

# MAKE THE JOURNEY NORTHERN NIGHTS

KERRY REYNOLDS COURTESY OF NORTHERN NIGHTS MUSIC FESTIVAL

## MUSIC FESTIVAL

If you distill everything that is playful, wise, stylish and funky about the Emerald Triangle—that edgy outlaw cannabis-growing community nestled throughout the hills of Humboldt, Mendocino and Trinity counties in Northern California—into three sunny days by the South Fork of the Eel River and unending nights in the Redwood forest, and set it to thumping electronica beats, you’ve got Northern Nights Music Festival.

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**ITS SIXTH YEAR, NORTHERN NIGHTS MIGHT BE ONE OF THE ONLY FESTIVALS IN THE EMERALD TRIANGLE THAT IS GROWING IN ATTENDANCE WITH “CLOSE TO SIX THOUSAND BEATING HEARTS ON FESTIVAL GROUNDS” THIS YEAR, ACCORDING TO ONE OF THE EVENT’S FOUNDERS, ANDREW BLAP.**

**BLAP OBSERVED DECLINING** attendances at other regional festivals and saw that they had to attract folks from areas untouched by the local recession. The end of cannabis prohibition has disrupted the robust economic engine of the Emerald Triangle region. With dropping wholesale cannabis prices and colossal costs to become legally permitted to grow, far fewer farmers are buying festival tickets for their entire crews like they once did.

So Northern Nights ran promotions in LA and Bay Area dispensaries that encouraged customers to buy cannabis grown in Humboldt and Mendocino in exchange for a big break on tickets. At least 100 people took up the offer and, thanks to this and other marketing efforts, Blap estimates that up to 70 percent of festival-goers were from outside the region, with most from the San Francisco Bay Area.

With five stages spread throughout the private property called Cooks Valley that bridges Mendocino and Humboldt counties along Highway 101, Northern Nights results from numerous stalwart local groups coming together to both create a common vision and build their own highly individualized stages. “World Famous Productions, Burningleaf, Skinny Kitty, Bunker Crew, EPIC Productions and many more create an event that is a mix of Burning Man, Ultra-Music, and Wanderlust,” said Blap.

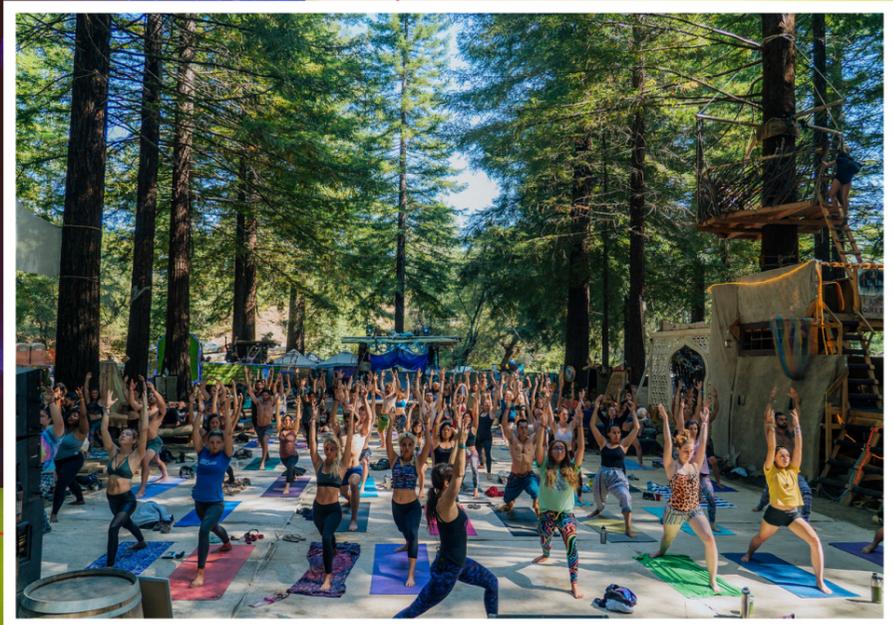
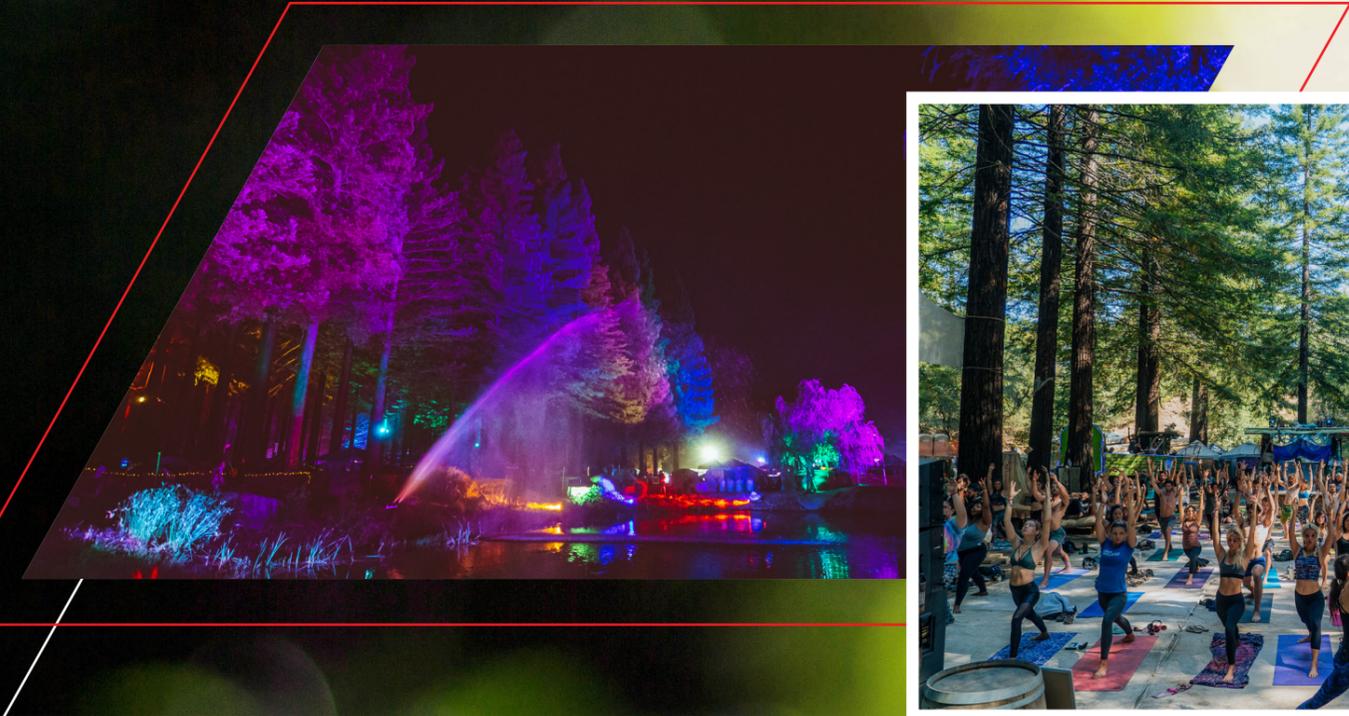
Northern Nights’ two-year tradition of hosting a medicinal cannabis area featuring Emerald Triangle-grown cannabis was on hold this year due to the new tight restrictions on cannabis sales at events. Nevertheless, organizers still frame Northern Nights as a portal for visitors to taste the wild, free and resilient outlaw Emerald Empire culture that was built by sweet Mary Jane before she was legalized and uber-regulated.

