



Denton's Day of the Dead Festival

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Background

- 2011 was our first festival year
- A 501(c)(3) non-profit, we currently have a committee of 13 board members, including President, Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer, and Executive Director.
- Denton's Day of the Dead Festival is a vibrant celebration of community, culture, and creativity.
- This free, family-friendly event in Denton, Texas, honors the spirit of autumn in the American Southwest : celebrating the harvest, Halloween, and Día de los Muertos. Rooted in inclusivity and artistic expression, the festival brings people together through music, art, and tradition. Our mission is to create a joyful and educational experience that highlights Denton's rich cultural fabric and thriving arts community.



Festival

- **Information about festival**

- Located in Downtown Denton's Cultural District on Hickory, Oak, Austin and Industrial, as well as 400 E. Hickory
- The 2026 festival is Friday October 23, Saturday Oct 24, and Sunday October 25.

- **Attendance** : Approx. **2023** (20,000) **2024** (25,000) **2025** (30,000+)

- **Event Highlights** : Festival-goers can enjoy a full weekend of food and drink, arts and crafts, live music, dance, cultural programming, and family-friendly activities throughout Downtown Denton. Signature festival events include the Pine Box Derby, Coffin Races, Twilight Lantern Parade, Community Ofrenda, Flight of Souls Blessing, and the original Cirque du Horror Musical. The festival also features two dedicated family and children's areas, including the Street of Screams and Pumpkin Patch Theatre, along with a Trunk-or-Treat area in the Greater Denton Arts Council parking lot. Additional programming includes a community costume contest, storytelling, performances by Denton ISD students, and a student art exhibition at the Patterson-Appleton Arts Center, running from October through December.

Since 2015, the festival has donated more than \$40,000 to local nonprofit organizations, including Serve Denton, Cumberland Youth and Family Services, and G.O.A.L. Last year alone, Denton's Day of the Dead Festival donated \$20,000 to these three organizations, continuing our commitment to using the success of the festival to directly benefit the broader Denton community.

The festival also plays a significant role in Denton's economic growth. As one of the city's largest annual cultural events, Denton's Day of the Dead Festival brings tens of thousands of attendees into downtown Denton each year, increasing foot traffic for restaurants, retailers, bars, galleries, hotels, vendors, artists, and service-based businesses. During our festival weekend, audience data showed approximately 24,400 festival visits, with an estimated audience of 23,300 and an average dwell time of 86 minutes. This level of concentrated activity provides a major boost to the downtown economy and creates meaningful exposure for local businesses.



Tourism

- The festival targets geographic markets in Denton, DFW, Texas, and across the nation.
- Our festival attracts overnight visitors by offering a unique, multi-day cultural and entertainment experience that is specific to this community. The combination of Día de los Muertos traditions, Halloween-themed events, live performances, children’s activities, arts programming, and signature events like the Coffin Races and Cirque du Horror creates a strong regional draw.
- Recent visitor-origin analytics show that while Denton County remains the largest audience segment, more than 41% of tracked visits came from outside Denton County. The report identified visitors from major nearby tourism markets such as Tarrant County, Dallas County, Collin County, Harris County, Cooke County, Wise County, Travis County, and Bexar County, along with visitors from other states, including California, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Michigan, Colorado, Florida, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, Arkansas, New York, Utah, Iowa, and others. This demonstrates that the festival reaches well beyond the immediate local audience and attracts people who are choosing Denton as a destination for this specific event.
- Because the festival includes both free public programming and ticketed performances, it appeals to a wide range of visitors, including families, arts audiences, music fans, cultural tourists, students, alumni, and regional day-trippers. Many of these visitors are introduced to downtown Denton through festival marketing, media coverage, social media, regional event listings, and the broader 31 Days of Halloween campaign.
- Our marketing strategy includes year-round promotion through the festival website, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, email communication, digital advertising, print materials, outdoor signage, sponsor and partner outreach, video content, media interviews, and community engagement. The festival website serves as the central hub for visitor information, including schedules, ticketing, sponsorship visibility, maps, parking information, performer details, and downtown event updates. Our social media platforms maintain an active presence throughout the year, building excitement for the festival while consistently highlighting Denton as a destination for arts, culture, live music, family activities, and unique seasonal experiences.
- The festival also receives annual radio, television, podcast, and press coverage, further extending the reach of our promotional efforts beyond Denton County.
- Denton’s Day of the Dead Festival also benefits from a strong working relationship with the City of Denton, Denton Main Street, and the Denton Visitor’s Bureau. These partnerships help connect the festival to broader citywide tourism efforts, downtown business promotion, visitor outreach, and community programming. Through ongoing collaboration with these organizations, the festival is able to better align its marketing, visitor information, downtown activation, and public messaging with Denton’s larger goals for tourism, economic development, cultural engagement, and destination branding.
- The festival also promotes the city through partnerships with local businesses, schools, nonprofits, artists, sponsors, and civic organizations. These relationships expand our promotional network and encourage cross-promotion among downtown merchants, restaurants, hotels, arts organizations, and community partners. By showcasing Denton’s local talent, historic downtown, cultural district, small business community, and creative spirit, the festival gives visitors a strong reason to explore the city before, during, and after the event.
- Denton’s Day of the Dead Festival has also played a central role in the City of Denton’s “31 Days of Halloween” initiative, helping unify dozens of October events under one shared promotional effort. As a cornerstone event of this citywide campaign, Denton’s Day of the Dead Festival helps amplify Denton’s brand throughout the fall season (Big Top Tent programming all October) and encourages repeat visitation during the entire month of October. This broader initiative strengthens Denton’s reputation as a destination for arts, culture, festivals, live entertainment, and family-friendly seasonal programming.



