For half a century, Esalen has been a primary thought leader and shapeshifter of the culture, generating and promoting new ideas, methods, and connections that have transformed our world. As we move into Esalen’s next half-century of creative influence, we honor our rich legacy, celebrate our initiatives and our outreach today, and embrace our common human future in an emergent world culture of tomorrow.

The word itself summons up tantalizing visions of adventure, of unexplored frontiers, of human possibilities yet to be realized. There is the wonder of the place itself, 120 acres of fertile land carved out between mountain and ocean, blessed by a cascading canyon stream and hot mineral springs gushing out of a seaside cliff. There is the delicate and subtle Big Sur air of a late afternoon in May, the midnight mist of July, and the drenching February rain. There are October nights so clear the Milky Way can light your walk along the darkened garden path. And always there is the sound of the sea.

And then there are the people—the people who live there and love the land, and the 750,000 more who have come from all over the world to participate in Esalen’s 50-year-long Olympics of the mind, heart, body, spirit, and community, committing themselves not so much to “stronger, faster, higher” as to deeper, richer, more enduring in the fellowship of other seekers. They come for the intellectual freedom to consider systems of thought and feeling that lie beyond the constraints of societal norms. They come to re-discover ancient wisdoms in the rhythms and tides of the body, and poetry in the pulsing of life itself. They come to rediscover the miracle of self-aware consciousness. Often they come away inspired by a fierce desire to learn and keep on learning through all of life, and beyond.

Esalen is a place with a global reach. In the words of Thomas Wolfe about America, It is a place where miracles not only happen, but where they happen all the time.

For a longer and more complete version of the Esalen story, please read Esalen and the Religion of No Religion by Jeffrey J, Kripal.

“There is nothing like Esalen anywhere in the world. I truly believe it has changed the course of human history.”

–Ken Wilber, Founder of Integral Institute
Gordon Wheeler, PhD, is an internationally-known psychologist for his teaching, training, and writing in Gestalt therapy, coaching, and education. He has served as President of Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California since 2003, where he also served for several years as CEO.

Dr. Wheeler teaches regularly at Esalen and around the world and is syndicated nationally.

His written work, including a dozen books and over 100 articles in the field, has emphasized the evolution of Gestalt theory as the basis for relational and developmental self-theory, integrating the body of Gestalt psychology research with the Gestalt therapy tradition.

Gordon’s areas of exploration include relational development, self and shame, couples and intimacy, multi-cultural issues, gender and men’s issues, leadership and coaching, and lifelong integral education, as well as post-Holocaust issues and Gestalt Systems Constellations.

Gordon and his wife Nancy Lunney-Wheeler have a large and growing blended family in Santa Cruz, CA.

Tricia McEntee joined the Esalen family in 2006, bringing both her laudable skill set and a spirited dedication to the community to the position of chief financial officer, before moving into the position of chief executive officer in 2010. Tricia spent her early career as a certified public accountant and auditor with Ernst and Young Accounting Firm, later holding multiple CFO positions in various profit and non-profit organizations throughout the Ogden/Salt Lake City, Utah area.

Throughout her 15-year tenure as CFO, Tricia demonstrated excellence in leadership, finance, accounting, strategic planning, human resources, and information technology management. Beyond her exceptional professional credentials and beloved standing in the community, Tricia is a mother of four grown children and a recent grandmother of a beautiful baby girl.

“Esalen is one of the most extraordinary places I’ve ever been and possibly the most extraordinary. It is infinitely precious because we can come here and tell the truth.”

–John Cleese
With combined resources, shared interests, and mutual respect, Michael and Dick founded Esalen Institute in 1962. Agreeing on the need for freedom and innovations in the academic, medical, sociological and religious arenas, they created a space where diverse views could be explored both intellectually and experientially and where no approach would “capture the flag”.

