

What is Burning Man?

Burning Man is a temporary city in the stark Nevada desert, created for one week around Labor Day, whose 50,000 denizens are devoted to creativity -- in art, technology, music and personal expression. Almost all comers are participants, exploring their creative selves. The coin is art; you are appreciated for what you give and what you show off.

The city is built quickly and thrives for a week. At the climax is the burning of a giant stylized figure known as "the Man" which becomes the city's prime universal experience. Shortly thereafter, all is gone, and months later it's not even possible to determine where the city was, until it is rebuilt the next year.

Burning Man is Living Creatively and Appreciating Creativity.

If you had to put it in one sentence, that's it. You go there to create, to appreciate what others create, and be appreciated for what you do.

Burning Man is American

Burning Man is a metaphorical Woodstock. It doesn't have 500,000. It is not a concert. But it is and will be the countercultural icon of this era. And while it is very far from mainstream American culture, in some ways it is as American as one can be, for no other culture would give birth to it, no other place has anything like it. That man's heart is the countercultural heart of America. At the same time, a good part of it could be enjoyed by the mainstream too.

Burning Man is Un-American

Because it does sit far from mainstream America, Burning Man is a temporary culture within a culture. For those who find stimulation in experiencing other cultures of the world, some come because one of the most interesting is right here.

Burning Man is Young

Not because all the participants are young, but because all are creative, and seeking the newly born ideas. Burning Man is *novel*. All parts of the human life cycle live at Burning Man, but even the old are not old there.

Burning Man is Social Experiment

It began almost as anarchy. As it has grown it has changed into a community with laws and rules, but ones different from the culture which spawned it. Commerce is largely forbidden (though still goes on.) Gifting is promoted. Clothing is optional, but this is more often expressed not as simple nudity but rather as creative and uninhibited body decoration and costuming. Trappings of the outside world are optional. Many take on new identities. Some look as they always did but *live* differently. The bicycle and foot are the main modes of transport. To drive, cars must be turned forever into works of art. Taboos are different and turned upside-down.

Your worth at Burning Man is what you can give to others; your art, your camp, your gifts, your life. To appreciate and be appreciated is the economy. This requires a society with wealth to spare to be able to do this for a week, but it is still real even though it is ephemeral.

Burning Man is a Night City

In spite of the lack of electrical grid, Black Rock City is lit up more than most cities at night, and many shun the day to live at night. The night and day are partners in Burning Man.

Burning Man is Fire

It began with fire and fire remains at its heart. You'll see far more art involving fire and pyrotechnics than other venues. It's also the heat of the desert and a fire in the hearts of the participants.

Beyond the Core

The things I list above I believe are the core of Burning Man. There are other elements of it which are strongly linked, though I think it might still be Burning Man without them. Indeed, some of them I think are negative and I would rather be without them. Others may disagree.

Burning Man is the Desert

The Black Rock Desert provides a challenge, and a shared harsh experience. The heat, the cold, the dust, the storms, the beauty all are dominant parts of the experience. Some come in RVs, some in tents, some just sleep under shelters. One man arrived naked and without possessions and successfully depended on the kindness of strangers.

The desert also provides the flat Playa for building, driving art cars and a bicycle community.

Burning Man is Remote

2 hours from Reno, 6 hours from San Francisco, further to all other major cities. The isolation demands dedication from the citizens, and that dedication plays a role in making the Black Rock City.

Burning Man is loud

Though many come not to rave, a sizable section comes to party and dance to loud Electronic music. One need not participate in this but nor can it be ignored in describing Burning Man. Efforts are made to move the loudest camps to the edges of the city, but they do not always succeed. Bring earplugs.

Burning Man has drugs.

Though the police are still there in force, drugs do play a larger role in Burning Man life than in regular life. Though lots of people don't take them and prefer the chance to live clearly in an alternate society. Pot and alcohol dominate, as in regular life. Surprisingly, the drugs stay fairly low key. They won't be shoved in your face just walking around, though you will encounter high people of course.

Burning Man is Art Cars

People love decorated vehicles, as well as their bodies and bicycles. While there are more dedicated gatherings for the Art Car enthusiasts, more people will see more moving Art at Burning Man than anywhere else.

Burning Man is not doing it the boring way

Rare is the camp that is just ordinary tents and cars. You don't go there to camp, you go there to live, so most camps show some style, even if just a little. Same for the people.