Future Plans

- Denton's Day of the Dead Festival plans to continue growing as one of Denton's signature cultural tourism events while remaining deeply rooted in community, accessibility, local partnerships, and public benefit. Our long-term vision is to thoughtfully expand programming, strengthen partnerships with local businesses, schools, cultural organizations, and nonprofits, and continue positioning Denton as a premier fall tourism destination.
- A major long-term goal is to further develop and enhance the Greater Denton Arts Council parking lot area as a more intentional family, arts, and community programming zone. This area already plays an important role in the festival footprint, and we would like to expand its use with improved layout, signage, lighting, children's activities, visual art elements, student programming, Trunk-or-Treat participation, and stronger connections to the Patterson-Appleton Arts Center. By creating a more developed and welcoming experience in this area, the festival can better support families, young artists, local schools, and arts-centered programming.
- We also plan to increase participation in the Denton ISD student art exhibit and related student performances. Our goal is to grow the exhibit into a larger, more visible district-wide arts initiative that showcases more campuses, more students, and more families. We also hope to further develop the month-long exhibition at the Patterson-Appleton Arts Center as a meaningful celebration of both Día de los Muertos and Halloween traditions, offering educational and artistic programming that reflects Denton's cultural diversity and creative spirit.
- Another major priority is the continued enhancement of the Big Top Tent. Over the next several years, we plan to improve the tent experience through stronger production quality, expanded October programming, improved audience amenities, additional performances, better technical infrastructure, and broader community use. The Big Top Tent has the potential to serve not only as the home of Cirque du Horror, but also as a cornerstone venue for Denton's 31 Days of Halloween initiative, hosting concerts, workshops, performances, family activities, cultural programming, and tourism-driven events throughout the month of October.
- In addition to strengthening local participation, the festival's long-term plan includes expanding our entertainment offerings by bringing in one or two national or international touring artists to headline our stages. These larger headlining acts would significantly increase the festival's regional draw, attract new visitors to Denton, support hotel activity, and help position the festival as a major destination event while still preserving the local music, cultural performance, and community traditions that define Denton's Day of the Dead Festival.
- We will also continue highlighting the best of Denton by deepening partnerships with local businesses, restaurants, breweries, arts organizations, and downtown merchants. These partnerships help integrate the festival into Denton's identity, drive foot traffic to local establishments, and expand the economic impact of the event beyond the festival footprint itself.
- Another long-term goal is to elevate the Coffin Races as one of Denton's most unique and recognizable signature events. We plan to continue pursuing larger media opportunities, including the possibility of coverage through ESPN's "The Ocho," which highlights unusual and entertaining sporting events. National coverage of the Coffin Races would bring tremendous visibility to Denton and further distinguish the festival as a one-of-a-kind tourism event.
- Finally, as the festival grows, we want to increase our ability to give back. Denton's Day of the Dead Festival has a strong history of supporting local nonprofit partners, and our long-term goal is to increase annual charitable donations to organizations such as Serve Denton, Cumberland Youth and Family Services, and G.O.A.L. Continued growth in sponsorships, attendance, programming, and tourism impact will allow us to expand not only the festival itself, but also the direct benefit we provide to the Denton community.
- Overall, our three- to five-year plan is to grow strategically and sustainably: enhancing the festival footprint, expanding youth arts participation, strengthening the Big Top Tent as a month-long venue, attracting larger touring talent, increasing media visibility, supporting local businesses, increasing charitable giving, and reinforcing Denton's identity as a must-visit destination every October.



Questions?

