

TAKE YOUR PICK

Get your folk, bluegrass fix at festivals

By STEPHEN A. IDE

The Patriot Ledger

For some music lovers, summer folk and bluegrass festivals offer a chance to hear dozens of top-notch musicians in just a few days. For others, it's a ritual gathering of "family" who look forward to seeing one another, even if it's just once a year.

Amid a sea of tents, canopies and RVs, festival-goers attend to listen, participate, learn and party. Newcomers are often amazed that they have been missing great music all these years, and veterans have come to expect the best and can't wait to return.

It's no wonder the web site for the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival in New York literally counts down the time until the gates open.

Here are some glimpses of upcoming festivals, along with some tips for first-time festival-goers. (A full list is in

**Boston's own
Catie Curtis will
appear at The
Greater New
Bedford
Summerfest,
July 2-3.**



Get your blues and folk fix at a number of festivals

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the accompanying story.)

Choose your festival

Here's a sampling of festivals in the region this summer.

■ **The Greater New Bedford Summerfest, July 2-3**

This festival has gained in popularity each year and offers a snapshot of the contemporary folk scene. This year, look for folk-rockers The Nields, funny lady Christine Lavin (one of the Bitchin' Babes), popular Boston singer-songwriter Catie Curtis and up-and-coming phenom Jake Armerding.

Summerfest is spread throughout historic downtown New Bedford. There are many stages scattered through the blocks by the waterfront. Expect to walk quite a bit. At least the stages all provide seats, so you can leave the chairs at home.

■ **New York's Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival, July 19-22**

Known for mixing traditional and progressive acts, it brings back bluegrass stalwarts the Del McCoury Band and Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver, but offers variety with Laurie Lewis & Tom Rozum, the Sam Bush Band and the jazz-influenced Psychograss.

Grey Fox, the ultimate bluegrass experience in the Northeast, has multiple stages, including workshop tents, a large dance tent and a children's tent. Expect to walk.

■ **The Lowell Folk Festival, July 29-31**

This is the only regional folk festival I know of that remains free. Perhaps because of this you might not have heard of some of the performers, who vary from Old West Saloon pianist Dave Bourne to blues to world music styles from Slovenia, Ireland, Greece, Mali, Mexico, Korea, Klezmer, Quebec (Quebecois), cajun and others.

Despite the lesser-known aspect of some of these performers, there's never a slouch in the bunch. And some go on to prominence. I remember seeing Alison Krauss there many years ago and remember her chatting with the public after the show. Good luck getting close to Krauss today.

A bluegrass highlight coming to Lowell this summer is power-packed spitfire Dale Ann Bradley, a wonderful singer from East Kentucky.

■ **Newport Folk Festival, Aug. 4-7**

The venerable Newport Folk Festival was responsible for helping to bring performers like Bob Dylan and Arlo Guthrie to prominence. Guthrie



STEPHEN IDE/The Patriot Ledger

Johnny Irion and Sarah Lee Guthrie will perform at the New Bedford Summerfest Folk Festival, July 2-3.

returns this summer, as part of his 40th anniversary of the writing of "Alice's Restaurant."

Newport's lineup is a virtual who's who, with rocker Elvis Costello & The Imposters and folk veterans Odetta, Nanci Griffith, Emmylou Harris and Richard Thompson.

Newport offers several stages and plenty of vendors. Getting there and getting out are an experience, since it's a popular tourist destination on an island. You'll need to drive in traffic through the center of Newport during peak season to get to Fort Adams State Park. Plan accordingly and pack your patience. The music is worth it.

If you go

Check the festival web sites for schedules, lists of performers and prices.

Usually, festivals offer "early bird" specials for folks who buy now. If you know you're going anyway, that's the best way to shop for tickets. Online purchasing is the norm, though some sites allow you to mail in a check. Online ordering can be confusing (they are all different and offer many options), so read carefully before you buy — often tickets are non-refundable.

You'll likely get updated material at the main gate, but a little advanced research will help you plan your visits to the main stage.

