

FESTIVAL SURVIVAL GUIDE

A GUIDE FOR FESTIVAL VISITORS

So - surviving the experience - what do you need to know?

- **Preparation** - some stuff to do before you're ready to go
- **Security** - on site security and stewards - what you should know
- **On Your Way** - what to do en route and on arrival
- **Your Stuff** - how best to keep it safe
- **Pitching Your Tent** - some useful tips
- **Your body** - keep it safe - it's yours and you have choices
- **Keeping clean** - not easy but perfectly possible
- **Clothes** - keep cool, keep warm, keep dry *and* keep your cred!
- **Drugs and alcohol** - be wise, be safe, take care
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- **Crowd Safety** - keeping safe in a dense crowd - crowd surfing and moshing
- **A Final Word** - Have a great time!

PREPARATION

Don't buy your ticket from a ticket tout - it is more than likely that they WILL rip you off and you simply won't get in. Lots of people get ripped off buying forgeries - it might look the real thing to you but it won't do to the people on the gate. If you buy from places like Ebay and other sites where touts peddle their wares be aware that you may lose out - many unwary people have found this out to huge personal cost (and disappointment) - it's a big expensive risk so - ask yourself if it's worth it - you could find yourself hundreds of pounds out of pocket and still not get access to the festival - are you prepared to take that level of risk?

So - do buy your ticket from a reputable ticket agency and try and buy early as they sell out really quickly for most of the big or popular events - certain festivals attract a strong following and people like to go year after year - they will know the ropes and be first in line to ensure they get their tickets - you need to be quick off the mark - don't leave it to chance make sure you know when and where the tickets for the event you want to get to will go on sale. These days getting tickets to the best festivals needs a bit of military precision - be aware when they release tickets and be prepared for a long hard session to get hold of them - it's worth being organised and putting that bit of effort in early just to make sure you get the ticket to the event you've set your heart on.

Check out the festival website (most have them now) and the artist/promoter/venue and see if you can get basic info with addresses of who you might need to contact with compliments or complaints.

Try and get as many contact details as you can on this site but it isn't always easy. It's important that you know what to expect with regard to what the rules are - most organisers have a whole huge list of rules and regulations about what you can and can't do - familiarise yourself with them - although festivals have a reputation as being an 'anything goes' affair - it's not really that simple and there are some basic rules to ensure everyone's safety.

Think about how you're going to get there and suss out the best way to travel for you - train/coach/car - book your ticket in advance. If you're traveling by public transport and make sure you get a return ticket - whilst you might be sad the festival is over you'll be well hacked off if you can't get home - you can bet your life the public transport will be over subscribed and you will be skint. If you do forget and end up getting into difficulties you could phone a friend or relative - they can go to their local train station and pay for your ticket for you so you won't be stranded for quite so long - but this does all take time to organise. Welfare services on site might just be able to help in some way - maybe by helping to find a lift share but they will not have any money for you. If you are under age (you really shouldn't be there without an adult and proper plans - but hey - shit happens) Social services will take some responsibility - welfare or the police should have contact details - and all social services departments operate an out of hours emergency service - the police will have contact numbers. But if you're classed as an adult nobody has any legal responsibility for you (unless you're classed as vulnerable) and you will be on your own - so best make sure you've covered all your bases before you go eh?

If you plan to travel by car make sure your vehicle is roadworthy and running okay - you really don't want a breakdown on a festival site (or even en route or on the way home) it may prove to be very expensive! Make sure you have ample fuel, many sites are miles from the nearest garage and don't forget to have directions or a map of how to get to the site.

Think about where you want to stay for the duration of the festival - the vast majority of people camp but some choose to stay in a hotel or go for bed and breakfast - if you do want to stay somewhere off site you will need to book well in advance as most places get block booked by the media and therefore it can be really difficult to find somewhere - always best to make accommodation arrangements as soon as you have booked your ticket if you plan to stay off site.

If you are staying on site check out parking/camping arrangements for the site in advance so that you know what to expect and what's expected of you - for fire safety reasons you will probably not be allowed to camp near your car or vehicle - it's worth bearing in mind that nylon from tents, petrol and oil make NAPALM - so health and safety isn't just being a pain in the arse - there are reasons why the aggravating inconvenience of having to park well away from your tent is the norm - they aren't really just having a laugh! Some festivals will allow you to park while you unload but by no means all do this - so forewarned is forearmed.

You will need to give some thought as to how you are going to get your stuff from the car to the camp site - it will involve a lot of walking and a lot of carrying - always good to travel light and best to make several smaller trips - unless you're really hard!

Some events do not allow caravans, mobile homes or "live in" vehicles on site or if they do they may restrict them to special areas - usually at extra cost and miles from the main part of the site - check in advance.

If you haven't got a car have you checked out how far is it to and from the site to the bus/train station/pick up point? Is it walking distance or will you need a taxi? If you do need a taxi make sure you've got the telephone number with you - they get very booked up so you may have quite a wait - it can be quite difficult for them to find you so do be clear about where you will be, what your name is etc. some firms find it hard to get on site as organisers often change routes to the drop off/pick up points so it's often worth walking a bit further and meeting the taxi off site - usually much quicker and easier in the long run.

