

Summer festivals give cause for celebration

BY MELANIE BOLTHOUSE
Summer Guide editor

When people think of festivals in northern Michigan, they might first think of that famous week in July when cherries are king in Traverse City.

Although the National Cherry Festival is the most well-known, towns around the region find a host of other things that are cause to celebrate.

If you're looking for reasons to dance, eat chicken barbecue, play basketball, or just sit back and listen to music, festivals in northern Michigan are the place for you.

For those with Polish heritage or just the Polish at heart, the 23rd Annual Cedar Polka Fest, July 1-4, is an opportunity to polka the day away.

Among performances by six polka bands including The Polish Kid and Company, and the Watkowski Family Band, polka-festers can eat German and Polish brats, watch the parade through downtown Cedar, or attend the polka Mass.

The main attraction is the polka, which runs from 1 p.m. to 1 a.m., so bring your dancing shoes.

More than 4,000 music lovers will congregate at Festival Farm in Cross Village to attend the 24th Annual Blissfest, July 9-11.

With 20-plus performers, Blissfest offers a wide variety of roots music from Acadian, bluegrass, blues, Cajun, Celtic, folk, jazz, Latin and ethnic.

"We're trying to expand people's musical horizons," said Jim Gillespie, executive director of Blissfest.

Gillespie describes Blissfest as a world of music in your own backyard. This year's headliners include



Record-Eagle file photo

The main draw of the Cedar Polka Fest is the dancing, which begins at 1 p.m. and lasts well into the night.

world-renowned violin player Vassar Clement with the John Cowan Band, blues player Larry McCray and Canadian group Kris Demeanor and His Crack Band.

Along with listening to a number of bands, Blissfesters can camp on the grounds and attend workshops.

On July 24, music lovers can find another festival to their liking. The 12th Annual Suttons Bay Jazzfest will be held at Suttons Bay Marina Park and offer a whole day of ongoing jazz.

The Suttons Bay High School Jazz Band will kick off the festival at noon, followed by Marcus Belgrave's Louis Armstrong Tribute Band, The Jeff Haas Double Quartet and the Harry Goldson Quintet featuring Jim Cooper and David Hay.

Marion McPartland, described as the living legend of jazz by Jazzfest founding director Piper Goldson, will conclude the evening at 7:30 p.m.

Proceeds from Jazzfest tickets go to music scholarships for high school students. Goldson encourages people to buy early as there is limited space in the park.

For boat lovers, the Venetian Festival in Charlevoix is the place to be July 18-24.

The festival began 74

years ago as a candle-lit boat parade and has expanded into the largest boat parade in the country. Twenty boats are decorated, judged and admired by 25,000 spectators lining Round Lake.

The boat parade is not the only attraction, however. The seven-day event includes national and local entertainers, sports tournaments and a celebration of

Charlevoix's heritage.

The 40th annual Alpenfest will be held on July 13-17 celebrating the Alpine influence in Gaylord.

This five-day event includes the Grand Parade, a spam carving contest, an ugly dog contest and even a yodeling contest. Concerts are held daily with Phil Dirt and the Dozers bringing the festival to a close.

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