

(9.3.2019) - <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/music/2019/09/03/dierks-bentley-seven-peaks-music-festival-luke-bryan-maren-morris-jon-pardi/2199596001/>

AT COUNTRY MUSIC'S NEWEST FESTIVAL, HOST DIERKS BENTLEY LETS FANS CURATE THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE



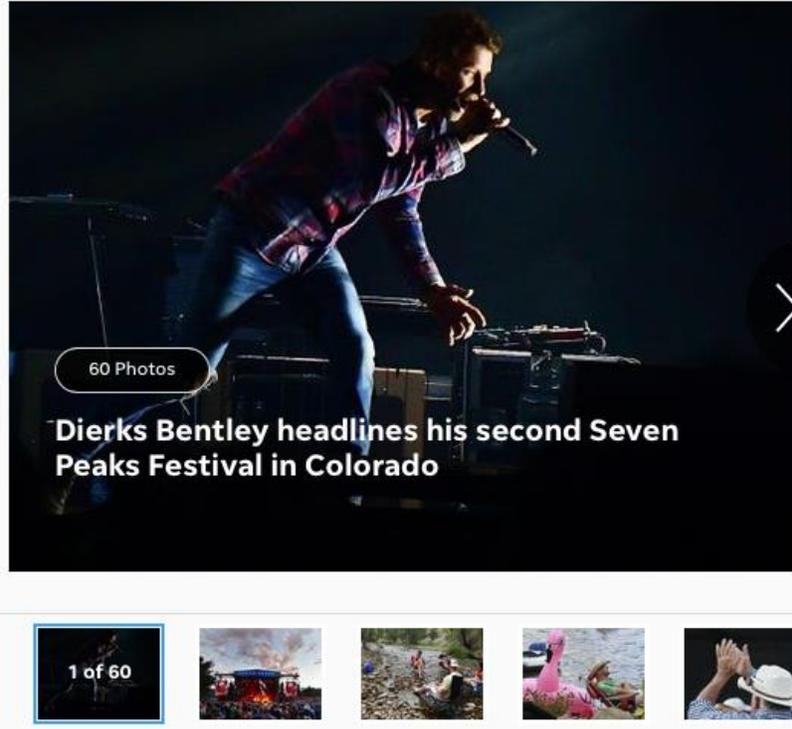
BUENA VISTA, Colo. — It is 4:20 p.m. on a Saturday, and Dierks Bentley isn't slotted to headline his three-day Seven Peaks Music Festival until the next night. The country singer is on stage anyway. He will spend the weekend trying to be anywhere his fans are, and this toasty afternoon in the shadow of Mount Princeton is no different.

"Happy 4:20, if you're into that kind of thing," he tells the crowd. "Make this whatever you want it to be. We're just following your lead."

Bentley hosted his second Seven Peaks camping and music festival in the remote mountain town over Labor Day weekend. Buena Vista is in an area of routes and passes, more than an hour from the nearest interstate. There's no fast food, and Walmart is about 30 minutes away. But country fans — and country headliners — showed up in droves to relish music and outdoor adventure in the

The eclectic lineup was uniquely Bentley — a reflection of his love for roots, bluegrass and contemporary country. The roster allowed for celebration of ['90s icons](#), discovery of new acts and singalong sessions with today's most noted contemporary stars.

In addition to Bentley, fans also saw Luke Bryan, Maren Morris, Jon Pardi, Travis Tritt, Tracy Lawrence, Diamond Rio, Mitchell Tenpenny, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Rita Wilson, Rapidgrass, HARDY, Caylee Hammack, Steep Canyon Rangers, [Tenille Townes](#) and more.



Seven Peaks is organized so that fans who park their campers and pitch their tents over its sprawling 220-acre footprint also have access to a range of outdoor activities for which the area is known. For an added fee, they can go fly fishing, whitewater rafting, kayaking, hiking, take an ATV tour and more. The add-ons are popular and sell out weeks in advance. The celebrities enjoy the area, too. Townes went horseback riding, and Bentley boasted that between himself and Bryan, he snagged more fish.



“That’s all that counts, not that it’s competition,” he said, explaining that he caught three to Bryan’s one.

Later that night on stage, he upped his total catch to four.