It may sound blindingly obvious, but check your tent before you leave - is it in good condition? Does it have a ground sheet? Is it waterproof? Have you got enough poles and tent pegs? Do you know how to put it up? Do you have a camping mat and a sleeping bag? It can get very cold at nights so these items are essential and will make a significant difference, a camping mat under you will prevent a lot of heat loss. When camping remember to take a torch - it gets dark and those guy ropes can be a bitch specifically setting out to get you! Don't forget a penknife and some matches or lighter and a tin opener if you're planning on eating that tin of beans you packed. A water container (you can get collapsible ones with taps these days!) will be something you'll be well happy you thought to take.

If you take medication for any illnesses make sure you have enough to cover you for the duration that you will be away from home (and take it in its original packaging as proof it's for you - just in case) If you have a medical condition that might cause severe problems make sure your mates know what to do in an emergency and wear a medic-alert bracelet or necklace so that people know what to do in the event you lose consciousness. and there are no mates around who might know what the problem is. Pack basic a basic first aid kit that you just might need in a camping scenario e.g. dressings, plasters, bandages etc. - just the basics but they can be indispensable in your hour of need!

Take enough money to get you through, it is unlikely you will find a cash point on site at many events and even if you do there will be very long queues - at some events you may not be allowed re-entry if you leave the site to find a bank or for any other reason. Always make sure you stash enough cash to get you home after the event.

Be aware that many festivals encourage you to use a 'beer tokens' system - this means that you purchase your beer tokens which you then redeem later for beer - be very, very careful if you do this - we've been told by several people that they spent their whole weekend allowance on the first day only to discover that there were rules in place that meant the tokens were valid for one day only. So - be very aware - read any notices about tokens and if you decide to go for it make sure you know what their rules are, caution is advised.

Don't forget some basics! You will probably need a rucksack to carry all your belongings - this is quite useful in the arena for all those little essentials. Take bog roll - you will so need it

Wet wipes are always very useful as are poly bags to keep dry clothes in when it's wet and muddy or dirty clothes when you've done with them.

Take a good sunscreen and sunglasses - don't forget that sunscreen whatever the weather forecast says - even an hours sun can give you a nasty sunburn.

Take condoms/contraceptive pills/tampons

Take a towel - wash stuff - deodorant and toothbrush/toothpaste

ON SITE SECURITY AND STEWARDS

The people who work for stewarding and security on site are there to make sure that the event runs smoothly and safely for everybody. When they confiscate things from you they have been told what is allowed and what isn't allowed by the festival organisers - so while we may think it's out of order when they take your things away - it isn't the fault of the person doing the searches. We agree that water should not be confiscated and neither should things that are then found on open sale in the arena - if this is an issue for you there is little you can do at the event - but if you want it to change then put in a formal complaint to the festival organisers and local authority licensing department - it's the only way that things will change.

The workers on site are often poorly paid and may have been working for hours in rotten conditions - we've read on other websites the lengths some people will go to to 'get one over' on security and stewarding - a really sad reflection on a few idiots hell bent on their own gratification as opposed to looking at the bigger picture which is to make the event safe and fun for everyone.

Security and Stewarding personnel will be in proper uniform and they will have clear identification, if you do get into any conflict with them at any time make sure that you make a note of their name and number. If there is conflict try and get contact details of any witnesses. An event held on private premises the owners have the right to eject anyone who is causing offence or being a nuisance, but only such force as is reasonable can be used to do so.

The prime reason for stewards in the "pit" area in front of the stage is not to prevent people getting on the stage, they are trained as a rescue team to help those who are distressed or in trouble in the crowd, it's not cool to throw things at them, you may find you are on CCTV and being ejected from the festival.

Once away from the festival you may wish to follow up your complaint you can write to the festival organisers and to the local authority licensing department. Obviously if an offence has been committed you should report it to the police. You should also write to the head of the security firm concerned. If the incident is serious you may need to seek legal advice and if you have been injured seek medical advice immediately.

ON YOUR WAY!

Some events issue maps and travel details of how to get to the site and other useful bits of information, always check out festival web sites in advance - it really does help to know where you're going! Sites are always more confusing when you actually get there and surprisingly sometimes the signage isn't quite all it could and should be.

Check out the weather forecast - it might be hot and sunny where you are now but that can change - you will be walking miles one way or another and if you haven't got that waterproof and it rains...are you gonna be wet...and are you gonna be wet for a long time...and then you will probably develop the festival sniffles.

Take extra special care if you hitch hike - in this day and age it really isn't the most sensible option but if you do go for it do make sure you travel in pairs NEVER alone -and make sure you have a fully charged mobile on you. Young people are advised to phone in to parents of guardians on a regular basis.

If you're walking along country roads (festival sites are usually in the middle of nowhere) always face oncoming traffic and wear something bright and reflective when it's dark - you really don't want to be splattered all over some country road.

Plan your travel arrangements with care, taxis and other local transport may not be easily available in country areas and local services may not be able to cope well with the huge demand from a large event.

The public may arrive over a period of several days to a festival site, but remember that they often all want to leave all at the same time, the result is traffic chaos! - Best to resign yourself to the situation and be prepared for a long wait in long and boring traffic jams both on the way in and on the way out of a festival site - play some music and chill - losing it won't change the situation and will only make you feel uptight and harassed.

