

Burning Man Fundamentals

This guide covers the basics... the “why” and “how” of surviving your first burn. Some of this may not be relevant if you are camping with Rootpile, but still good info to have.

Prepping for Burning Man may seem like a lot of work, but surviving in a harsh environment with creative, caring, open-minded, beautiful, and all-around amazing people can be a life-changing experience, and it wouldn't be the same if it didn't require so much effort.

Here are links to essential resources that can help you plan:

Burn.life: Great website run by a passionate Burner who is also a really interesting, intelligent guy. You'll find detailed information about pretty much everything you need to know under the “Preparing and Attending” tab, and his [packing list](#) is amazingly comprehensive.

Burning Man Survival Checklist: This is from the official Burning Man website.

ePlaya: Great forum where you can get your questions answered. Beware the snark, and SEARCH before you ask. Veteran Burners are happy to answer your questions, if it hasn't already been asked thousands of times and you didn't search first. Radical Self Reliance...

Burner Hacks Facebook Group: A great resource for random questions about products, survival tips, etc.

r/BurningMan: A Reddit subreddit with great information. Again, search or check the sidebar before you post a question.

The 10 Principles of Burning Man

Burning Man co-founder Larry Harvey wrote the Ten Principles in 2004 as guidelines for the newly-formed Regional Network. They were crafted not as a dictate of how people should be and act, but as a reflection of the community's ethos and culture as it had organically developed since the event's inception.

Radical Inclusion

Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.

Gifting

Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value.

Decommodification

In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.

Radical Self-reliance

Burning Man encourages the individual to discover, exercise and rely on his or her inner resources.

Radical Self-expression

Radical self-expression arises from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.

Communal Effort

Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction.

Civic Responsibility

We value civil society. Community members who organize events should assume responsibility for public welfare and endeavor to communicate civic responsibilities to participants. They must also assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with local, state and federal laws.

Leaving No Trace

Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather. We clean up after ourselves and endeavor, whenever possible, to leave such places in a better state than when we found them.

Participation

Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play. We make the world real through actions that open the heart.

Immediacy

Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most important touchstone of value in our culture. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, the reality of those around us, participation in society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers. No idea can substitute for this experience.

The 11th principle: **CONSENT**. It is vital that you seek consent before photographing people, touching, hugging, giving intoxicants, etc. Burners are huggers, but the community takes the issue of consent very seriously.

Food & Water

Water: Bring at least 1.5 gallons of water per person, per day. You **MUST** hydrate properly throughout the day. Every year people end up at ESD/Rampart (on-playa medical), or get helicoptered out to Reno due to dehydration, so never leave your camp without water. Of course, if you camp in an established camp, they often have their own water brought in. If you join a camp, they'll let you know whether you need to bring your own water. Electrolytes are also key. Either supplement pills or powder to add to your water occasionally. A hydration pack is your friend for those long playa jaunts

People who take the Burner Express Bus (read on to learn more about the Burner Express) can purchase water tickets in advance, and you can fill up your bottles on the playa. If you do this method, [collapsible water bottles](#) would be helpful to reduce pack size.

Hydration Pack: These packs are great because they allow you to constantly hydrate. If you think it tastes funny at first, wash the bladder out a few times before you leave default (the real world, where you live and work). Or try rinsing it out with water and baking soda. A dash of lemon juice can really help, too. They can be pricey, but with care it should last for years. Most have replaceable bladders and mouth tubes.

Food: You can only buy two things at Burning Man... ice and coffee. You can use the ice for your cooler, and melt some for drinking water if you don't want to carry a ton. Pre-frozen, non-perishable pouches, and food in small cans that you can eat out of the container are great. Energy/protein bars, trail mix, dried fruit and that sort of thing are good for snack bags in your hydration pack. Making elaborate meals presents certain challenges due to waste/dishes (see below for "recapturing" water).

Whatever you do, keep in mind that everything you haul in has to be hauled out... and you can't just leave your food scraps on the playa... because it won't decompose (no microbes in the dust to break it down)! A bucket with a tight seal for food scraps or compactor/contractor bags with your waste compressed will work. If you eat canned items, leave them out to dry, crush them, and put in the bag so you have no leaky mess.