At most festivals, you will be camped near or next to your vehicle, so don't skimp on bringing extras to make your stay comfortable for a multi-day festival.

If it's a multi-day festival that permits camping, pack a canopy or tarp coverage in addition to your tent. You'll appreciate the shade during moments away from the stage area.

What to bring

There are certain essentials to bring

that will make your festival experience more enjoyable.

First aid tents, often near the main stage, offer sunscreen at some festivals. But you'll need sunscreen around camp. So it's best to bring your own.

Equally as important: bring water. Oh, sure, you can probably buy it there, but that will cost you. You should bring a healthy supply of water for multi-day festivals, even if your drink of choice may be of the alcoholic variety. Only water will truly hydrate you.

If the summer goes well and the sun shines, wide-brimmed hats are helpful for protecting ears and necks from the sun and for cutting glare when viewing the stage.

You'll want chairs for the main stage area and for around camp. Collapsible "umbrella" chairs are the norm. They are cheap and dry quickly if it rains. But plain-old nylon-webbed aluminum chairs are fine. Festivals like patrons to use the low-back variety. But so few people bring those, you'll probably want a standard height chair so you can see over or between the heads of other patrons.

Whether it's a multi-day festival like Grey Fox or day-trip romps like Summerfest, Newport or Lowell, make sure you are wearing comfortable shoes. There's often lots of walking, if only just to get to your seat. And most festivals offer multiple stages to visit and a long vendors' row.

For multi-day festivals, expect to purchase ice before you go and then replenish it at the festival. It's a necessary evil, but a great task for kids (tip them generously, so they have cash to spend) and bring a little red wagon to make hauling easier for them.

Expect to spend

Festivals stay afloat financially with help from their vendors, who pay to hawk their wares. Rows and rows of tent-covered shops offer everything from cheap trinkets to mid-priced hats and bandannas to expensive instruments.

In the heat of summer, it's not unusual to find products geared to keeping you cool, like water misters or neck wraps that you soak in water.

There are so many vendors at festivals that you might be inclined to wait to purchase necessities at the festival. But it's best to get what you need before the trip. There's no guarantee you can get what you want on site.

While it's always nice to pick up a souvenir or a T-shirt, you don't need to go broke at a festival, especially if you plan ahead.

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Upcoming music festivals

Here is a sampling of upcoming Northeast folk and bluegrass festivals. Be sure to check the web sites or call for last-minute changes or specifics regarding particular shows. Some ticket prices rise the closer you get to the festival.

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June 24-26: The Old Songs Festival of Traditional Music & Dance, Altamont Fairgrounds, Altamont, N.Y., 518-765-2815, e-mail: oldsongs@oldsongs.org, oldsongs.org/festival. Performers include old-timey player Bruce Molsky, banjo great Tony Trischka, funny folks The Arrogant Worms and Peter & Lou Berryman, and blues great Gary Davis. On-site camping. All festival tickets \$85, youths \$50. Per-day prices available.

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July 2-3: New Bedford Summerfest Folk Festival, New Bedford Historical Whaling National Park & State Pier. E-mail: helene@barrel-of-music.com, barrel-of-music.com. More than 35 acts, including Paul Geremia, Sara Lee Guthrie and Johnny Irion, Jack Hardy, Catie Curtis, The Nields, John Renbourn and Jacqui McShee. The festival wristband price is \$10 a day or \$15 for an all-festival wristband. Separate admission required for Whaling Museum, but not for festival-related shows.

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July 14-17: Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival, Rothvoss Farm, Ancramdale, N.Y., 1-888-946-8495, greyfoxbluegrass.com. More than 35 acts, including David Grisman Quintet, Peter Rowan's All-Star Bluegrass Jam, the Seldom Scene, Sam Bush Band, Tim O'Brien Band, Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver, the Del McCoury Band, John Cowan Band, Mountain Heart and more. On-site camping. Full-festival tickets: \$150, \$135 by June 30; 12 and under free. Seniors 60+, \$5 off per day. Day tickets available.