If you want to get a prime place with enough room for all your mates to be together you'll have to get to the site the day before the event starts. You don't want to end up with a long hike at the end of the night, and you do don't want to be camped near the toilets! Getting there early will give you more choice and options about where you'll camp.

Only hand over your ticket at the gate on-site or wristband exchange (as appropriate) Beware bogus officials off site 'checking' tickets they may try to rip you off. Staff are always in uniform and have ID on them - do remember that lost tickets or wristbands **WILL NOT BE REPLACED**, not under any circumstances - so take care of yours.

When you get to the venue get a site map as soon as you arrive and familiarise yourself with what's around you, some events publish downloadable site plans on their web sites, get one in advance if you can. There should be a guide in the program or available from the information tent. Find out where first aid and welfare services are then if you need them you can get there straight away and relatively easily.

Arrange a meeting point with your friends preferably before you get lost!

Best not behind the mixing desk - unless you like wandering around with 50 other lost people in the dark - choose somewhere well lit and not too crowded. Bear in mind that the "official" meeting point may not be accessible when the arena is closed (this does not apply at all festivals) and it might be wise just to have a different place to the one everyone else will use so that you all know you can easily find each other. If you do lose someone and you haven't made arrangements beforehand try the welfare tent or meeting point and hope they have the same idea!

Some (but not all) festivals have public telephones (usually ones that use phone cards and five hundred people waiting to use the phone in front of you) and mobile phone networks may not receive a signal on some sites - sometimes there are points to recharge mobile phone batteries but often there aren't - so bear that in mind.

At most festivals you will find message points at welfare or information places - you can leave messages here for friends or perhaps even arrange lifts if you need to - welfare may also be able to help with lifts and car sharing but please take care and always travel in pairs for your own safety.

YOUR STUFF

If you have a car remember that festivals also attract thieves. Thieves will gather anywhere that they think will give them an easy option. The car park will be their first target - so try and stick to a few basic and simple rules and you should be able to keep yourself and your belongings safe and secure.

Always remember to turn off your lights, close all windows and lock all your doors! It might sound obvious but people do tend to forget the blindingly obvious when in the laid back atmosphere of the festival - thieves know this and are ready to take full advantage! Use vehicle security devices and don't leave anything valuable or visible in your car - in fact, don't leave anything. A glove compartment can look like Pandora's box to your average thief, empty it and leave it open to dispel the mystique. If you can take a spare set of car keys do it - give one to a friend for safe keeping.

Identify a reference point that will help you find the car again - oh how easy it is to forget where you left it - and oh what a long time it can take to find it again! Many large festival sites have a number or colour code system to identify car parks, make a note of these. Park where you are instructed to park by the stewards, keep to a low speed when you're on the site (there are always lot's of pedestrians - and they do wander and don't look) - don't block the emergency fire and access roads.

Parking in restricted areas both on or off site may lead to your vehicle being towed away to the car pound and will incur the payment of a large fine in order to get it back - and boy do these people give out large and hefty fines.

Have your tickets ready for checking on the way in but only give them to official staff or you may be robbed - official staff will be in uniform with ID's. Your ticket is your only way in so be very aware and careful with it.

Some items are banned or restricted at many festivals and concerts (check out websites for information before you go) and don't even think about taking banned items that will probably include:

Professional cameras and recording equipment (to prevent bootlegging). Wax garden flares (flambé) and candles are a real safety hazard, people can get quite severe burns from hot wax. Fireworks and Pyrotechnics. Weapons or anything that can be construed as a weapon. Glass and Styrofoam containers. Illegal drugs of any kind. PA and sound systems (to prevent breaches of noise limits). Dogs and animals, a festival is not a good place for your pet, the sights, sounds and vast numbers of people can really freak out your pet and then they might run off, they can bite people, cause problems for farmers (who might well shoot them) The flying of kites and balloons is often prohibited especially if overhead power cables run nearby.

Knives, saws and axes (yes some people take saws and axes to festivals to cut fire wood, they don't realise that "green wood" will not burn and that fires are often banned for safety). It's not good for the environment and the local farmers and land owners won't be pleased if you go cutting down their hedges and trees.

Some cans have ring pulls that can be totally removed from cans, these are very dangerous to farm animals that live on the site the rest of the year - you may not be allowed to bring your own food or drink onto some sites.

If you are in the country side, follow the country code and respect local people and property - aside from any other consideration you want this festival to continue and to be able to go again next year - don't do things to put the Entertainment License in danger. Keep to foot paths and don't climb fences, walls, trees or hedges. Close all gates, respect all plants and wild life, drive with care on country roads and don't block gateways when you park. If walking on roads with no footpath, always walk facing oncoming traffic and make sure you are visible (especially at night) and wear bright clothing.

We can't stress this enough - don't bring anything to a festival that you can't afford to lose, If you do bring valuables either carry them with you or use left luggage or a property lock up if they are provided (lot's of festivals provide these for a small fee)

PITCHING YOUR TENT

Choose your location wisely - it might be easier to find your tent by a path or hedge, but people are more likely to stumble over it... or worse still piss up against it.

Make sure you can recognise your bit of the site by fixed landmarks (like trees or poles) - you could also try decorating your tent with flags or paint. Do remember that things can look very different at night and when other tents have moved and other people have arrived and set up - it's amazing how your little bit of landscape can change when you're not looking!

