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The Festival Outlasted the Clam. After 80 Years, Both Are Back.

The 80th Annual Pismo Beach Clam Festival returns October 17–18, 2026, marking eight decades of a tradition that reinvented itself around whatever the town needed most

[October 2, 2026 – Pismo Beach, CA] — In 1946, Pismo Beach threw its first Clam Festival to celebrate what put the town on the map and fed its early economy. The festival has run nearly every year since. The clam it was named for has not been so lucky, disappearing from local beaches for almost three decades. This October, the 80th Annual Pismo Beach Clam Festival celebrates the namesake that came back a few years ago.

Set for October 17–18, 2026, in the pier plaza and on the pier, the anniversary weekend will include the Clam Festival Parade, the Clam Chowder Cook-Off, live music, a free Kids Zone, and dozens of local food and craft vendors. Admission is free.

The Chowder

The Clam Chowder Cook-Off remains the reason many people circle back to this weekend every year. Local restaurants go head-to-head for the title of *Best Local Clam Chowder*, guests sample the entries, and everyone weighs in on the People's Choice Award. Tickets typically sell out early.

Weekend Highlights

Clam Festival Parade — Saturday, October 17 at 10:00 a.m. down Price Street, with decorated floats, community organizations, performers, local businesses, and schools. Bring a chair, find a spot, and watch the community come together.

Live Music & Entertainment — Local musicians and performances in the pier plaza all weekend. Full lineup to be announced closer to the event.

Free Kids Zone — Bounce houses, inflatables, interactive games, and open play areas, free and built for all-day family visits.

Food Trucks & Local Vendors — Central Coast makers, artisan booths, handmade goods, and festival treats throughout the event footprint.

Pismo Beach Stewardship and Educational Outreach Program – Hands-on exhibits, coloring activities about conservation, and a reburying class on Sunday at 11 AM to learn how to protect the clams.

A Festival That Changed With the Town

The Clam Festival began in 1949 as a celebration of the industry at the height of the recreational clamming era. With an estimated 5,000 diggers working the sand each day during open season, they could pull more than two million clams in a single 75-day stretch. Amid the frenzy, the festival grew.

Eventually, the clams thinned out, and California closed the commercial fishery in 1947 after decades of overharvesting. Legal-sized clams grew scarce, and by 1993, the last legal-sized Pismo clam was recorded at the beach. The festival kept going anyway, shifting from a harvest celebration toward something closer to a community reunion, holding the tradition open even without its namesake in the sand.

In 2020, researchers at Cal Poly's Ruttenberg Lab documented something no one expected: thousands of juvenile Pismo clams reappearing along the shoreline, one of the most significant marine recoveries on the California coast in a generation. The recovery continues today. So the festival has changed again, leaning into stewardship and education, teaching a new generation why the clam matters and how to protect it. From industry to reunion, to conservation, the weekend has always reshaped itself around whatever Pismo Beach needed it to be.

Read more on the recovery: The Pismo Beach Clam Comeback.

Make a Weekend of It

"For many families, the Clam Festival is a tradition passed down through three or four generations, making this 80th milestone feel like a homecoming for them all," said Silas Clarke, Assistant City Manager for the City of Pismo Beach. "We hope everyone catches the parade on Saturday, joins us on the pier, and celebrates the exciting news that our local clam population is thriving once again."

Many visitors arrive Friday and stay through Sunday. Beyond the festival, Pismo Beach offers surfing, coastal hiking at the Pismo Preserve, the Monarch Butterfly Grove, wine tasting, and the nearby dunes, all within minutes of downtown. Festival weekend sees high demand, so early lodging reservations are encouraged. Participating hotel packages running October 16–19 will be listed as they are announced.

For event details and tickets, visit https://experiencepismobeach.com/pismo-beach-sand-art-festival/.

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About the City of Pismo Beach

Located on California's iconic Highway 1, Pismo Beach offers a balance of adventure and relaxation. Visitors can surf, kayak, clam, hike coastal bluffs, explore nearby wine country, and catch the sunset from the pier. With its laid-back vibe, walkable downtown, and natural beauty, Pismo Beach delivers the quintessential California coastal experience. Follow along on Instagram and Facebook: @PismoBeachCA and facebook.com/PismoBeachCa.

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