

Silicon Valley assholes flood Burning Man with Champagne, private chefs and drugs How the 1 percent do Burning Man

By Christopher Cameron

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Chef Keven Lee prepared farro and quinoa salads for so-called Burners in light-up fur coats.

Courtesy of Keven Lee

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**BURNING
MAN**

What do you do when you've got the munchies in the middle of an unforgiving desert? If you're an elite "Burner," just ring for your private chef.

Burning Man is an otherworldly, nine-day-long arts festival set on a sprawling, dry lake bed — the playa, to those in the

Burning Man wants people to start bringing their own poop bags

know — in Black Rock City, Nev. From Aug. 26 to Sept. 3.

Attendees, aka Burners, adopt new identities (“playa” names), don elaborate costumes (or wear nothing at all), take drugs, party on fantastically decorated mutant vehicles (“art cars”) and ritualistically burn an enormous wooden man.

During the festival, which debuted in 1986, attendees are meant to practice decommodification, meaning that money and marketing are verboten. Also a must: radical self-reliance, which means bringing everything they need to survive — including water — since civilization is miles and miles away.

At least, that’s the idea. But recent years have marked a shift for Burning Man: It’s become something of an “It” networking event for Silicon Valley tech gurus and stifled Wall Streeters looking to blow off steam. But they’re not interested in totally roughing it — and that’s led to the creation of lavish camps known as “Billionaire’s Row” with all the luxuries of the Ritz, including private chefs.

While most festival attendees refuel with canned soups, beef jerky and protein bars, those with limitless resources pay as much as \$50,000 to camp in style with seated dinners and toothsome tasting menus.

Did you lose your
loincloth at Burning
Man?

“My clients fly in,” Keven Lee (known as “Cheven” or “Sipha” on the playa), a Los Angeles-based private chef for a camp of 1-percenters, tells The Post. “They are the elite: celebrities, billionaires, sports stars, developers, you name it. They trust me to take care of them 24/7” — whether that means soothing someone who’s “wiggling out on mushrooms” or preparing a Michelin-worthy dinner.

For the past two festivals, Lee, 40, has prepared four gourmet meals a day for a camp of 180 — a feat that he says takes a “motherf – – king rock star” to organize.

To pull it off, Lee arrives at Burning Man with six assistants and a convoy of vehicles, including two 26-foot-long refrigerated trucks. He then builds a 38-foot-long kitchen from scratch in the middle of the desert. The camp of 53 luxury RVs and six art cars is built around a central lounge and dining area with a nightclub, where top DJs spin 24 hours a day, all powered by four 15,000-amp generators. His fee to cook for the camp starts at \$250,000, before alcohol (usually cases of Whispering Angel, Don Julio 1942 and Dom Pérignon).

“We try to level up to the atmosphere. I’m not walking in with a bright white coat and frickin’ toque on,” says Lee, who cooks in a pink tutu and bomber jacket. Last year, he had 250 pounds of fresh fish flown in on a jet. He used it in hand-rolls, which he made at 4 a.m. for people in

Mother grieves death of son who ran into Burning Man flames

light-up fur coats chanting his name.

“We make the most tweaked-out, ripping edible displays,” adds Lee, whose company, My World on a Plate, also caters for production companies and events such as the Sundance Film Festival. “I’ve got rock-star chefs from Maui who are beyond the bada-es of the bada-es carving ninja stars, orchids and the most gorgeous blooming flowers out of watermelon, radishes and rainbow carrots.”

Lia Paulina Holmgren, 35, a dominatrix, therapist and German sex-club owner who has attended the festival for the past 10 years and stays in Lee’s camp, says that while she adores the fresh, organic produce he prepares, it’s the ambiance that makes the dining experiences at Burning Man so special.

“It’s all about how you dine,” Holmgren, who goes by “Lia Blossom” at the festival, says. “You are in the dust in costumes with people who are probably Silicon Valley billionaires. It’s just so fierce.” In the spirit of Burning Man, Holmgren says she typically brings gummy bears or melons to gift to strangers.

Last year, Manhattan-based chef Sander Kooijman — who specializes in Indonesian cuisine and has yet to take a playa name — took over as private cook to a camp of about 100 Burners in the finance, fashion and real-estate

Man who ran into 'Burning Man' fire dies from injuries

industries.

"What they have in common is that they like to party hard, and Burning Man gives them that opportunity," he says.

This year, he plans to up his game, schlepping tons of food including 1,500 eggs, 100 pounds of chicken breast, 30 watermelons and eight different Indonesian seasonings to the event. His fee starts at \$40,000, before booze.

Kooijman says he was awed last year by the sheer size of the festival, the logistics of setting up a mobile kitchen in a dust bowl

Daniel Edwards (from left), Delahna Flagg and Christa Bruno serve sushi as part of chef Keven Lee's crew.

Courtesy of Keven Lee

and catering to the demands of guests on LSD.

"Last year, I really underestimated the amount of tablecloths I would need, because after a day, it was filthy," he tells the Post. "They eat like maniacs. Breakfast is dinner and dinner is breakfast."

An array of waters infused with fresh fruits and herbs keep Burning Man attendees hydrated.

Courtesy of Keven Lee

Of course, many long-time Burners look askance at the event's velvet-rope glampers and the culinary one-upmanship that

can occur. Camps at Burning Man are expected to be more or less welcoming. And the VIP encampments for the likes of Mark Zuckerberg or Google's Sergey Brin have been accused of building walls with RVs and refusing to serve food and drinks to outsiders.

“It strikes me as odd to go to Burning Man for the food,” says an eight-year festival veteran who asked to be identified by his playa name, RCT. “The wonderful things there have absolutely nothing to do with fine dining.”

However, he adds that there are many food-themed camps at the festival that do give back.

“There are camps that specialize in food that do wonderful things for the community,” he says. “You will be wandering around in the dust and darkness, and suddenly, a truck will appear with nice, grilled-cheese sandwiches.”

Chef Sander Kooijman plates upscale food at Burning Man.

Courtesy of Sander Kooijman

Camp Baconeers, for instance, specializes in doling out bacon to the public. Stop by Barbie Death Camp and Wine Bistro afterwards for fine wine in a cheap, paper cup — no invitation necessary.

But at the end of the day, at Burning Man, like anywhere else in the world, “if you want the best service,” says Lee, “you better have deep pockets.”

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