Try and pitch your tent on level well drained ground - you don't want to wake up floating in a river when it rains - that just won't be your best wake up call now will it!? Oh and just remember how much it has rained at some festivals!

Steer well clear of rivers, streams, ditches lakes, ponds etc - yep they look cool when you arrive and you think how nice it would be to be near a little stream into which you could dangle your poor tired aching feet but - not only could you end up very wet and uncomfortable but they often contain rats and can also carry nasty unpleasant diseases like Leptospirosis! You really wouldn't fancy that.

Try to keep your area of the camp site clean and tidy and always place litter in the bins or in bin bags - yeah we know - sounds just like yer Mum having a pop - but at the end of the day you're only borrowing this bit of land for a little while - it will go back to what it was after and it's likely that livestock will live on it - you don't really want to harm them do you? Nah come on - no you don't - and you do want the festival to happen again next year

I know we've said it before but it's an important point so it will be emphasized in several places in this guide - don't bring anything to a festival that you can't afford to lose, If you do bring valuables either carry them with you or use left luggage or a property lock up if they are provided (lot's of festivals provide these for a small fee)

Split your money into various hiding places when you sleep just in case you're unlucky enough to be burgled in the night.

if you should discover a stranger in or around your tent try not to panic - there are a couple of options - you could pretend to be well asleep in which case hopefully they will take what they can see and go - or you might make a lot of noise and call out for help (another really good reason for getting to know and getting on with your neighbours) We would advice you not tackle a thief - at the end of the day possessions can be replaced - your well being is paramount - you are not replaceable and you are worth more than a few 'things'.

If the worst happens and you are attacked go to medical, welfare or police straight away - and remember that it's not your fault so go easy on the self blame thing that we all do... the person to blame is the bastard that did it - remember that there are people around who will help you get your head back together in these circumstances. There are some great welfare services around who are experienced, non judgemental and they really do care - don't hesitate - speak to them - you really are not on your own if bad things happen. Be a bit careful if you wander around alone at night - fortunately assaults really are quite rare - just bear in mind that they do sometimes happen and be just a little aware of where you are and who's around you.

Get to know your neighbours, then you can keep an eye on each others' stuff - after the car park the campsite is the most lucrative area on-site for those who choose to rip others off and tents are easy targets. If there are a few people in your camping party try setting them up in a circle with the entrances facing one another. Rip off merchants will target obvious hiding places so try and be original, some people do use locks on their tents - this might just give out the message that you have things worth stealing - best to make sure that you don't leave anything of value lying around and just don't take anything with you that you couldn't bear to lose.

If you do see anyone acting suspiciously it's worth reporting it to the security on site - they can't be everywhere at once and we all need to take some responsibility for ourselves and those around us.

Again - remember to keep enough spare cash stashed for emergencies and so that you know you can get home after the festival.

YOUR BODY

It simply isn't a good idea to get piercing and tattoos done at festivals, or for that matter just days before you go - new body piercing's and tattoos need careful looking after in the early days and are much harder to keep clean at festivals - so even if the stall where you got them was clean you'll be putting your health at significant risk at a festival - so it really is a dodgy decision. Tattooing and skin piercing is usually banned at most festivals as a condition of the Entertainment License. If you think you might go ahead and do it anyway make sure you've got some surgical spirit with you and keep the area scrupulously clean - and we mean clean - infections just aren't where it's at and will ruin your festival experience. If you really want to get it done try and do so at least six weeks in advance - that way you'll know you're all healed and ready to show it off to the world as a thing of beauty and not a puss filled horror show.

Try to eat at least one hot meal a day and drink enough non-alcoholic drinks, you should be having a piss at least three times a day - any less and you might well be dehydrated. Being dehydrated makes you more prone to feeling tired/irritable and having headaches - not what you want after shelling out at least £100+ of your hard-earned cash to have a good time.

There should be FREE drinking water points in the arena and the campsite (near the toilets) and the water should be safe to drink and clearly signed to this effect. It can't be over stressed - DRINK PLENTY OF WATER. If it's really hot, stay in the shade as much as possible, use sun-block and cover up exposed skin to prevent painful burning and sun stroke with it's flu like systems. You really don't want to be ill at a festival as it tends to cramp your style - and this type of ill is preventable - whilst medical services are actually very good at most festivals you really don't want to be spending all your time with them (as nice as they are!)

A good range of food and drink is usually available at most events but prices are often high - so remember when you budget for the festival you will need to eat and drink - sounds so obvious but it's so easy to forget the basics and so easy to think you'll be okay.

Above all don't be pressured into doing anything you don't want to do - it's likely that you will lose some of your inhibitions during a laid back festival but make sure you're with your mates and that you're looking out for each other - talk to each other before you go so you know if your mates gone off on one and s/he will know if you have too. Do not feel pressured into doing drugs or drinking excessively if you don't want to - you don't have to be out of it all the time to have a good time - you know what your limit is and what you are comfortable with - don't let anyone make you feel you should be doing something you don't want to - and just because others might be doing stuff it doesn't mean you have to as well - we are all different and have different limitations - what's okay for your mates might not be for you and vice versa - so never ever pressure someone into doing anything they would rather not.