When Michael moved back to San Francisco and established the city branch of Esalen, Dick stayed in Big Sur, continuing to provide core direction to the operational, programming and community aspects of the Institute. His enthusiasm and support helped establish the work of Ida Rolf, Moshe Feldenkrais, Fritz Perls and Stan Grof. Among others. He was instrumental in bringing Julian Silverman from NIMH and, in collaboration with Dr. Jack Downing, supporting significant research regarding drugless intervention in first break schizophrenia. These diverse interests led to Dick’s formation of Gestalt Practice, a communal approach to developing awareness, which synthesized eastern meditative principles and gestalt structures with a somatic emphasis, which continues to develop and expand through his long-term students.

Dick died in 1985.
Esalen is neither a school, nor a church, nor a spa, nor an inn, nor a monastery . . . and yet its utterly unique mixture contains a bit of all of the above. Perched on 27 acres of Big Sur coastline where the mountains meet the sea, its magical beauty makes it feel a little like the Garden of Eden. Esalen hosts 20,000 visitors a year who come for a weekend or a week or a month or longer to learn, to grow, to explore, to heal, or to carve the near edge of the future, the cutting edge of humanity.

Founded in 1962 by Michael Murphy and Dick Price, Esalen is the birthplace of the human potentials movement. Where Freud gave us a portrait of the human condition based on pathology, Murphy and Price were inspired early on by Abraham Maslow’s psychology of higher health and peak experiences. With the help of hundreds of workshop leaders drawn from many disciplines and with many practices, Esalen allows its visitors not just sanctuary from the urban hub-bub, but an opportunity to push the envelopes of their own and society’s existing limits.

Esalen boasts breakthroughs in fields from gestalt psychology to nuclear physics, from philosophy to economics, from body work to citizen diplomacy. Esalen hosted Boris Yeltsin’s first visit to the United States, immediately after which he resigned from the Communist Party. The rest, as they say, is history. Time and again, Esalen has proven the possibilities of reconciling intellectual and experiential; mind and body; science and mysticism; immanence and transcendence; East and West; meditation and action; youthful idealism and time-tested wisdom. At a time of personal and economic stress, when demagoguery seeks to exploit fears and insecurities, Esalen continues to fulfill a critical role: to explore and promote interconnections between heart and mind, soul and body, individual and society.

Maintained by a living community of teachers, body workers, work scholars and other staff who walk the talk and welcome guests, Esalen is a social invention new under the sun. Prior to 1962, there was nothing like it. Since then there have been hundreds of imitators, but none has survived and thrived as Esalen has. Proud of its past, Esalen, on its 50th anniversary in 2012 is now poised toward a future featuring a new commitment to sustainability, a stronger role for its Center for Theory and Research, and an abiding passion for personal and social transformation.

We willingly limit workshop enrollments so teachers and students can learn from one another. But while we are small by design in many respects, our approach to teaching and learning is expansive and ever-evolving. Our legendary Esalen catalog contains enough learning and transformative opportunities for several lifetimes. Ultimately, everything we do feeds one goal: to make Esalen feel revelatory with each visit—a place to discover new reserves of courage, new tools for growth, and a new sense of adventure.

Esalen? It’s a trip and a half and then some.
ABOUT ESALEN

Esalen is a leading center for exploring and realizing human potential through experience, education and research. The community works toward the realization of a more humane and all-embracing world, seeking answers to questions unlikely to be explored by traditional universities and religions. Esalen sponsors pioneering initiatives and offers personal, spiritual and social transformation practices for residents, interns and workshop participants. Perched on a windswept rocky promontory on California’s scenic Big Sur Coast, Esalen opened its doors over 50 years ago as a center for positive, personal change, and for the 750,000 people who have been through its gates since 1962, nothing has ever been quite the same. For more information, www.esalen.org

THE PROGRAMS

Workshops, residential education apprenticeships, massage, conferences, massage, personal retreats, pre-school.