Staying Clean

Recapturing Water: The soil at Burning Man is home to a fragile ecosystem. The valley floods during the winter and the mud comes alive with a few species of aquatic life, including fairy shrimp (whose eggs are in the soil). One of the Burning Man Ten Principles is "Leave No Trace," or LNT, so any water we use to wash our bodies, brush out teeth, or clean our dishes has to be

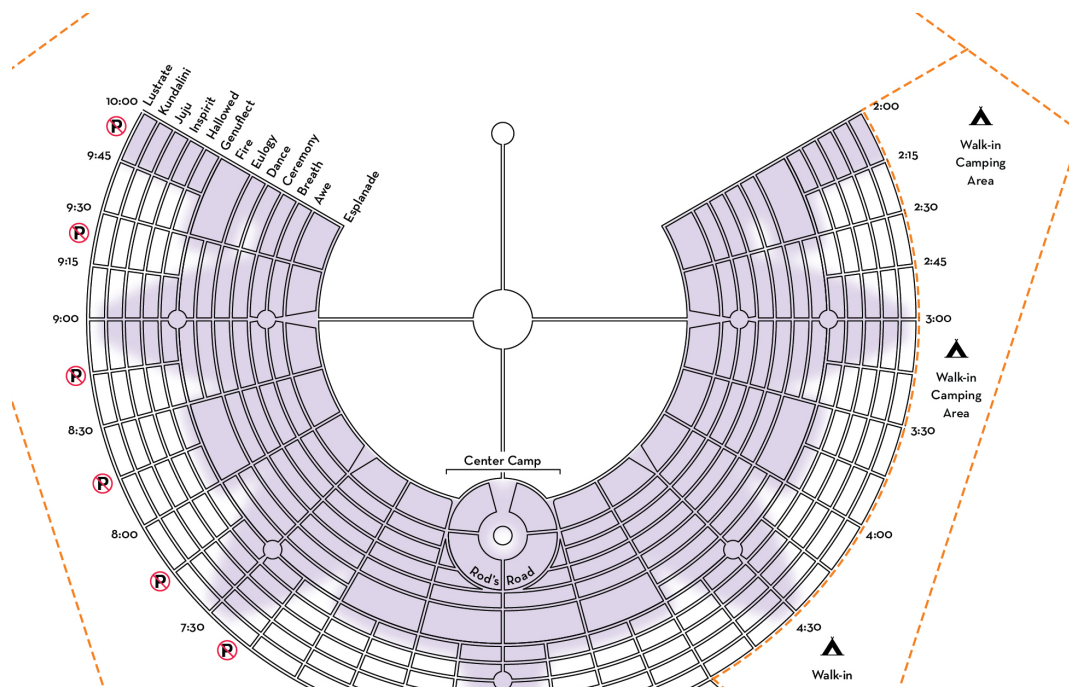
recaptured and either hauled out or evaporated. Some people build complex [evap systems](#) for use on the playa, but try to produce as little grey water as possible. Spit into a bucket when brushing your teeth and let it evaporate. Wash your body with baby wipes. Even if you're fine being grungy, you'll probably want to clean the dust off yourself at least once a day because it gets everywhere, and it's incredibly drying to your skin and hair. A vinegar/water solution in a spray bottle is good to help restore your skin's pH from the super-alkaline playa dust.

You can clean your hair with [no rinse shampoo](#)—which works well for about four days until the dust builds up. There are camps that offer hair washing as gift to the community (Astral Headwash is one—there are others), and foam parties, but they are generally busy and sometimes hard to locate. You can take a large plastic bin and shower using this cheap [Solar Shower](#), capturing the runoff in the bin. Pour whatever runoff is produced in your grey water container and let it evaporate.

Vinegar: Since vinegar is acidic, it neutralizes the highly alkaline dust, which otherwise irritates your skin. If you get a spritzer bottle and mix some vinegar into it (roughly 1 part vinegar, 4 parts water), you can spray it on your hands and skin every so often and it will dissolve the dust. That mixture can also work well to clean utensils, the floor of your tent, etc. Some people hate the smell and use other mildly acidic mixes—up to you!

Layout of Black Rock City

BRC is a carefully planned city, with the Man in the center and Temple behind and further out towards deep playa. Orienting yourself with its layout will help you get around. The “radial streets” come out from the man (like the radius of a circle), and they're named after their position on the dials of a clock (going from 2 o'clock to 10 o'clock). Center camp (which is a hub of activity, with information booths, events, cafes, talks, etc.) is at 6 o'clock and Esplanade (the very first street in the “circle”), and there are plazas with other activities at 3:00 and 9:00. The Playa is everything in the middle. The streets in the circle are letters of the alphabet, and the names change with each year's theme, but it will always start: Esplanade, A, B, C, etc. through L (which is the furthest street out, and where walk-in camping is located, the airport, etc.).