So what could an attendee actually expect at Northern Nights Music Festival? As a first-timer invited to write about the event, I had no idea. With a leap of faith, I joined the throngs of colorful festival pilgrims trudging in camping gear, yoga mats, skimpy festie garb, and giant unicorn floaties under the hot July sun. It’s all part of the journey.

After setting up my tent, I sauntered into the VIP lounge and scored a 20-minute massage from Dr. Chocolate of Burning Man’s HeeBee GeeBee Healers camp. He worked out the kinks in my shoulder, but whatever magic he did with my ears and jaw was the most restorative. I didn’t even know my ears and jaw needed attention, but they were happier for it. Thanks, Dr. Chocolate.

Post-massage I stepped over earthy sitting cushions and pillows beneath the shade of an oak tree and admired a three foot tall crystal nestled between its roots. Other crystals adorned with feathers hung above an honor system stand offering self-serve healing teas, salves, and tinctures from Rising Light Botanicals and Emerald Sisters Collective.

I poured myself a shot of fire cider, slid a dollar in a jug, and continued a short way through the grass and up a few stairs to the Tree Lounge where I met two Humboldt women, Alana and Wanda. They were representing Gen-



eral Extractions, one of several cannabis companies that helped create the Tree Lounge experience. We shared a joint and conversed about the healing power of raw juiced cannabis leaves and potential ways to harvest and bring frozen juice to market. I took note of the tangy, earthy taste of the joint and turns out it was a strain I'd been hearing a lot about lately called *Wedding Cake*—a *Girl Scout Cookie/Cherry Pie* cross that really perked me up.

As the sun went down I discovered the Grove, which took enchanting decor to a surreal new level. A giant metal and leather Sasquatch sculpture greeted everyone as they entered an area with a Peter Pan mannequin looking down from a rocky castle stage onto a dance area dotted with faux fur-covered couches and a fancy bed for relaxing with friends. Whimsical, fairytale-themed art installations included a pirate ship that you could board and then climb higher onto an EarthFirst!-style treesit platform or plunge off a plank into a pit of orbs.

Not surprisingly, one couple of nine years decided that the Grove's elegant entrance of paper lanterns dangling from silver tree branches was the perfect tunnel to walk through into matrimony. They approached the Grove organizers on Friday and were hitched on Saturday as DJ 4NR played Alabama Shakes.

Come sundown Saturday I was back in the Grove with friends and we were spellbound as aerial silk artist, Nathalie Nebula, gracefully twirled her entire body upside-down in sync with the beats of DJ Dragonfly. I imagined even her bones were carved of pure muscle and asked her the next day how she defied gravity.

