

I never understood the attraction of Glastonbury.

On paper, running around a massive muddy field in the rain trying to catch the bands you want to see on stages 2 miles apart with the wind playing havoc with the acoustics, not to mention the very real risk of catching an earful of the likes of Ed Sheeran if you take the wrong turning, didn't exactly sound like my bag. On top of that, I went camping once at school, and once was most certainly enough.

I thought it was probably just one of these things like the Football and XFactor that seem to be wildly popular that I can't see the attraction of myself.

But that all changed when a friend asked me to go with him.

My initial thought was to make an excuse, but then I realised that a lot of people with underground tastes similar to mine are absolutely desperate to get a ticket and gutted if they miss out.

I could either turn into one of these people who don't really know much about the festival other than the stuff the BBC show me, make a lot of assumptions, scour social media for people who went once, got mud on their shoes, caught a cold and would never set foot in the place again to share around and wear my lack of knowledge as a badge of honour, proudly stating "I've never been and never will"

Or I could open my mind, see what all the fuss is about, and if nothing else, slag it off from a position of knowledge rather than ignorance.

People who have been, generally love it, people who have never been generally hate it, funny that.

And whilst I didn't get off to the best start – following 4 weeks of baking sunshine, I turn up at Glastonbury and we have biblical flooding (obviously all the Eavis's fault!) mud everywhere, lost my tent (rookie error) couldn't get a phone signal, and bar couldn't serve beer due to lightning taking out their power.

I was desperate to go home, but I couldn't because I was skint and my coach wasn't until Monday morning.

But by the Sunday night, the festival had worked its magic on me, and suddenly I could see what all the fuss is about, even the people who say they'd go even if no bands were on suddenly made sense. And no, I don't do drugs, other than alcohol.

People often accuse Glastonbury of being a middle-class festival, too expensive for working people.

The reality is that people from all walks of life attend, from the super-rich spending thousands on a tipi, to those who save all year and borrow a tent from a friend.

If it was only for "posh" folk, would they let Billy Bragg upset the apple cart by having a massive tent called Left Field with left wing political speakers and politically charged bands? There's even a guy here with a "Fuck the Tories" t-shirt on the official website if you wait for it to scroll.

<https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/areas/left-field/>

Would they have a massive area dedicated to environmental issues and sustainability?

<https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/areas/the-green-fields/>

Would they give the profits to charity?

<https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/worthy-causes/>

And would the one high-street brand with a stall not be Waitrose rather than the Co-Op (A workers co-operative as the name implies)

<https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/glastonbury-2023-co-op-shop-8540624>

Nevertheless, I concede that particularly with the cost-of-living crisis, 2023 tickets costing £335 + £5 isn't exactly small-change for most of us, and is at the high end of UK festival prices.

However, if you manage to get a ticket in the initial sale in October – you pay £50 deposit, the balance being due in April, giving you 6 months to save ( $£340 - £50 = £290$ .  $£290 / 6 = £48.33$  – approx. £50 a month to put aside).

Or of course you could put £28.33 a month aside and spread it across the year.

For many of us, these 5 days are the highlight of our year, better than any holiday, so it's really not as bad as it seems on first glance.

If you are really skint, you could work as a volunteer in exchange for free entry (though you have to pay a deposit in case you don't turn up).

But does it provide value for money?

Well, £340 for 5 days = £68 per day, which I feel most attendees find reasonable.

If you look at it purely in terms of how much you'd pay to see the bands elsewhere, there aren't many on the Wed or Thursday, so £340 over 3 days = £114 per day.

A lot of bands who played are still on the festival circuit so it was hard to find their gig ticket prices, but of the bottom of the bill bands on the 5 main stages, the cheapest I could find were The Last Dinner Party (£13) and Maisie Peters (£16.50).

Even if you managed to only see bands that normally cost £13, you'd still only have to see 8.7 over 12 hrs to break even.

Realistically, most bands on the main stages would cost £20+ meaning you'd only have to see less than 5 to get your money's worth. A Pyramid headliner could potentially justify the entire day.

And there is a lot more to Glastonbury than the bands, but you really need to go to appreciate it!

Also, once you've got your ticket, everything else tends to be cheaper than at other festivals.

Firstly, camping is free so no accommodation costs unlike a city festival.

<https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/information/accommodation/camping/>

The big advantage of Glastonbury is that it's one of the few festivals that allow you to bring in your own alcohol both to campsite and arena (Bearded Theory is the only other one I know of).