WORKSHOPS AND PERSONAL RETREATS

# of Workshops offered each year: 550

# of Workshop Program Disciplines/Categories: 23

Top 6 most popular workshop types: Yoga, Massage, Wilderness, Psychological, Arts, Somatic

Percentage of Returning Workshop Participants: 43% (2007-2010)

RESIDENTIAL EDUCATION

One month to one year residential programs.

Total # of workscholars, extended students, and apprentices: 40.

MASSAGE AND HEALING ARTS:

40 massage and healing arts practitioners on staff, representing nearly 25 different modalities.

# of massages & healing sessions given by our staff each year: 13,500

THE IMPACT:

Environmental, personal, socio-political, spiritual, transpersonal.

ARTS & MUSIC:

Well-known musicians who have performed at Esalen: Crosby Stills Nash & Young, Simon and Garfunkle, Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, Bonnie Raitt, George Harrison.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

1960’S

Abraham Maslow forms Humanistic Psychology Fritz Perls forms Gestalt Therapy at Esalen.

1964

Ida Rolf creates Structural Integration/Rolfing at Esalen Institute

1964

Complementary Medicine and Humanistic Medicine developed and legitimized by Sukie Miller and Wayne Jones, leading to the first federal legislation on Humanistic Medicine.

1976

Connections between consciousness and quantum physics made at Esalen with Fritjof Capra and Nick Herbert.

1980’S

Soviet/American relations improved during cold war through spacebridge cosmonaut/astronaut program and Boris Yeltsin visit.

1993

Field of Ecopsychology created through a series of Esalen conferences by Theodore Roszak

2000’S


2000’s

Trainees in transpersonal psychology courses learn about whole-person development and transformation.
Esalen Institute celebrates its 50 year anniversary with a week long celebration

Big Sur, California (September 18, 2012) Esalen, a leading center for exploring and realizing human potential through experience, education and research, is hosting two special events to culminate the celebration of its 50th Anniversary. The events are “The Best of Esalen: A Movable Feast” which runs from September 30 through October 3rd and “Esalen’s 50th Anniversary Benefit Weekend” which begins on October 4 and concludes on October 7. “Our 50th anniversary is a time to renew our pride in Esalen’s timeless mission of integral transformation – personal, social, spiritual and cultural—from change to change agent, healing and lifelong learning combined,” says Gordon Wheeler, Ph.D., Esalen president.

“At this pivotal time in our history, we celebrate innovation and the enduring contributions of many leaders in diverse fields such as psychology, ecology, somatics, and spirituality whose vision and creativity was nurtured at Esalen. Abraham Maslow, founder of the fields of humanistic and transpersonal psychology; Fritz Perls, noted Gestalt psychotherapist, Buckminster Fuller, architect/engineer/designer and futurist; Joseph Campbell, pre-eminent mythologist; Virginia Satir, pioneering family therapist; and others, were part of the Esalen community who explored and realized what Aldous Huxley called the “human potentialities,” continued Wheeler.

“The Best of Esalen: A Movable Feast”, September 30-October 4, offers a medley of uniquely Esalen offerings including farm to table cooking and dining, planting, dance, singing, improv, yoga, Gestalt, performances, creativity, meditation, and time to enjoy the healing hot springs and food harvested straight from the Esalen farm and gardens. Included in the Best of Esalen package is a special commemorative afternoon concert by Joan Baez on October 3rd. “These four days will be a remarkable confluence of body, mind, spirit and community; they represent the very best of the Esalen experience”, notes Wheeler. Spaces are still available. See www.esalen.org/esalen50th/ to register.

“Esalen’s 50th Anniversary Benefit Weekend”, October 4-7, welcomes an extraordinary group of presenters leading participants on a far-ranging
journey of ideas, activism and deep connection”, says Wheeler. The weekend’s speakers include Robert Reich, Marianne Williamson, Byron Katie, Michael Murphy, Anna Halprin, Al Huang, and Ken Dychtwald. Other activities include music and movement, yoga and meditation classes, a Big Sur nature hike, and online, silent and live auctions to benefit the Institute. For more information, see www.esalen.org/benefit.