The Man is at the very center of the circle, and you can use him to orient yourself (see that big circle in the middle of the playa with four roads?). The temple is the small circle at the very top, and Deep Playa is everything beyond the temple. The Man looks the same on the front side and the back side, so he looks like he's facing 6 o'clock if you're below that horizontal center lines that run through 3 o'clock to 9 o'clock, and he'll look like he's facing 12 o'clock if you're above that line.

Tent: People like Kodiak Canvas and Springbars because they are built like Fort Knox, and all the mesh closes up to keep the dust out. They are generally taller, so you can stand inside the tent and have more room for storing gear out of the dust. Keep your tent closed 100% of the time, unless you like a dusty bed. They are expensive but will last forever.

Note: You really don't want to store much outside your tent because it'll be covered in dust after the first dust storm. Which there are many. And wind. Make sure anything outside is secured and get longer stakes or lag screws for your tent.

Of course, not every wants to pay \$500+ for a tent, but you'll want to take certain measures to ready your tent for the playa. The most important thing is to cover up any mesh. A rain fly will NOT keep the dust out during a dust storm because the wind blows like crazy and the dust goes everywhere. DO NOT leave your mesh uncovered. And if you have a backpacking tent that is mostly mesh, you might want to purchase a new one, and don't go too cheap! Small tents will get crushed in the powerful wind during a dust storm.

Shading: Shading is awesome - and necessary if you want to sleep past 8 AM. You can read about all your [shading options](#) on burn.life. 70% Aluminet is great because it let's the wind through but reflects heat. You don't want your shade to become a sail or MOOP. Order aluminet early, as most pieces are custom sized to your order and will need to be made.

Stakes: If you have normal tent stakes, consider using lag screws—you can drill them right into the ground with a cordless drill and the right size drill bit, so you can get each screw in the ground in a matter of seconds, rather than pounding them into the thick, hard desert floor (read about lags [here](#)). The other option is rebar (read more about rebar [here](#)). If you use

regular tent stakes, your tent could blow away in the wind (see this [video](#) of a tent getting swept away). Short chain links attached to the screws will give you a place to attach guy lines or ratchet straps.

Note: Rebar is one of the major causes of injury at the playa because people step on it and it punctures their foot. Cut a tennis ball in half and put the half-tennis-ball-dome over each piece of rebar to prevent injury—or just use lag screws, which are superior in every way.

Guy lines: If you use a tent or a shade structure with guy lines, use something like bird tape to reflect the light from head lamp or bike light... that way people be less likely to run into it and injure themselves (and possibly take your tent down with them).

Dealing with Dust

Dust Mask: [RZ N99 Dust Mask](#) (it comes with two reusable F1 filters, and the N99 means that it filters out 99% of the particulate) to keep the dust out of your lungs, some people only use a Buff, and other just use bandanas, but playa dust is not great in large doses. If you want something that breathes even easier check out the F2 and F3 filters on the RZ website—they filter out 97% of the particulate. The other advantage to those filters is that they don't get as hot. According to the website's FAQ, each filter is good for 8 hours of prolonged dust exposure, and you'll know it's filled up if you're having trouble breathing. Be prepared, and since the filters are cheap, bring extra filters. You probably want a minimum of 3 filters, since one heavy dust storm a day is common on the playa (along with plenty of smaller pockets of dust).

Goggles: Get a good pair of goggles that keeps dust out. You'll want clear lenses for night time and shaded lenses for the day time. [Global Vision Goggles](#) goggles seem to be a favorite, and you can get both clear and smoke in a pack. The frames are soft and they wrap around your face, and the foam covers up potential leaks and they fit easily over your dust mask.

IMPORTANT: If you buy the Global Vision goggles, seal up all the ventilation holes (top, bottom, and in the middle) with gaff tape or silicone sealant in advance so no dust will get in your eyes.

Note: Never, EVER leave your camp without your dust mask and goggles. You could get stuck in a whiteout (a dust storm where you can't see more than 10 feet ahead) and and forces you to stay in one place until it passes. You don't want to be unprotected during that.

Clothing and Sun Protection

Wide-brim hat: For sun protection.

