

North Carolina State Fair 2026: Dates, Tickets & Travel Guide



The **North Carolina State Fair 2026** returns to Raleigh from **October 15 through October 25, 2026**, bringing 11 days of carnival rides, farm animals, live entertainment, competitions, fair food, and family fun to the heart of North Carolina.

Held at the **North Carolina State Fairgrounds in Raleigh**, the annual event is one of the state's biggest traditions and one of the most popular fall events in the Southeast. It attracts families, food lovers, agriculture enthusiasts, and travelers looking for a classic American state fair experience.

But the North Carolina State Fair is much more than a midway and a collection of food stands. Agriculture remains at the center of the event, with livestock shows, farming exhibits, educational programs, competitions, and displays that connect visitors with one of North Carolina's most important industries.

From deep-fried creations and thrilling rides to blue-ribbon competitions, heritage demonstrations, live music, fireworks, and family attractions, the **North Carolina State Fair 2026** offers plenty to fill an entire day.

What Is the North Carolina State Fair?

The North Carolina State Fair is an annual celebration of the state's **agriculture, agribusiness, arts, crafts, food, culture, and communities**.

The first North Carolina State Fair was held in **1853**, originally as an agricultural event designed to share new farming ideas and technology. Over the years, it grew into one of the state's most important annual traditions while continuing to maintain its connection with agriculture.

Today, the fair gives farmers, ranchers, students, artists, cooks, and other participants a place to showcase their work through exhibitions and competitions.

Visitors can see livestock, crops, flowers, arts and crafts, home cooking, folk art, farm equipment, and other displays alongside modern entertainment and carnival attractions.

That combination of traditional agriculture and big-event entertainment is what makes the North Carolina State Fair special.

North Carolina State Fair 2026 Dates & Location

Here are the essential details for planning your visit.

- **Dates:** October 15-25, 2026
- **Venue:** North Carolina State Fairgrounds
- **Location:** Raleigh, North Carolina
- **Tickets:** Check Tickets

The 2026 fair runs for **11 days**, beginning on Thursday, October 15, and continuing through Sunday, October 25.

The fairgrounds are located in West Raleigh near major attractions such as North Carolina State University, Carter-Finley Stadium, and the Lenovo Center. This

makes the fair easy to combine with a longer trip to Raleigh and the wider Research Triangle region.

What to Expect at the North Carolina State Fair 2026

The fairgrounds offer a wide variety of attractions, and different visitors may enjoy completely different parts of the experience.

Agriculture and Livestock

Agriculture is at the heart of the North Carolina State Fair.

Visitors can see thousands of animals and explore livestock competitions involving cattle, sheep, goats, swine, horses, and other farm animals. Youth programs also give young participants opportunities to showcase their agricultural knowledge and projects.

The fair's livestock tradition goes back to its earliest years, and agricultural exhibits remain one of the best ways for visitors to learn more about North Carolina's farming communities.

For families with children, the animal areas are often among the most memorable parts of the fair.

Got to Be NC Agriculture Pavilion

The **Got to Be NC Agriculture Pavilion** highlights North Carolina agriculture and locally produced goods.

Visitors can learn more about the farms, food, and businesses that help shape the state's agricultural economy.

This area is a good reminder that the fair is not simply about entertainment. It also connects visitors with the people and industries behind the food and products they enjoy every day.

Field of Dreams

The **Field of Dreams** is one of the fair's most recognizable agricultural areas.

Visitors can see impressive displays of crops and giant vegetables while learning more about farming and agricultural production.

The area is especially popular with families and provides excellent photo opportunities during a day at the fair.

Farm Family of the Day

The fair also recognizes North Carolina farm families through its **Farm Family of the Day** program.

The program gives visitors an opportunity to learn more about the people working in agriculture across the state and helps put a human face on North Carolina's farming industry.

It is one of the ways the fair continues to connect modern visitors with the agricultural roots of the event.