“Esalen, which established the human potential movement in 1962, is a grand experiment, 50 years young and stronger than ever. We’re never finished learning, exploring new frontiers and creating a better way. Over the years, Esalen has helped shape many cultural trends that were once considered alternative but are now mainstream, including complementary health practices, such as mindfulness, yoga, meditation and bodywork; organic foods; eco-psychology; physics and consciousness, as well as citizen diplomacy, to name a few,” continued Wheeler.

“Our fall events will honor and celebrate the many contributions that Esalen has birthed over the past 50 years and provide a foundation for our next 50. In laying that foundation, we are renewing our mission and dedication to ‘pioneering deep change in self and society’ in people, organizations and beyond,” stated Wheeler.

Esalen will also be conducting an online auction to raise funds for the Institute’s programs. The online auction goes live on September 24th and includes over 100 donated items of value. To see the auction or donate to it, go to: http://www.biddingforgood.com/esalen50thanniversary

“Part of my breakthrough was coming here (Esalen.)” – Van Jones
I am often asked about the historical influence of Esalen on American culture. I reply that this influence has been vast and deep, that it has not simply involved American culture (think Europe, Russia, Latin America, China, and the Middle East), and that much of this influence almost certainly still lies in the future.

I would only add one further observation here, namely, that Esalen’s signature idea of the human potential is so widespread and so popular now that it is virtually invisible. It is “in the water,” as we say. Or better, it is the water. I am reminded here of the story about the fish who one day met a turtle. The turtle said to the fish: “Isn’t the water fine today?” To which the fish replied, “What’s water?”

This is sort of where we are with the human potential. It is so common and so well known that we do not even recognize it any longer as something special, much less as something “Esalenesque.”

My favorite example here is American popular culture and its embrace of various “psychical” abilities or “paranormal” powers, capacities which are commonly seen, exactly as we have it in the human potential movement, as the evolutionary buds of our own latent human supernature. Think the X-Men and Prof. Xavier’s School for the Gifted. Think television programs like “Heroes.” Think countless Hollywood films, from John Travolta in “Phenomenon” to Matt Damon in “The Adjustment Bureau.” The latter film is based on a short story of the sci-fi master Philip K. Dick, who was himself utterly convinced of the evolutionary purpose of mystical illuminations, his own included.

My point? That the human potential movement, on its fiftieth birthday, has already instilled itself, alongside a host of other influences, in and as the very soul of American popular culture. This particular example (there are many others) may involve fiction, film, and fantasy, but that is precisely how a worldview often first shifts—through the cultural imagination. Nothing can be accomplished that is not at first imagined. And Esalen has inspired us to re-imagine ourselves in ways that are ecstatic, visionary, future-oriented, and, above all, big. Really, really big.
Recent Press

SF GATE: Esalen Institute turns 50 this year
HUFFINGTON POST: The Esalen Institute And The Human Potential Movement Turn 50
HUFFINGTON POST: ~ Esalen ~
MONTEREY COUNTY WEEKLY: One Half Century at Esalen Institute

Videos

Today Show
Supernature Documentary
Clip of Founder Michael Murphy
An Esalen Photo Essay

Other Resources & Links

Media Relations Page
Pioneering Initiatives of Esalen’s Center for Theory & Research
Wikipedia

Media/Press Contact

For a media pass or a copy of our location agreement for your next visit to Esalen, please contact:

Doug Ellis
Marketing/Communications Manager
831-620-6256
doug.ellis@esalen.org

Please direct questions about our media kit or other marketing or PR-related questions to marketing@esalen.org.
You *can* take it with you.