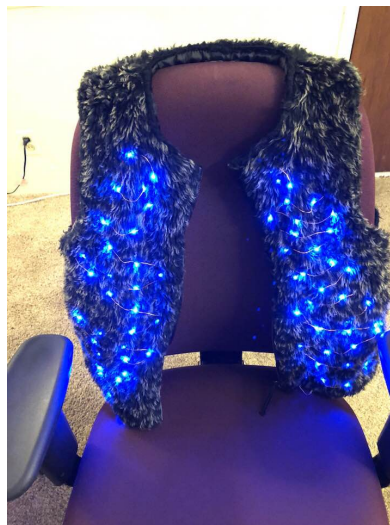
Sunscreen: Don't skimp on this—bring more than you think you'll need. And no, playa dust is not sunscreen!

Crazy Clothes: Wear whatever the hell you want... as long as it doesn't make a mess (e.g., feathers, glitter, some long furs)—don't take anything that will leave MOOP (Matter out of Place) on the playa. Some people just wear normal clothes, but you do you. Go to thrift shops and buy cheap clothes that you can modify and don't care about. Nothing you take to playa is ever quite the same. Faux furs are great in the evening to keep you warm.

Make sure you pack clothes that will do well in intense heat, and bring warm clothes for the evening since it can get very cold at night. Also, wear breathable socks...and cover your feet! If you go barefoot, you might develop a condition called "playa foot," which hurts like hell and takes a long time to heal. You can Google it for examples.

Body lights: Light yourself up at night, otherwise someone might run you over with a bike or an art car. People will yell at you and call you a "darkwad" if you don't use lights.

Electro-Luminescent (EL) Wire (see pic #1 below) and fairy lights (see pics #2 and #3) are good to light yourself and your bike. You can do more fun and creative stuff with EL Wire, but fairy lights are easier to work with for most people.



You'll also want to buy a decent **headlamp** to get around at night and make your way through the dark streets at night.

Bikes: Take a bike and light it up (you can [read more about that](#) here). Black Rock City is huge, and you will see/do less if you are only on foot. Just be sure not to take a nice bike, because the playa will have its way with it... dust will end up in the gears, and the desert tends to destroy things. It is recommended to take an extra bike tube, but there are plenty of bike "repair shop" camps in Black Rock City if you need anything else... but they only operate certain hours, so if you need a repair, it may limit you for a day. Also, be sure to take some [environmentally friendly bike lube](#), otherwise your gears will probably get stuck (and your kickstand might as well). When you get home, [pop it off and clean up the rust](#). One speed cruisers and fat tire bikes do best in the fine playa dust, which drifts and sometimes makes for difficult riding.

Electric bikes are great if you've got the money for one, but then you'll need to accommodate recharging the battery.

Cameras: Buy a cheap, used digital camera or rent one. Don't take your smartphone out or carry it with you because the dust gets everywhere and can tend to destroy electronics. Plus, there is no cell service, and you want to follow the principal of Immediacy, right? Post your pics on IG when you are back in default. Some people get plastic cases for their phones, but most keep them sealed up in their living space.

Where to Camp

Camps: A camp is a group of burners, and you can read about different theme camps [here](#). If you don't have a camp, you can search the directory and see if you can find a camp to join. Some are more elaborate than others, providing shade structures, kitchens, and community. Other camps are no more than a group of solo campers who have reserved a spot on the [Black Rock City Map](#).

[Check out this ePlaya](#) post on how to join a theme camp... it's an old post, but it's got good info. Whatever you do, choose your camp carefully—it could make or break your experience.

Villages: A village is a collection of camps, and they usually take up a portion of a block (or more).

Walk-in Camping: There are walk-in camping spots that are just outside of the street-side fence. Lots of empty space...at the very edge of Black Rock City. It's a long walk to the playa from there if you don't have a bike, and it's kind of a long ride even if you do have one.

Entrance and Exodus

Directions to Burning Man: [Print the directions from the Burning Man website](#)... DO NOT USE GOOGLE MAPS! Most phone's GPSs will fail once you leave Fernley.

Entrance: Sometimes it can take 5+ hours or more to get past the gates. It MAY be possible to avoid the long entrance by staying the night at a cheap hotel in Reno or Fernley on Sunday night and leaving at 4 AM on Monday morning to arrive really early. There still may be a wait—three or four hour waits are common, and in instances even longer.