"I've been a dancer my whole life and started doing aerial silks with Humboldt Aerial Collective five years ago," Nebula said, adding that she practices five days a week on silks to keep up her grip strength and performs for corporate gigs and birthday parties as well. "Honestly, Northern Nights is my favorite event to do," Nebula said, "it feels like home. The whole Humboldt community comes together and obviously people from everywhere else. It's really special being under the trees, experiencing the river, everything."

The art, performance, ambiance and music inspires rich experiences in the woods and the rave continues until sunrise. I did not. I was crashed in my tent by 2am Saturday morning and 3am Sunday morning, which is quite tame for Northern Nights. As I stood in line for coffee the next morning, others appeared to have not slept at all. Coffee in one hand, yoga mat in the other, I made it back to the Grove and embarked on an epic guided meditation from Tim Rothchild, and then remained for a juicy yoga class by Gina Turner, who also DJ'd a set on the Main Stage Saturday night. After his guided meditation, Tim Rothchild described his six-year study with mystics and magi and waxed poetic about festival renaissance culture.

"We're living in such an amazing time. We have access to so much information now, that it is overwhelming us and dropping us out of our heads and into our hearts and a more purpose-driven life. The intelligence of the heart is nondual. It is not in opposition to anything.

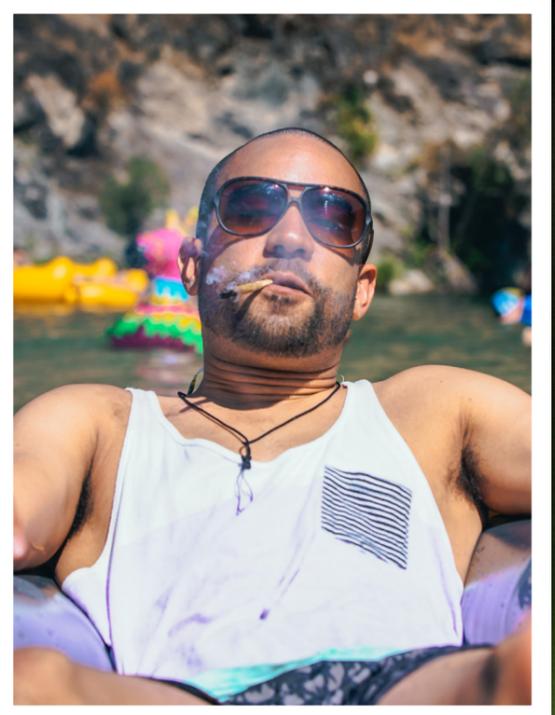


Only the heart can hold everything. The mind, the brain, has right and left sides and splits the world into pieces and parts," Rothchild said.

"Practices like this, yoga, meditation, whatever healing work you're drawn to, will dip you back into that stream of wholeness and essentially awaken you to your true nature. Being that, living that, is essentially your gift back to life."

I would add cannabis to the list of portals into that stream of heart-centered wholeness as well. That powerful gift that cannabis provides many of us is easily forgotten as we awe at the number of diseases that cannabis can treat, or vex at the number of people around the world who are still jailed for growing or possessing it. And now the right to grow more than the legal six plants in California is limited to those with enough cash to pay the immense price of licensing. Some farms have sunk half a million dollars into work on their land and fees to agencies to win a permit from Humboldt County. Most small mom and pop farms don't have that kind of money and hundreds of them in Humboldt County are now receiving abatement notices announcing daily fines of \$10,000 until all cannabis material, plants and growing infrastructure is gone.

Before leaving on Sunday afternoon with a dusty duffle bag full of glorious memories, I spoke with a woman who lives and works on a small Humboldt farm that had received a county-issued abatement notice while she was at the festival. While she still enjoyed being among friends in the redwoods at the festival, she also felt shock at the abrupt change in her life.



"All the partners are clearing it all out right now and we're done. It's done," she said, and described the farm's small scale and regenerative soil practices. "Everything was done sustainably. There are even crystals in the garden because we believe cannabis absorbs that good energy. What's going to happen to the quality of the medicine when only the big guys that bulldoze an acre are the ones that can afford permits?" she asked.

The cannabis community in the Emerald Triangle is well acquainted with adversity and people are already organizing efforts to support the many legacy farmers whose livelihoods are being lost in this new era of regulations.

Meanwhile Northern Nights organizers are joining other cannabis-centric festival creators statewide in lobbying for the passage of AB 2020, a California bill that would allow them a shot at offering cannabis sales once again by ending the current arbitrary regulation that only events on county fairgrounds or district agricultural association events can be awarded state temporary cannabis event licenses. The struggle for freedom and the right to grow and sell cannabis continues in the Emerald Triangle and, despite the many challenges, Northern Nights Music Festival's authentic celebration of nature, art, community and good vibes beats on.

**MAKE THE JOURNEY, AND LEARN MORE ABOUT NORTHERN NIGHTS MUSIC FESTIVAL AT [NORTHERNNIGHTS.ORG](http://NORTHERNNIGHTS.ORG)**