Carnival Midway

The carnival midway brings the classic state fair experience to Raleigh.

Visitors can enjoy a wide variety of rides and games, including options for younger children and more thrilling attractions for teens and adults.

The midway becomes especially lively in the evening when the lights come on and the fairgrounds take on a classic carnival atmosphere.

The fair also features signature attractions that offer views and experiences beyond the standard midway, including the **State Fair Flyer, SkyGazer, and the America 250 Wheel**.

If rides are one of your main priorities, consider setting aside several hours to explore the midway rather than trying to fit it in at the end of your visit.

Free Grounds Entertainment

One of the biggest advantages of visiting the North Carolina State Fair is the amount of entertainment available throughout the grounds.

The fair offers free entertainment, with performances and activities taking place in different areas throughout the day.

Entertainment can include live music, specialty performances, demonstrations, and family-friendly acts.

Because the schedule changes throughout the fair, check the official daily program before visiting to see what is happening on your chosen date.

Homegrown Music Fest

North Carolina's music scene is also part of the fair experience.

The **Homegrown Music Fest** showcases musical performances and gives visitors another reason to spend time exploring different areas of the grounds.

It is a good opportunity to hear live music while taking a break from walking, rides, and food.

Grandstand Shows and Special Events

For visitors looking for high-energy entertainment, the fair also features special Grandstand events.

The 2026 program includes ticketed special events such as:

- Tractor Pull competitions
- Motorsports Mayhem
- Rodeo events
- Horse Pull competitions
- Mini Horse Pull events

These events offer a different experience from the free entertainment around the fairgrounds.

If a specific Grandstand event is one of your priorities, check the official schedule before planning your visit because dates and event times can vary.

Heritage Circle and Village of Yesteryear

The North Carolina State Fair has a strong connection to the state's history.

Heritage Circle and the **Village of Yesteryear** give visitors an opportunity to step away from the rides and experience traditional crafts, demonstrations, and aspects of North Carolina's past.

Depending on the daily schedule, visitors may see craftspeople demonstrating skills such as woodworking, weaving, blacksmithing, quilting, and other traditional practices.

This is one of the quieter and most distinctive parts of the fair and is worth visiting if you want to experience more than the midway.

Flower and Garden Show

The **Flower and Garden Show** brings another side of North Carolina agriculture and horticulture to the fairgrounds.

Visitors can enjoy creative displays and learn more about flowers, plants, gardening, and horticulture.

It is also a good place to take a break from the busiest outdoor areas of the fair.

Competitions and Blue Ribbons

Competitions are a major part of the North Carolina State Fair tradition.

Participants compete in categories connected with agriculture, livestock, cooking, arts, crafts, and other skills.

The 2026 fair introduces several new competition opportunities, including categories related to **Plein Air art, country ham, egg grading, diamond art, and creative cooking challenges**.

The 2026 **Home Chef Challenge** also features daily cooking competitions with creative themes.

Visitors can explore the exhibits and see the work of people from across North Carolina, from professional exhibitors to young participants and hobbyists.

Food at the North Carolina State Fair

Fair food is one of the biggest reasons many visitors attend.

The North Carolina State Fair is known for creative food vendors and classic carnival favorites, with plenty of deep-fried creations alongside regional specialties.

You can expect to find traditional favorites such as:

- Funnel cakes
- Corn dogs
- Barbecue
- Turkey legs
- Fried foods
- Kettle corn
- Candy apples
- Ice cream
- Lemonade
- Desserts and sweet treats

North Carolina flavors also play an important role, so keep an eye out for local barbecue, Southern favorites, country ham, and dishes inspired by the state's agricultural products.

One of the best strategies is to walk around before deciding what to eat. With so many food vendors, you may find something better than the first stand you see.

North Carolina Public House and Local Flavors

The fair also highlights local North Carolina products and flavors through areas such as the **North Carolina Public House** and other food and beverage experiences.