Note: Check with the Black Rock Traffic Twitter Feed for gate updates when you're entering: @BurningManTraffic. If there's a huge dust storm or a hold up for whatever reason, you could end up in one of those 10+ hour waits but checking the Twitter feed will reduce your odds of getting stuck at entrance if they've closed the gate. As you get closer to Black Rock City, tune into 94.1 FM to find out how long the wait is at the gate. You can also listen to 94.5 FM music and info about what's happening at Burning Man.

Waiting to Leave: Leaving Black Rock City is a long process, and they do something called pulsing, where they let groups of cars leave at the same time, in increments and then pause the line and everyone turns off their engine. This doesn't get you out any faster, but it reduces the amount of pollution caused by thousands of cars idling in traffic. Exodus is usually 8+... sometimes longer... but it depends on when you leave. Departing right after Temple burn (Sunday) or Monday will usually have the heaviest traffic.

Burner Express: If you don't want to drive, you can take the [Burner Express](#)—a shuttle bus that runs to and from San Francisco and Reno to Black Rock City. It only costs around \$100 each way. They also have ones that will do a shopping run enroute.. There are specific times that it leaves so you have to go according to their schedule, but you'll bypass all the traffic. It's a great way to go if you can make it work. They have also started offering a ticket package with the BxB, but YOU must take the bus...you cannot pick up your ticket without getting on the bus.

There's also the Burner Express Air, where you can fly in for around \$900 (or charter a small flight if you're going as a group). Again, you'll have limited space for gear, so you'll have to find another way to get some gear in.

How do you get your gear in and out if you're not driving? Check out the next section on Burner Hacks for Minimalists.

Burner Hacks for Minimalists

Advantages of minimalism include: 1) Ability to take the Burner Express Bus, which allows you to bypass the long entry and exodus lines, 2) Easier cleanup and storage 3) Easier if you're flying in from a distant location. The challenge, of course, is making sure you have everything you need while you're on the playa. Keep in mind that this is not normal camping, and you will have to figure out how to get extra stuff to the playa that are must-haves (e.g., water, goggles, dust masks, night clothes with lighting so you don't get run over, strong tent stakes or lag bolts or rebar to hold down your tent). There are other items that are VERY nice to have, such as a bike, a sun shower, baby wipes to clean yourself, etc. So how do you do it all with minimal gear? Here are a few tips:

Go with a Camp: As mentioned above, one benefit to camping with an established camp is that they often pool communal resources like food and water, so if your camp is bringing in water, you don't have to lug in 1.5+ gallons per day (read on for more about camps). Going minimal is easier with a camp, but it's not 100% necessary, and I know people who camp alone as minimalists.

Get Someone Else to Take Your Stuff: Find someone reliable who will deliver your stuff—just make sure they're arriving before you and they're not leaving before you plan to leave.

Get Your Gear Shipped in a Shipping Container: Google this, and check on e-playa, to find people who have shipping containers delivered from your location. They'll plop the whole

storage container down somewhere in BRC, and you can come get it when you arrive in the Burner Express. You typically pay by the cubic inch, and you'll have to schlepp the gear to wherever you're camping. If you go this route, a bike trailer might make that part easier.

Get Water on the Playa (only available if you take the Burner Express): People who take the Burner Express can purchase water tickets in advance, and you can fill up on the playa. If you do this method, think about [collapsible water bottles](#) and use a bike trailer to get them back to camp.

Gifts

Burning Man is a decommodified environment —no money is exchanged except for ice and (weirdly enough) coffee. It's also a gifting culture.

Gifting is not expected. Lots of people don't bring gifts, and that's fine. People don't "expect" things. Just being present and participating is enough.

Events in BRC: There are countless workshops, parties, lectures, performances, etc., throughout the week. You'll get a book at the gate (the What Where When) that shows you everything to do there, but you can also access events through an app called [Time to Burn](#). Download the latest version (make sure it's updated for the current year since the previous year's info won't do you any good—it's usually available to the developers in August). Make sure you do it before you head out to Burning Man because you won't be able to download it when you get there (no data/WiFi).

You can access [Burning Man Events](#) from the Burning Man Website sometime in early August as well (just make sure you wait until *after* they've published the full list of events). You can make a list of things you'd like to do/see, but be prepared to make NONE of them. Part of Burning Man is spontaneity, and who needs a watch? You'll find yourself heading to an event, make new friends along the way, and head off to a new adventure.