Same goes for sex - so you meet Mr or Ms adorable who you've been looking for all your life - you don't have to have sex if you don't want to - if it's right they'll go at your pace - it's all about respect right? You do not have to lose or sacrifice your own values in order to fit in or be accepted - remember - be yourself and do what you want to do and not what anyone else might think you should do - it's your body and it's your choice - you live with the consequences of what you do or don't do. So - you want to fine - you don't want to - also fine.

And if you do go for it? Make sure you use a condom - there is no way of knowing who has or hasn't got an STI and there is a much higher risk of contracting an STI than you might think - statistically (and worryingly) STI's are very much on the increase - and there have been cases of individuals with the HIV virus deliberately setting out to infect others. It's well easy to become embroiled in the 'anything goes' atmosphere of a festival - but you do need to keep yourself safe ALWAYS carry a condom and ALWAYS use a condom - it doesn't matter if you are on the pill - the pill will NOT protect you from STI's.

The risk you take if you have unprotected sex is not just about pregnancy - you may also pick up:

HIV and Aids
Chlamydia
Non Specific Urethritis
Genital Herpes
Gonorrhoea
Hepatitis A/B/C
Pubic Lice
Scabies
Trichomonas Vaginalis
Syphilis
Genital Warts
Cystitis
Thrush

Not really the lasting memory you really want to take home from the festival is it? - There are only two ways to keep yourself safe from STI's - one total abstinence! - not really a long term option is it? Nor is it a realistic option - the only other way is to always use a condom.

Welfare will often provide free condoms and confidential advice about sex and related issues such as HIV or other problems.

The Morning After Pill may be available at First Aid for a small charge or use a town pharmacy. You have 72 hours in which to use it, but the sooner the better. Or you have 5 days to use an IUD as emergency contraception. But remember condoms not only protect against pregnancy but sexually transmitted infections too.

While most people have a great and safe festival experience there are a few who do not - for a whole variety of reasons. Some might be depressed and find that the festival makes it worse when they expected it to make them feel better - some might have a bad experience with drugs. Some people feel suicidal and some just find that the pressures of life suddenly get too much to handle. Don't feel ashamed if you just can't cope - and please remember the reason you are feeling so bad is because the pain you are feeling at the present time is greater than the ability you have to deal with it *just at the moment*.

Welfare services are there to help you - don't be afraid to ask for help if you find that you need it - the Samaritans usually go to most festivals - they will listen to you and they will not judge you. **The Samaritans festival branch are on line at www.samaritans.org/festival**

KEEPING CLEAN

OK - so not easy at your average festival, but not impossible either - although there are usually some washing facilities somewhere they won't be the best - try taking a bowl to fill with water from the taps. Better still take a water container - you can find some cheap collapsible containers with taps that are just right for this situation - fill it up in advance and you have instant personal washing facilities.

Wet wipes are a good standby for hands before and after eating, and absolutely essential for those dodgy toilet moments! Personal hygiene is absolutely essential at a festival which - let's face it - is a prime breeding ground for nasty little germs.

Girls - sods law says that your period will start just in time for that festival weekend - make sure you take enough tampons with you - and wet wipes (unperfumed of course) - will be indispensable for use both before and after that loo visit. Make sure you've got some pain killers on you if you're prone to cramps - just don't take too many and be wary of mixing with alcohol.

Deodorant is essential and perfume can mask a multitude of sins! Hair washing is just too difficult - theoretically it could be done under a tap but to be honest it's just not a good idea - get your hair as you want it before you go (dreads, plaits and extensions will get you through brilliantly) otherwise take a hat or scarf to tie fetchingly and create your own individual look! As far as fashion goes absolutely anything goes at a festival and you can get away with crafting your hair in ways you'd never dream of in any other situation - so have fun with it and don't stress.

Don't forget your toothbrush! - Just don't okay - all that excess will leave your mouth feeling like the inside of a festie toilet - you will so need to brush your teeth! Chewing gum might help but it only helps so much.

If it rains it will get wet and muddy - so will you! - there is nothing you can do about it so just accept it - just make sure you've packed a spare set of clothes to get you home.

Don't forget to take a towel!

CLOTHES

Travel light, you really, really don't need more than the basics and you don't need the jimmy choo's - they just aren't de rigueur for this occasion and you WILL be walking for hours. When it starts to rain as it usually does at some time during these events, and when you find yourself facing a several mile hike to get to where you want to be - there will be tears - you'll be miles from anywhere - and you'll be very, very sorry - not to mention the fact that you will seriously piss off your mates with all the whimpering that will inevitably accompany your discomfort. Oh - and you will not look cool - you will look like a chav and people will mock!

Boots, strong waterproof boots are a really good bet, even if the weather's great and the ground dry - when it gets dark and you're trudging back to your tent trampling over all manner of unpleasant things - you'll be really glad you got those boots! Have you tried trudging out of the arena at night in a flimsy pair of flip flops? - enough said.

Get yourself a pair of wellies and some good quality socks - both waterproof and comfortable - whatever you wear on your feet take them off when you go to bed - wet feet = 'trench foot'. This is not nice, not nice at all! Avoid at all costs.

Waterproofs are an absolutely essential item - they take no space and weigh nothing but when its hissing it down you'll be laughing, Take a spare pair of trousers so you've got a fallback if anything happens to your fav 'wear everywhere set'. Jeans are not awfully good if the weather is wet - they have a tendency to soak up the water - get very heavy and take forever to dry out. Go for stuff that's versatile, a sarong is a great standby item, wear them as a top, headgear (hides the hair you haven't been able to wash), tie as a skirt or dress if the sun puts in an appearance! Adds an extra layer if it chills down and can look really cool!