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July 15-16: The Green River Festival, Greenfield Community College, Greenfield, 413-586-8686, greenriverfestival.com. More than a dozen acts, including Steve Earle, Donna The Buffalo, The Duhks, Tracy Grammer, The Mammals, Jeffrey Foucault, Allison Moorer and others. Tickets \$35 until July 10, under 12 free. Day tickets available. Balloon rides \$200-\$225, includes festival admission.

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July 21-24: The Falcon Ridge Folk Festival, Long Hill Farm, Hillsdale, N.Y., 860-364-0366, e-mail: info@falconridgefolk.com, falconridgefolk.com. More than 50 acts, including The Kennedys, Vance Gilbert, Eliza Gilkyson, Lowen & Navarro, Dar Williams, Jesse Colin Young, Crooked Still, Railroad Earth and more. On-site camping, \$115; \$95 through July 1; ages 12-16, \$45. Under 12 free. Day and no-camping tickets available.

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July 29-31: Lowell Folk Festival, 67 Kirk St., Lowell, 978-970-5000, 978-970-5002 (TDD), lowellfolkfestival.org. More than 15 acts including Susan Watts and the Fabulous Speilkehs (Klezmer), Nora Jean Bruso (blues), Dale Ann Bradley (bluegrass), Kevin Naquin & The Ossun Playboys (cajun), Dave Bourne (Old West Saloon piano) and more.



STEPHEN IDE photos/The Patriot Ledger

Peter Rowan will be at the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival in New York July 14-17.

plus crafts and activities. Free.

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Aug. 4-7: Dunkin' Donuts Newport Folk Festival, Jane Pickens Theater, Newport Casino and Fort Adams State Park, Newport, R.I., 401-847-3700, newportfolk.com.

Events include the screening of the film "Festival," which chronicles the festival from 1964-'66, at the Jane Pickens Theater, \$15. Arlo Guthrie with The Mammals celebrating the "40th Anniversary of the Alice's Restaurant Massacre" and Nanci Griffith at the Newport Casino, tickets \$30-\$75. And at Fort Adams: Patty

Griffin, Odetta, Del McCoury Band, Elvis Costello, Old Crow Medicine Show, Jane Siberry, Emmylou Harris and many more.

Three-day tickets, which include lawn seating for the Guthrie/Griffith show and full access at Fort Adams, are \$120. Aug. 6-7 tickets to Fort Adams are \$90; children 2-12 are \$5 per day; children under 2 free. Day tickets available.

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Aug. 4-7: Podunk Bluegrass Music Festival, Martin Park,

East Hartford, Conn., podunkbluegrass.net, 860-291-7350. Acts include Doc Watson, Rhonda Vincent & The Rage, Mountain Heart, Vassar Clements, Pine Mountain Railroad, Dale Ann Bradley and more. Four-day festival ticket with camping \$75. Youth tickets available (check web site). Children 12 and under free with paid adult. Day tickets available.

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Sept. 2-4: Rhythm & Roots Festival, Ninigret Park, Charlestown, R.I., 1-888-855-6940, rhythmtix@aol.com, rhythmandroots.com. On-site camping. More than 25 acts, including Donna The Buffalo, Keb Mo, Steve Riley & the Mamou Playboys, Slaid Cleaves, Sonny Landreth, Marcia Ball, Little Feat and many more. Full-festival camping tickets \$140, \$110 through June 30. Non-camping tickets available and day tickets available; 12 and under free with adult ticket buyer. Senior discount (60+) \$5 off per day.

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Sept. 24-25: Boston Folk Festival, University of Massachusetts, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, 617-287-6911, folkfest@umb.edu, bostonfolkfestival.org. More than 20 acts, including Suzanne Vega, Janice Ian, Lori McKenna, Modern Man, Patty Griffin, Eric Andersen, Greg Greenway, Jennifer Kimball, Guy Davis, David Massengill, Alastair Mook & Pastures of Plenty and more. Tickets: \$50, 2-day; ages 6-14, \$10; under 6 free. Day tickets available; discounts for WUMB members.

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