Whether you come to Esalen as a seminarian, conference attendee, work scholar, or workshop leader; whether you’re exploring storytelling or SLOW food, you leave knowing you can put yourself and the world together in new ways. You gain a bigger, richer toolkit of communication and leadership skills. You take away a newfound willingness to “lean in,” a deeper sense of acceptance and self-awareness, a heightened empathy for ambiguity and nuance, a broader repertoire of “dots” to connect. Call this greater capacity to mobilize inner resources an expanded heart and mind, a reconnection to the better angels of your nature, or a discovery of your inner divinity—it’s the reason why the Esalen experience goes far beyond “self-help,” becoming a substantial ingredient in people who become a force for positive change in their relationships, their communities and the world.
We are, strictly speaking, a retreat—spiritual or humanistic, depending on your point of view—and one renowned for meditative experiences. So it’s not surprising that people tell us they seek out Esalen to “step off the grid,” or to “quiet the spirit.” In truth, however, our driveway takes you into an environment that’s conspicuous and rambunctious in its intentionality. Eye contact is startling and invigorating. The cross-fertilization of ideas, creativity, and perspective is almost palpable. Laughter is unguarded and spreads quickly. Conversations become the basis for lifelong friendships. At Esalen, people say their capacity to listen multiplies, their ability to think vaults, and their willingness to consider other possibilities comes alive. During meals, at the Baths, in the lodge, on the patio, the spontaneous coming together of people reawakens both compassion and joy for our shared human experience.
At first glance, Esalen might seem like an unusual place to come at a time when personal or civic life is at the tipping point. Esalen is not where you find flashily-packaged, easily-digested “self-help”; this is not where you say, “Esalen, tell me what to do.” Whether you come to process personal pain or to embark on a modern-day vision quest, we provide the crucible and catalyst, and workshop leaders whose integrity and skills embody the highest standards of practice. We ask that you become attuned to the here and now, and understand that the relationship between self and world is an intensely communicative process that’s continually created and recreated. This perspective, and the empowerment, acuity and focus it inspires, is why “Esalen time” seems to defy the clock—and why insights and a profound sense of healing seem to emerge so quickly.

**TRANSFORMATION IS MESSY and we wouldn’t have it any other way.**
Some of the most intriguing ideas in today’s public conversation have Esalen DNA.

“We are the children of Esalen” says Whole Foods CEO John Mackey, speaking on the success of the conscious business movement. In fact, Esalen’s lineage is evident in a wide range of ideas, skills, practices and entire fields that define progressive mainstream culture. Our work has paved the way for the broad acceptance of yoga, meditation, body-based psychotherapy, lifelong experiential learning, permaculture, and the pursuit of personal and social transformation. We created a new American spirituality by borrowing and blending diverse belief systems; today, polls show it’s the norm for many people to describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” The Esalen concept of a mindful universe, where science and mysticism can live in harmony, is now being confirmed by discoveries in neuroscience and quantum physics. In 1967, a New York Times writer looked at what was happening at Esalen and wrote, “It could change the way we live.” It was true then—and it’s still true today.
No one captures the flag.

This value has been at the heart of Esalen from Day 1, and we believe it’s the reason people from every walk of life consistently tell us that we’ve created the freest, most creative environment they’ve ever experienced. At Esalen, inquiry is ecumenical and open-minded. We walk away from orthodoxies and gurus. We ask big questions to each other and of the world with optimism, good-heartedness and a tenacious belief in human progress. We believe diversity and divergence can inspire better solutions. The many people who seek us out at critical moments of personal transition; the innovative bodywork, thought leadership, and social change we’ve inspired; our pioneering and ongoing work in citizen diplomacy; even the large number of non-dancers in our dance classes—all this speaks to the enduring value and impact of wearing dogmas lightly.
ESALEN: the ONE and MANY

It’s a noun and a verb, a seat of energy, an exhilarating adventure, a wellspring for the mainstream. Esalen is a place of pilgrimage, grounded in a wildly alive environment—the spectacular, unparalleled, convergence of mountains and water that is the Big Sur coastline. Esalen also travels the world as an inextinguishable, animating spirit—healing lives and history, sweeping away tired paradigms, and igniting change. There is nothing else like it.