

## Pow wow Etiquette

January 31st, 2007 by BrokenClaw

The following guidelines are intended for visitors and newcomers to Native American Indian pow wows and festivals. I compiled this list from various printed material, other online pages, and from personal experience. Always remember that pow wows are based on ancient and sacred ceremonies, filled with traditions which have been passed down for generations. To be ignorant of these traditions, and to act inappropriately, may be considered disrespectful.

Although each tribe, nation, or region has their own special customs, the following list applies generally to most North American pow wows and festivals.

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1. Under no circumstances are alcohol, drugs, or firearms permitted on the grounds.
  2. Bring your own seating. Unless you are familiar with the site and know that public seating is available, bring a lawn chair or blanket to sit on.
  3. Arrive at the start of the day. The *Announcer* (also called the Director or the MC) will often explain many of the events before they start. If a printed program is available, use it to follow the day's activities. The program may also include special rules of conduct.
  4. Tipis and lodges are usually set up on the grounds. Unless specifically marked for Display or Demonstration, these structures should be treated as you would treat a private home. In either case, do not touch any personal property.
  5. The circular area for dancing and ceremony is called the *Arena*. It will be clearly marked by benches, chairs, hay bales, and/or a rope fence. The circle of the arena is reserved for dancers. You will see their blankets and personal belongings there.
  6. The drum may be placed in the center of the arena or at the edge. There may also be a sheltered area for elders, dancers, and other officials. Visitors are not permitted in these areas.
  7. Visitors may set up anywhere beyond the arena. If you are early enough to find a spot directly behind the dancers, it is good courtesy to ask their permission, as they may have family or friends they wish to have near. Otherwise, use common sense. Do not block someone else's view, and never try to move a blanket or chair already placed.
  8. A dancer's clothing is called *Regalia*, and he/she is said to be *in dress*. It is not a costume. A dancer's regalia is a unique expression of spirit, often comprised of priceless heirlooms and other articles handmade by family and friends. Never touch a dancer's regalia without permission.
  9. Only dancers in regalia are permitted to dance, and certain dances require specific styles of dress. However, the Announcer may call an Intertribal Dance and may invite everyone, including visitors, to join. If you do, follow the lead of others and enter the arena at the proper place. Remember that it is an honor to be asked to dance.
  10. Stand during special songs, including the Grand Entry, Flag Song, Veterans Song, Memorial Song, and any other Prayer Songs the Announcer indicates. Men should remove their hats to show respect.

11. Photography requires special attention. In most cases, panoramic or scenic photography for personal use is permitted. However, always ask permission before taking photos of individuals, and wait until they are out of the arena. Keep in mind that Native Americans are a rich mixture of ethnic backgrounds, so don't expect all of the participants to look like a *typical* Indian, or to look like each other! Some dances are sacred, and the Announcer will prohibit photography during those dances.
12. Most pow wows are non-profit. While admission charges may cover the cost of the site, the participants must rely on the generosity of others to help defray their personal expenses. Donations are accepted during the Blanket Dance. During this dance a blanket is placed on the ground, or is carried by its edges around the arena, so visitors can show their appreciation to the dancers and singers by dropping monetary gifts on the blanket.

Although a pow wow is based on ancient ceremonies, it is primarily a dynamic celebration which evolves with the times, and everyone is expected to enjoy themselves. Newcomers are always appreciated for their interest and willingness to learn about Native American culture

Source: <http://native.brokenclaw.net/wp/archives/etiquette>