Combats - short style combats are a Godsend! Layers - think layers - several light layers like a thin t-shirt with sleeves or a thin cardy is better than one thick jumper - also you can tie them round your waist when it's hot and pop them on when the sun goes down. Take a couple of your favourite t-shirts and a warm jumper, cardy or fleece for when the sun goes down... it will get chilly even if it's been stifling all day - you will shiver.

So the basics would be one complete change of clothes which will get you through the weekend quite nicely but do make sure you have something to travel home in - what looks great on site at the festival may look a tad conspicuous en route home - and if it's been pissing it down all weekend you'll be covered in mud - that spare 'going home' set will be a lifesaver.

DRUGS AND ALCHOL

The reality is that a lot of people tend to drink quite a bit at festivals - try to know what your limits are! You are the best judge as to how much is enough - you know how your body reacts and how your mind reacts - respect what your body tells you! Don't drink on an empty stomach or mix it with drugs, prescription or otherwise (you will be very, very sick - lying on the ground vomiting isn't pretty and doesn't make friends or influence people) - seriously - if you really overdo it you can get alcohol poisoning and that can be a tad serious - you will need medical help if this happens - but you will be at risk as even your close mates might not recognise the warning signs - especially if they are out of it too - might sound boring but it is a good idea to temper it with non-alcoholic drinks and food - you might still be plastered but try to be safely plastered.

Silly things are much more likely to happen when people get very drunk, accidents, losing or quarrelling with friends and getting lost are just a few of the hazards you'll be more likely to encounter - okay we know it's actually quite rare but remember what can happen - a young man got thrown out of a budweiser event where he had been plyed with lots and lots of booze - his body was dragged out of a canal days later - there have been other similar tragedies - don't let it happen to you or your mates - no one wants things like that to happen so try to have fun AND be safe as well.

If one of your mates does drink too much, don't leave them alone or let them wander off (however annoying they might be, and we do know how annoying very drunk people can be) encourage them to re-hydrate with non-alcoholic drinks, e.g. water.

If they do pass out, lay them on their side with a clear airway (the recovery position) and send someone to get help. Be wary of accepting an open drink, like a can, from a stranger - people have been 'spiked' and subsequently robbed and/or assaulted - girls - be especially on your guard.

Drugs are just as illegal on-site as off-site and there will be police around, many in undercover operations - to be honest festivals are not the place to experiment with stuff for the first time. You might not get the effect you expect, you can easily put yourself at great risk, even if you think you're used to a particular drug, you may get ripped off or sold some dodgy gear. Don't know what it is? Don't take it!
If things do get bad, If you do freak out or want some information, then get to the welfare point or to the Samaritans, it's a safe haven, you won't be judged, no-one will preach to you and it will provide a safe space if you're having a bad time - it's absolutely confidential.

"Herbal Highs" may be legal at this time, but can still make you feel nauseous or anxious, get some advice at the stall if you decide to buy them. If the stall-holder seems not to know or care - go somewhere else! Welfare or Information Points may be able to advise you about these things.

A needle exchange may be found at welfare and/or first aid at some events. Remember, if you do inject, dispose of used needles in a responsible manner, don't leave them laying around where others may accidentally come in contact with them with possible disastrous results.

If you want some more detailed advice before the event, about any drug, in confidence, you can contact the National Drugs Helpline on 0800 77 66 00 or visit their website at www.ndh.org.uk

NOISE AND SPECIAL EFFECTS

High sound levels can do serious permanent damage to your hearing! Don't stick your head in the bass speaker bins until your ears bleed! If you think you have hearing damage do get yourself some medical advice as soon as you get home.

The smoke, fog and vapour from special effects units used on stage should not cause you any problems but strobe type lighting effects can cause epileptic fits in those who suffer from flicker sensitive epilepsy - venues will announce if they are using this so you will have time to get yourself away from the potential problem.

Lasers and Ultra Violet lighting are the two remaining effects that cause problems, so don't go looking directly into the beam of a laser or you may suffer eye damage and U.V. lighting can cause skin problems like sun burn.

The conditions listed here are very rare indeed and control systems are usually in place, the main control is keeping people at a safe distance and issuing warnings.

Perhaps the most serious problem originates with strobe type lighting so take notice of any warnings given or displayed.

FIRE

Campfires at most festivals are banned due to the crowded conditions and dry land so don't bother - it's a danger and a hazard to everyone. If camp fires are allowed do not dig a pit for the fire, just build a small manageable fire on the ground and never leave it unattended, ensure it is out before you go to bed. Never use fuel such as petrol or flammable liquids to light a fire. Oil burning appliances are not recommended.

Many people suffer burns and serious injury from camping stoves at events, keep cylinders and stoves upright when changing cylinders, never change gas cylinders in your tent, near naked lights or when smoking and never attempt cooking inside a tent.

A fire can spread through a festival campsite in minutes with possible catastrophic consequences - take real care. Tests have shown that gas from camping stoves can travel a long distance across the surface of the ground so to prevent fires tents should be at least three meters apart if possible. A torch is the safest form of lighting, don't use candles or flares, not only are they a fire risk but hot dripping wax can cause serious burns. Discourage smoking inside of tents especially the smaller type of tent, these can burn in seconds!