For travelers interested in discovering products made in the state, these areas can provide a more local alternative to traditional carnival food.

Nightly Fireworks

Evening visits offer a completely different atmosphere from daytime trips.

As the lights come on across the midway and entertainment areas, the fair becomes busier and more energetic. Fireworks are also part of the traditional evening experience, giving visitors a memorable way to end a day at the fair.

If you are planning to stay late, remember that October evenings can become cooler, so bringing a light jacket is a good idea.

Best Time to Visit the North Carolina State Fair

The best time to visit depends on the experience you want.

For Smaller Crowds

Weekday mornings are generally a good choice for visitors who want a more relaxed experience.

You will have more time to explore agricultural exhibits, Heritage Circle, the Flower and Garden Show, and other attractions before the evening crowds arrive.

For Families

Families with younger children may prefer mornings and early afternoons.

This gives you plenty of time to see the animals, enjoy family attractions, take breaks, and explore the midway before the fairgrounds become busier.

For Food Lovers

If food is one of your main priorities, visit with plenty of time to walk around the grounds.

Arriving hungry and sharing different items with friends or family can be a good way to try more than one specialty.

For the Full Fair Atmosphere

Friday and Saturday evenings are ideal if you want the fair at its most energetic.

The rides are illuminated, entertainment is underway, food areas are busy, and the overall atmosphere feels like a classic American carnival.

Expect larger crowds during the busiest weekend periods.

For Agriculture and Competitions

Check the official daily schedule before choosing your date.

Different livestock competitions, demonstrations, special programs, and contests take place on different days.

If agriculture is one of your main interests, planning around the specific event you want to see can make your visit more rewarding.

North Carolina State Fair 2026 Hours

The fair operates during the day and into the evening, but hours can vary by date and by attraction.

The opening day begins later than most other fair days, while Fridays and Saturdays generally offer the latest evening hours.

Exhibit halls, rides, food vendors, and special attractions may also operate on different schedules.

For the most accurate information, check the official daily schedule and hours before leaving for the fairgrounds.

Travel Tips for Attending the North Carolina State Fair

A little planning can make your visit much easier.

- **Arrive early:** The fairgrounds can become busy, especially on weekends.
- **Wear comfortable shoes:** You will do a lot of walking.
- **Check the daily schedule:** Events, entertainment, and competitions vary throughout the 11 days.
- **Dress for changing weather:** October can bring warm afternoons and cool evenings.
- **Bring a light jacket:** It can feel much cooler after sunset.
- **Plan your food stops:** There are many vendors, so give yourself time to explore.
- **Explore beyond the midway:** The agricultural and heritage exhibits are some of the most distinctive attractions.
- **Check special event dates:** Grandstand events may affect crowds and parking.
- **Use the official map:** The fairgrounds are large, and a map can save time.
- **Check accessibility information in advance:** The fair offers services and facilities for visitors with accessibility needs.
- **Allow extra travel time:** Traffic around the fairgrounds can be heavy during busy periods.

Getting to the North Carolina State Fair

The North Carolina State Fairgrounds are located in **West Raleigh**, near Interstate 40 and several major Raleigh attractions.

The location makes the fair easy to reach by car from Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, Cary, and other communities across the Research Triangle.

Visitors traveling from farther away can fly into **Raleigh-Durham International Airport**, which is a convenient gateway to the area.

Because the fair is one of North Carolina's largest annual events, traffic around the fairgrounds can become heavy. Allow extra time, particularly on weekends and during major events.

Parking and Transportation

Parking and transportation arrangements can change from year to year, especially when other major events are happening near the fairgrounds.

The fair has traditionally provided free parking options on or near State Fair property, with additional transportation and park-and-ride options available during the event.

Ride-share and drop-off services can also be useful for visitors who want to avoid navigating busy parking areas.

For the smoothest arrival, check the official parking and transportation information shortly before your visit and follow directions from traffic officers around the fairgrounds.