People who chose not to leave the campground had access to the beach — Bentley’s Somewhere on a Beach, named after one of his most popular hit songs. The man-made lake area is rimmed with sand and filled with filtered water that replenishes every 24 hours. DJ Aydamn set up shop on a sand bar in the center to keep the area rocking. The festival provided tents, gigantic floats and hammocks for attendees, and the lake quickly became one of the most popular destinations on the property, attracting thousands daily.



Festival co-creator Brian O’Connell, president of country touring at Live Nation, said the beach was a “curiosity” last year for fans, but this year he said it had turned into “a rager.” Bentley surprised campers at the beach over the weekend to sign autographs and pose for selfies, but mostly he wanted to engage with guests and see how they were enjoying the festival space and atmosphere. He admits his unannounced appearance caused a bit of commotion.

“It’s so wild that here we are at this festival, and if you walk down to the beach it feels like a whole separate festival down there,” he said.



“We’re going to give them the opportunity to have fun, but we’re not going to tell them how to do it,” O’Connell added. “We’re going to watch what they gravitate to and ... we’re going to pour all of our resources into it.”

Seven Peaks joins an already crowded country music festival scene. Nashville hosts the CMA Music Festival. Indio, California, has Stagecoach. Faster Horses is in Brooklyn, Michigan. Watershed is at the Gorge in George, Washington. Fort Lauderdale, Florida, is home to the Tortuga Music Festival, and Chicago has Windy City Smokeout — and that’s just for starters. However, O’Connell believes Seven Peaks is not more of the same.



“The most successful festivals are in places where you can go and do other stuff and then come to the festival,” O’Connell said. “It has to fit into the community it’s in. Seven Peaks is fun, and it’s unorthodox. We were amazed at how many people wanted to come here for this mountain experience.”

Last year people from 49 states traveled to Buena Vista for the inaugural event. This year, Bentley believes they picked up the 50th. O’Connell admits the event isn’t for everyone. Seven Peaks Music Festival sits at an altitude of nearly 8,000 feet — the mountain air is thin, and the terrain is rough. However, country music fans of all ages and interests camped, danced and sang for days. Children ran around in the dirt with bare feet, and teenagers were glued to their phones as their parents and grandparents observed between bites of pizza and loaded french fries.

“It’s a festival spirit,” explained Tonya Rogers, who traveled to Seven Peaks Music Festival from Las Vegas for the second year in a row. “Dierks Bentley, thank you. There’s a free spirit and good people, and it’s country music in the mountains. We’re surrounded by the mountains. Even though it’s high altitude and a little hard to breathe, it’s the best air in the world.”

The music remained the main attraction. Bentley is proud that he was able to catch large chunks of most of the sets and create a collaborative spirit among the artists. He joined the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and Rapidgrass, and he popped up with Pardi during Bryan’s set to cover Alabama’s “Mountain Music.”

Festivalgoers spread blankets, sat on hay bales or took advantage of the outdoor furniture in the VIP areas to catch performances by their favorite singers.

There was a slight breeze as the sun dropped behind the mountains on Friday night. Taking it all in, Lawrence said: “I think this might be the coolest festival I’ve ever been to.”



While final numbers are still being assessed, O'Connell estimates that festival attendance grew by at least 40%. Seven Peaks Music Festival alumni agree.

"It seems twice the size," said Scott Trumpeter, who camped at the festival with his wife, Jan, last year, too. "It's a great venue; it's close to Denver, it's a nice camping spot, beautiful, cool. Feel this (weather), this is wonderful. We'll be back."

By the time Bentley took the stage for his headlining set Sunday night, he was ready to pour himself into his show and soak up every minute. Pardi sat on the stage, dangling his legs off the front, while Bentley ripped through hits including "Burning Man," "Up on the Ridge" and "Riser." Bentley brought his 5-year-old son, Knox, out to help him sing "Somewhere on a Beach," and his 10-year-old daughter, Evie, joined him on "Travelin' Light." Townes covered Elle King's part on "Different for Girls."

"I've been waiting all week for this night," he told the sea of fans. "This is the best weekend of my life."

Bentley closed his Seven Peaks Music Festival with "Drunk on a Plane" then fell backward into the crowd.