People were seen throwing gas canisters onto fires during the disturbances at both Leeds and Reading in 2005 - people got injured and it was a major hazard - a spit away from a full blown catastrophe. It's hard to believe that people could be quite so stupid and care so little for their own safety and that of those around them. We can only suggest that in the event you find yourself in the middle of such disturbances you get yourself well away from it as quickly as possible - it isn't a spectator sport - and police or security will not be able to differentiate between who is a bystander and who is a perpetrator.

At many festivals, Fire Points are provided, these are often equipped with buckets and a supply of water in case of fire: please do not use the buckets for your rubbish or steal them for your own use, you could save a life.

TOILETS

What can we say about the toilet situation? You're gonna have to go at some stage - do make sure you wash your hands after (clothes pegs for the nose and perfume to mask nasty smells are an optional extra) remember you really don't want 'festival tummy'! 'Nuff said? We know that some people take immodium or similar to try and delay the inevitable with varying degrees of success - but sooner or later you will have to use them their toilets.

While we're on the subject use the toilets - don't piss in the hedges - can you imagine the environmental damage caused by 100,000 people pissing in the hedges? (Not to mention the health risks) It's not big, it's not clever and it's not funny. It's another thing that puts the future of the festival in jeopardy - Glastonbury were prosecuted under environmental health laws - and to be honest there's not much excuse for it at Glastonbury where there are a wealth of facilities.

Portaloos are found at most festivals with the advantage that they flush and they have locks (some activities you just don't want to share eh?) The disadvantage is that they do stink - especially in the heat - put a bit of perfume or tiger balm under the nose before entering (honest it really does help!) You certainly don't want to be touching anything if you can help it and will have to perfect your hovering technique (so much easier for the boys in general!)

Long Drops are used at some events - they have the advantage of being more open and tend to stink a bit less - sometimes they have a lock on the door - sometimes not (which can be a bit off putting) but the open nature does make for a slightly 'better' toilet experience. They are basically stalls positioned over a large pit - we would advise that you don't look down!

Most festivals do have some form of washing facility adjacent to the loo's nowadays - use them! Always wise to make sure you have a pack of wet wipes on you as well though.

Please leave the loo's in the state you find them - if everyone did that the whole festival toilet situation would improve hugely.

CHILDREN

Taking kids to festivals can be great fun and most of the major festivals cater really well for the kiddies - but remember if you do take your children YOU are responsible for them. Here are a few tips on how to manage the festivals with children:

If you have children keep a close eye on them at a festival - kids have a nasty habit of getting lost very easily and very quickly. Do all the safety things you would normally do going out, but be aware that there are lots of things to attract your child out of your sight. In case they get lost make sure that you know what they are wearing and have told them what to do if they get lost - find a police officer, steward or a 'mummy with kids'. It's a good idea to put a mobile phone number on the child somewhere (a wrist band, or sticker on t-shirt), so that if they are found you are easily contacted. Contact festival welfare and the police on site if you have lost your child and they will help you get reunited, emergency announcements can be made from the stage and normally this will be arranged by Welfare, do not waste your time and everybody else's by going to the stage and trying to arrange stage announcements yourself - it won't happen! Go to Welfare, that's what they are there for!

Lost kids and lost property should be reported/taken to the Welfare Point so it/they can be reclaimed/returned - after the event lost property will be handed over to the Police and lost kids to Social Services.

Some (but by no means all) events have special facilities for children including crèches, play areas and children's entertainment but that does not mean you can just dump the kids off for the weekend, you will almost certainly be required to stay with your kids and the children's facilities are usually closed by early evening. Some events have age restrictions or are not considered suitable for kids- check in advance. Pick the right festival. The best festivals for kids are those which include more than bands alone - so look for events that are more rounded with arts and crafts or world music. Often these events will have specific stuff for kids laid on.

Make sure you really do want to take your child/children with you. Remember that you are going to miss out on a few things if they go with you and there is no point in going to all the trouble of taking them if you are simply going to feel frustrated at the end of the day. You'd be better off trying to arrange a babysitter (even if it means going for less time) and having a blast on your own. The idea that you can do everything you want to with children in tow is a misnomer, unless you are prepared to let your kids suffer.

But remember, they are still only kids (even young teenagers) and are therefore more vulnerable to all the dodgy aspects of a festival site: big crowds, loud noise, drugs, alcohol, drunks and weirdo's.

Be prepared and make sure you have everything to provide for their needs - take anything to the festival that your child is unhappy without. Most babies through to 13 year olds are pretty flexible, but if there is a dummy, teddy, pillow or toy that your child relies upon, then take it to ensure plenty of relaxing times. Having said this, you should never take anything to a festival that you are not prepared to lose - so you will need to be incredibly vigilant if there is a 'special' item that your child can't live without - you really don't want to traumatise them for life!

Chill out - remember that you are on holiday, having a break, trying to relax, and so are your kids, so let the kids have a good time. Forget about those normal rules and planned days and let the festival and your kids guide you. Children will lead you into spaces that you have never dreamed of visiting before which is great - it makes the festival experience fresh.

Take a potty - the loo's can be too much for kids of all ages to cope with, so a potty can be invaluable.