Things to Do Near the North Carolina State Fair

The Raleigh location makes it easy to turn a visit to the fair into a longer city break.

Explore Downtown Raleigh

Downtown Raleigh offers museums, restaurants, parks, shops, and historic sites.

Visitors can explore the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, the North Carolina Museum of History, the State Capitol area, and the city's growing food scene.

Visit the North Carolina Museum of Art

The **North Carolina Museum of Art** is located near the fairgrounds and is a great choice for travelers looking for a quieter cultural experience.

The museum also has outdoor trails and park space, making it a good addition to a longer Raleigh itinerary.

Explore North Carolina State University

The fairgrounds are located close to **North Carolina State University**.

Visitors can explore the university area, nearby restaurants, and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Visit Pullen Park

Families can visit **Pullen Park**, one of the area's best-known family attractions.

The park offers playgrounds, open space, a historic carousel, and other activities for children.

Explore the Research Triangle

If you have extra time, use Raleigh as a base for exploring Durham, Chapel Hill, Cary, and other destinations in the Research Triangle.

The region offers museums, restaurants, gardens, universities, and a wide range of cultural attractions.

Where to Stay for the North Carolina State Fair

Raleigh offers plenty of hotel options for fair visitors.

For convenient access to the fairgrounds, consider staying in **West Raleigh, near the airport, or close to downtown Raleigh**.

West Raleigh is one of the most convenient options for visitors who want to minimize travel time to the fairgrounds.

Downtown Raleigh is a good choice for travelers who want to combine the fair with restaurants, museums, nightlife, and other city attractions.

Because the fair is a major October event, booking accommodation early is a smart idea, particularly if you plan to visit on a weekend.

Is the North Carolina State Fair Worth Visiting?

The **North Carolina State Fair 2026** is worth visiting for travelers who want a large state fair with a strong connection to local culture and agriculture.

You can experience the traditional side of the fair through livestock, farming exhibits, competitions, heritage demonstrations, and North Carolina-made products.

At the same time, the fair offers the modern attractions many visitors expect, including rides, games, live entertainment, creative food, special events, and evening fireworks.

The combination gives the event broad appeal.

Families can enjoy the animals and rides. Food lovers can explore creative dishes and local flavors. Travelers interested in North Carolina can learn more about the state's agricultural and cultural heritage.

For anyone visiting Raleigh in October, the North Carolina State Fair is one of the area's biggest annual experiences.

Conclusion

The **North Carolina State Fair 2026** takes place from **October 15 through October 25, 2026**, at the North Carolina State Fairgrounds in Raleigh.

From carnival rides and deep-fried food to livestock competitions, traditional crafts, live entertainment, Grandstand events, agriculture exhibits, and family activities, the fair offers a complete fall experience in North Carolina.

Before traveling, check the official North Carolina State Fair website for the latest **tickets, daily schedules, attractions, parking information, special events, and visitor updates.**

Frequently Asked Questions

When is the North Carolina State Fair 2026?

The **North Carolina State Fair 2026** takes place from **October 15 through October 25, 2026**, in Raleigh.

Where is the North Carolina State Fair held?

The fair is held at the **North Carolina State Fairgrounds in Raleigh, North Carolina**.

How long does the North Carolina State Fair last?

The 2026 fair runs for **11 days**, giving visitors plenty of opportunities to experience rides, food, entertainment, competitions, and agricultural exhibits.

What is the North Carolina State Fair known for?

The fair is known for agriculture, livestock, carnival rides, creative fair food, live entertainment, competitions, traditional crafts, family activities, and evening fireworks.

Is the North Carolina State Fair family-friendly?

Yes. Families can enjoy farm animals, agricultural exhibits, rides, games, family entertainment, food vendors, educational activities, and attractions for visitors of different ages.

What can I do near the North Carolina State Fair?

Visitors can explore downtown Raleigh, the North Carolina Museum of Art, Pullen Park, North Carolina State University, and other attractions across the Research Triangle.