Cleaning Your Gear: In order to clean up the dust, you want to clean your gear pretty quickly (within a week or so). A cheap bug sprayer, mixed water and vinegar, and spray down every item before scrubbing it. You hear horror stories about things never getting clean, but vinegar cures all, assuming you don't procrastinate. Add vinegar to the laundry to dissolve the dust in your clothes. Most people keep all their Burning Man gear separate/in storage, and don't worry so much about the dust. If you aren't bringing it in your house, it will just get dusty next year!

Cleaning Your Car: The dust is very corrosive, so you'll want to fully clean your vehicle. Here is some info on [cleaning your car](#) (and other stuff) from the website. Also, [this rental company](#) has more detailed instructions for cleaning their vehicles (scroll to the bottom of the link).

If you're renting a car, clean the hell out of it, or do it through a company that knows about

Burning Man and attaches a cleaning fee. Don't think they won't "know" and you'll get away with it...they'll know. And they will ding the hell out of you for it.

Getting Tickets

Note: *This is last because it's the least interesting part and it won't apply to some, but tickets are hard to come by, and the website doesn't explain it very well, so this may help.*

You have different rounds of ticket sales prior to the event, and each one represents a different way to get a ticket. YOU MUST PRE-REGISTER FOR ALL TICKET SALES. The dates can be found on the BM website. If you aren't registered, you can't enter the sale.

Vehicle Pass: If you are driving to BRC, you MUST have a vehicle pass. Car, RV, whatever. Requires a vehicle pass. Motorcycles may not but check the website. You CANNOT walk into Burning Man and hitchhiking on the road in is not advisable. It's very narrow, and if you are dead you will miss the burn!

Pre-sale Tickets: These tickets (called Pre-Sale Tickets) go on sale first, and they're the easiest to get because you're competing with fewer people (most people would rather purchase the cheaper tickets. The Pre-Sale tickets subsidize the low-income tickets and help with the art grants, and you can pay \$990 or \$1,200 for them (you get to choose which price you pay... so if you're Elon Musk and you want to pay \$1,200 for it, you're voluntarily donating more to the cause).

Directed Group Sale: If you're a first-time Burner, this likely won't apply to you. Directed Group Sale Tickets are set aside for camps/groups of people who were integral to Burning Man the previous year by offering events, building the city, creating the art you see on the playa, etc., and each camp/group that falls into this category gets a certain number of Directed Group Sale tickets allotted to them. The groups then offer these tickets key members who made their camp work. It may sound unfair, but it's actually an important part of keeping Burning Man and its culture going strong. Burning Man wouldn't be nearly as amazing if those people didn't attend, and they get access to tickets because they give more than they take. If you do a significant amount of volunteer work with a camp or an art project this year, you'll have a decent shot of getting these tickets the following year.

Main Sale Tickets: These cost \$425 each, and lots of other people will be competing for them, so your odds of getting one through the main sale are less than half. Each person who signs up for the main sale can purchase two tickets, and they generally sell out in minutes.

STEP: This is the Secure Ticket Exchange Program (STEP), and it's a system used to purchase tickets at face value from people who want to sell their Main Sale tickets (for \$425). When you go through STEP, you can be 100% sure your ticket isn't counterfeit, and you can't be sure of

that when you buy tickets online through other sources. The odds of getting a ticket through STEP depends on how many people are selling tickets, and where you are on the list.

OMG Sale: This is the final sale of the year, with 2,000 tickets going for \$425.

Third Party: Another way to buy tickets is by going onto various forums and FB groups and finding someone who is selling tickets. If you're going to buy tickets through a third party, maybe do it after STEP closes, but before the OMG Sale. After the OMG Sale, there will be more people wanting to buy tickets, so they'll be harder to get. You can also participate in local Burning Man events find someone who is selling within the community. Just don't buy tickets above face value—even if they aren't fake (and that's a BIG if) - it goes against the principles of Burning Man. It's best to purchase tickets in person so that you can verify they are real and you don't get scammed because ticket get "lost in the mail".

Low-income Tickets: There are also low-income tickets for \$190—they require an application w/proof of income. Just be aware that if you buy a ticket through any other sale, your low-income ticket becomes void. You also have to provide proof of income and fill out a detailed application form that outlines your monthly budget. They're given away on a first come/first serve basis, so get your application in as soon as it opens (typically in February).

IMPORTANT: Be sure to call your credit card company and let them know you're going to make a large purchase on the date of the sale. You don't want them to decline the charge if you make it to the checkout page on the Main Sale.