A young child is best transported in a ruc-sac baby carrier as a pram is tricky to push over fields and rough roads. Also the baby can see from this vantage point.

It's a good idea to play some of the music your child will hear at the festival before going. Then they will recognise it and enjoy it all the more.

When seeing bands with smaller kids don't go too near the front of the stage as they will be put off by the high volume of the music. If you stand a bit further back the kids will enjoy it all the more. Also be aware of the fact that kids can't see what's happening on the stage and they have little patience with listening alone.

Make time for your child and they will be much more tolerant of the things that you want to do. e.g. an hour in the kids make-it tent followed by a band followed by an ice cream will hopefully mean that your child is fulfilled and so are you.

Take plenty of sun block/hats and light coloured t-shirts for a hot event or wellies/waterproofs and spare clothes for a wet one. Don't forget medication if your child is dependant on it for any medical condition.

CROWD SAFETY

When you go to a festival or outdoor concert situated on a green field site you can guarantee that it will be very crowded indeed and at times you might find yourself right in the thick of it.

Wherever there are dense crowds there is potential for a disaster - this is particularly so in a music festival situation and in our opinion - there is insufficient research into crowd density at music events and crowd capacity - experts recognise that these are areas that need urgent attention but it takes time to implement new safety measures. That being the case it really is wise to be just a little bit aware of what's going on and the best way to keep yourself safe.

It really isn't the wisest decision to keep pushing yourself further and further into an already dense crowd - crowd collapses and crowd surges do happen - people have died as a result - and there have been a number of near misses.

In these very densely crowded situations you are putting yourself at risk of compressive asphyxia (intense pressure that stops you from breathing) everyone wants those the prime positions and most people don't think of the potential consequences this might have if things go wrong.

A few ideas to keep yourself safe in mass crowd situations (or as safe as possible - no event can be completely risk free)

1. Arrive at the venue in plenty of time to familiarise yourself with the setup and layout -check it out to see where the exits are, also check where the welfare services and medical services are located - is there an information area? Is there a security office?
2. Once you're in the venue check out where the emergency exits are and as you find the place you want to be for the concert make a mental note of the nearest exit to your party, preferably look for a different exit -- NOT the main entry/exit because if there is a need to get out fast most people will make for the main one and the crowd there will be very intense.

3. Make a decision with your mates as to where you will meet up or make contact if you get separated - either inside the venue if you just lose each other or outside the venue if something happens there - that way you all know what you will do and how you will make contact.
4. Most people want to be near the front of the stage for their favorite acts - this results in some dodgy situations and there have been numerous 'near misses' in this area - this can be one hell of a dodgy place to be and if something goes wrong you won't have much time and you can't rely on security to get you out - pit teams are good but they are not miracle workers and it's very unlikely that they'll be able to get into the crowd to get to you in time - in a real dodgy situation you may only have **3 minutes** to get out - think about it - is it really worth it? Remember - crowd collapses can occur anywhere in the crowd but why increase your risk by forcing yourself into an already overcrowded situation?
5. What are the ground conditions like? Safety will be compromised with changing weather conditions, what seems okay on a fine sunny day can change rapidly and unpredictably if adverse weather conditions enter the equation. When the ground becomes sodden you might find it hard to walk and if you're on a slope it's easy to fall over - if the crowd pressure becomes intense or surges occur you can get into difficulty pretty quickly. If barriers haven't been correctly placed they may give way. So be aware of where you are standing and what the potential problems might be - if necessary move to a better space.
6. Crowd surfing, stage diving and moshing - not a good idea, don't do it, most places are trying to ban it - there is a high risk of injury - and a higher risk of hurting those around you (and seriously pissing them off!) You may get ejected from the venue as well.
7. To avoid the crowd's inevitable rush to leave following a performance consider the possibility of leaving before the end of the show - you may miss the last number but you will get out much more easily and safely.

If you do stay to the end try and hang back in the arena until the mass eases a little bit - it might just help you out if things look too hectic and security shouldn't force you into what you consider to be an unsafe situation.

CROWD SURFING, STAGE DIVING AND MOSHING

Should you or shouldn't you? - Well there are so many (quite serious) risks associated with these activities that most venues are now banning it - so aside from the risk to yourself and those around you - you run the risk of being ejected from the arena - a lot of venues are operating a 'three strikes and you're out' policy.

It isn't just about the risk to yourself - it's also about the risk to those around you who don't want to do it - it's quite a selfish activity in many ways.

A FINAL WORD

It may be possible to delay your departure until the rush has subsided but remember, if you're a driver do not attempt to drive until you are sure you are safe to do so - alcohol or drugs take some hours to get out of your system - they reckon 12 hours at least for alcohol. So make sure you're okay and plan how you're going to deal with it in advance - just don't over indulge the night before if you're the designated driver.

LASTLY AND MOST IMPORTANT

Have yourself a really good time! that's what it's all about you're going out to enjoy yourself and have fun - okay there's a few things to be aware of but just a bit of pre-festival planning and a wee bit of common sense can help you make sure you'll have the time of your life and be safe at the same time. Like most things a bit of awareness goes a long, long way.

Take care of yourself and of each other, the safest we can all be at a festival is when we take responsibility for ourselves and care enough to help those around us - a festival really is a special place, make sure you keep it that way.