Photo of the Day



Dr. Meital Peleg Mizrachi answers a question at a panel discussion on sustainable fashion, global inequality and human rights which took place at the Homer Babbidge Library on April 14, 2026. Speakers attested to their personal experiences with issues such as textile pollution, and shared their approach to combatting these trends.
PHOTO BY NORA MARIANO, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS.

Meet Coachella's Headliners: Influencers and brands

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"This was Coachella, 2016. It was the vibe at the time". — Kendall Jenner for Vogue, 2023.

Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, arguably the country's most culturally relevant music festival, is currently celebrating its 25th anniversary. Over the past 25 years, public perception of Coachella has come a long way from its humble origins as a protest against rising concert ticket prices. When you think about Coachella, chances are, it's not simply the performers coming to mind. The values backing Coachella's creation — community, accessibility, and appreciation of music — have been overshadowed by extreme commercialization and superficiality.

Coachella dates back to the 1993 war between Pearl Jam and Ticketmaster. Angered at inaccessible ticket prices and skyrocketing service fees, Pearl Jam refused to play at any Ticketmaster venue. Instead, the band set their sights on the Empire Polo Club in Indo, California. Proving that the Polo Ground could handle large crowds, Pearl Jam's protest planted the seed for Coachella. The first festival, held in 1999, was nearly shut down for insufficient funds. After skipping a couple of years and reformatting, it's built up a rapport as the country's most elite music festival.

The valley of Coachella, which inspired the festival's name, is largely misconstrued as a celebrity hub with a tourism-based economy. However, the region relies heavily on agricultural production. There's an intense class divide between the high population of farmworkers, many of whom are immigrants, and celebrities in their winter homes. The festival's inaccessibility is only worsening this divide. Guests are mostly celebrities and influencers, many of whom are invited in collaboration with brands. For the average person, attending Coachella would either be a poor financial decision or a cause of immense stress. Three-day passes for this year's festival cost anywhere between $549 and $1,399, and that's not counting additional costs of shuttle passes, onsite camping and service fees. When an event is entirely inaccessible to the majority who inhabit its namesake valley, there's a clear problem.

Consumerism has slowly saturated the fabric of Coachella. With every passing year, there's an increasing focus on which brands are sending influencers, and which brands have pop-up stands inside. Between performances, guests may be entertained by booths providing free merchandise and services. Social media isn't flooded with videos of the performers; it's all who's wearing what and which brands sent them there or gave out merchandise. For those not in attendance, performers are eclipsed. We're instead placated with superficial objects to consume in a shadow of experiencing Coachella. We may not be able to see Sabrina Carpenter or Ethel Cain, but we can march ourselves down to the store and buy the eyeshadow they're wearing or the vodka they're drinking.



A group of friends taking photos at Coachella. Coachella was originally created in protest of Ticketmaster and its venues.
PHOTO COURTESY OF COACHELLA ON FACEBOOK

I can still recall my first impression of Coachella. Circa 2016, I watched a group of my favorite YouTubers posting outfit inspiration, all glitter temporary tattoos and flower crowns and loose tank tops over lace bralettes. As a middle-schooler in suburban New York, I didn't know what Coachella was. I assumed it was like a party, or a big fashion show. My awareness was limited to the influential people in attendance and the makeup brands that paid for their stays.

I will unabashedly admit that perusing Coachella looks remains a guilty pleasure of mine. Primarily drawing inspiration from 2010s boho fashion, the Coachella aesthetic features loose layers, scarves and a lot of lace. When dressing for the festival, influencers know that they'll be seen. Even in the past ten years, expectations for Coachella's guests have become incredibly unrealistic. Calling back to Kendall Jenner, no one at Coachella in 2016 batted an eye at people showing up in outfits from mall brands and handmade flower crowns. It was merely the vibe at the time. Now, influencers pay thousands for designer clothes and stylists to dress them.

There's a sort of capital in self-presentation at such spotlit festivals. Last year, influencer Katie Fang was ridiculed to no end for her Coachella outfit. I can't remember who headlined, but I can remember how, in the following weeks, it was impossible to scroll any social media site without coming across someone mocking Fang's stylist. The transition of Coachella's emphasis on what the guests are wearing over the performers themselves fully overshadows both the focus on music and the festival's original spirit.

Coachella culture is in serious need of reform. In an ideal world, the festival would lower ticket prices and limit brands' abilities to advertise. Unlikely as this may be, I have hope that they can return to their roots. Music is an essential part of the human experience; it shouldn't be limited to those who can pay their way in.