has been marching along for more than a century. Dogs, horses, goats, chickens, turtles (for safety reasons, cats and rabbits must stay home) come decked out in their most patriotic and eye-catching costumes. Human companions are part of the festivities too. You'll see them walking their animals on leashes, pushing them in decked-out wagons and carrying them on festooned bicycles to celebrate Independence Day. Some participants even substitute stuffed animals for living pets—the perfect stand-ins when temperatures swell.

The parade starts in Bend's Harmon Park and winds through town. Anyone can take part in this free, noncompetitive and community-focused event. No preregistration is required.

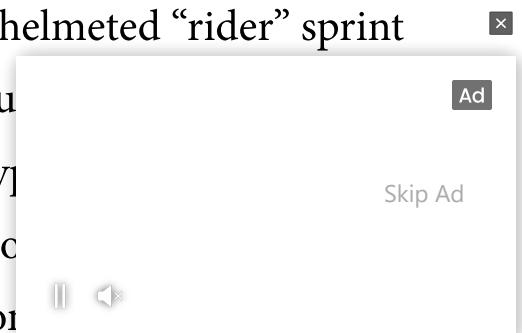
The Great Bristol Outhouse Derby Bristol, Vermont





A three-member team in the Great Bristol Outhouse Race crosses the finish line on July 4, 2025 in Bristol, Vermont. Robert Nickelsberg/Getty Images

Every Fourth of July, teams of three race functional outhouses through Bristol, each vying for a coveted, privy-shaped trophy. This quirky competition has been an Independence Day tradition here since circa 1979 or 1980. It works like this: Two “pushers” and one helmeted “rider” sprint along a straight, 500-foot-long stretch with their custom-built toilet shelter, in a three-outhouse heat. There are typically 10-12 teams competing. The winner of each heat then moves on to a final competition where the winner determines who becomes Bristol’s World Champion. To qualify, each privy must be equipped with a back, two sides and wheels that swivel 360 degrees.

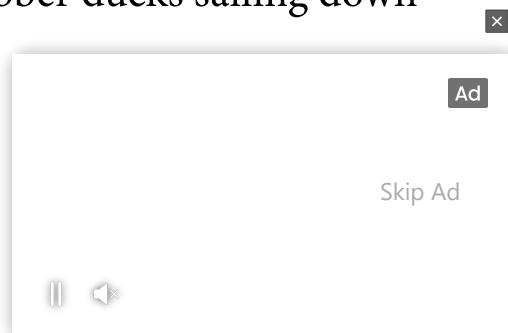


This morning event jump-starts the rest of the day's festivities, including live music and an afternoon parade.

Fourth of July Midnight Parade, Gatlinburg, Tennessee

For more than half a century, local Gatlinburg residents and out-of-towners alike have lined up in the late evening of July 3, ready to catch the “First Parade in the Nation.” At 12:01 a.m. on July 4, giant balloons, creative floats, military honor guards performing precision drills and marching bands from around the U.S. kick-off one of the most impressive Independence Day parades around. Running through a mile-long stretch of downtown Gatlinburg, the parade typically has more than 100 entries and draws upwards of 80,000 spectators. As a bonus, it's all set against the backdrop of the spectacular Great Smoky Mountains.

Revelers later return to the streets (after some much-needed sleep!) to continue the holiday celebrations. These include the River Raft Regatta, a race that sends unmanned decorated floats and rubber ducks sailing down the Little Pigeon River, vying for first place.



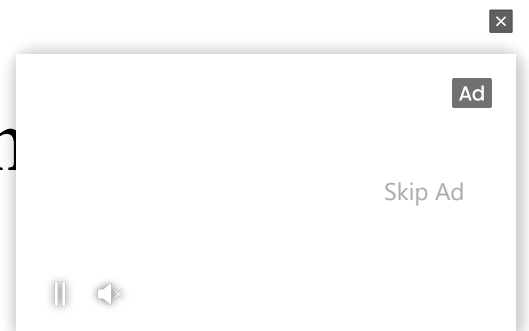


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Kite-Flying Contest, Ocean City, New Jersey



It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a kite-flying contest on the shores of New Jersey. Ocean City's July 4 Kite-Flying Contest brings together 3D box kites, classic

diamond-shaped cross-frames, frameless self-inflating parafoils and kite trains—dozens of identical kites strung together on a single line—in a colorful airborne menagerie. The free contest takes place in the evening and awards prizes for the highest flying kite and the most patriotic, among other categories. It's held on the beach between the city's Music Pier and 10th Street, with fireworks to follow.

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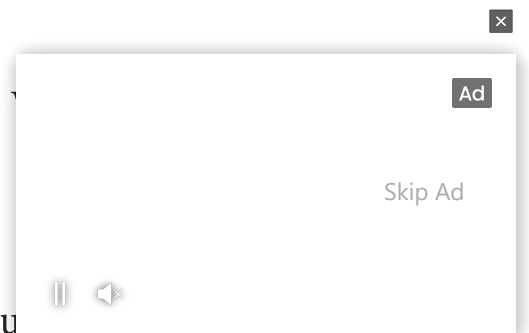
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Laura Kiniry [Read More](#)

Laura Kiniry is a San Francisco-based freelance writer specializing in food, drink, and travel. She contributes to a variety of outlets including *American Way*, *O-The Oprah Magazine*, *BBC.com*, and numerous AAA pubs.

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