<https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/information/advice/drink/>

If you do want a cold beer from bar, it's currently £6.50 a pint (cheaper than say O2 Academy for example which IIRC are £7.50)

<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/whats-on/music-nightlife-news/glastonbury-festival-food-drink-prices-27169666>

And the bars are run by Workers Beer Co staffed by volunteers, profits go to good causes including trade unions.

<https://www.workersbeer.co.uk/about/directly-funded-campaigns/>

You can bring in your own food, and 300 stallholders (75% of the total) offer 1 main meal option for £6, some are more filling than others, but if you shop around you can get something decent for your £6.

<https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/whats-on/food-drink/nine-best-glastonbury-festival-vendors-8542545>

Still, a lot of people were shocked when they saw ticket prices this year.

Certainly, in 2019 they were only £248 + £5 booking fee = £253

<https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/glastonbury-2019-tickets-on-sale-in-october/>

But according to Inflation calculator, £253 in 2019 is equivalent to £323.48 today

<https://www.officialdata.org/uk/inflation/2019?amount=253>

Actual 2023 price, £335 + £5 = £340.

<https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/information/tickets/>

So they've gone up by £16.52 more than inflation, which isn't bad considering they made big losses in the 2 pandemic years when the festival had to be cancelled.

Is the festival ripping people off with the high ticket prices?

It costs £40 million to stage, is costed on selling out, Michael Eavis pays himself a reasonable £60K a year, and gives £2 million to charity, so you decide!

<https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/michael-eavis-net-worth-glastonbury-7229315>

But, are the bands getting ripped off?

Bands reportedly only get paid 10% of their normal rate, which is the only way the festival can take place on the scale it does.

<https://www.radiox.co.uk/festivals/glastonbury/emily-eavis-talks-pay-bands-10-percent-festivals/>

Emily Eavis justifies it with "But the thing that happens every time is because of the TV and because of the exposure that they get, they do go on to do really well afterwards, so they'll sell records afterwards, so we're saying 'look, come and do this but even though there's a small fee, we can almost guarantee afterwards you'll make up for it'."

Obviously "exposure" has become a dirty word in the music industry as rogue promoters use it as an excuse to not pay bands, however, it would seem in this case, the exposure really is worth more than their normal fee since most bands large and small are keen to play given the opportunity, and the bean counters at the labels would have figured out if it isn't worth it by now.

I've seen bands on the smaller stages say they weren't even fed let alone paid, it's one thing Paul McCartney reportedly making do with £200K instead of £2 million, but for bands starting out, I'd really like to see them at least get their expenses and food so they aren't out of pocket as it's harder to "cash-in" on exposure for grassroots artists.

Mind you, if I was in a band, I'd rather play a small stage at Glastonbury, potentially to thousands of music fans milling about, than paid £50 to play to 30 of my mates in a local pub venue.

Certainly, whilst some bands report bad experiences, most bands seem to love playing there and can't wait to be asked back.

Some would say that Glastonbury has an unfair advantage over other festivals that have to pay market rate.

But I'd argue that having a festival with blanket coverage across the BBC and most newspapers is a great showcase for live music.

In the same way that the World Cup encourages kids to buy a football and kick it around the park, a lot of kids probably get their first taste of live music through Glastonbury coverage. Perhaps not the music you or I like, but the first band I loved was 50s revivalist, "New Faces" explosion in a paint factory band Showaddywaddy – and I turned out alright! We've all got to start somewhere.

Glastonbury is 1 weekend a year – and getting tickets is almost as hard as getting a GP appointment these days – so people enthused by Glastonbury coverage inevitably go to smaller festivals and gigs, and for young people with not much money, the bargain-basement prices at grassroots venues can be appealing. So the entire industry benefits.

Personally, I enjoy the sheer variety of bands on offer, and the chance to step out of my comfort zone to see bands I would never normally see.

<https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/line-up/>

The whole thing is on a scale that is hard to imagine, and much as I love live music and it sounds mad to anyone who's never been, I enjoy the Wednesday and Thursday as much as the days the bands are on, just exploring and soaking everything up! (Cue accusations of "see, he doesn't even like live music").

I've discovered loads of bands whilst wandering about which I've then made a point of seeing when they tour, often in grassroots venues.

Realistically, with it being so difficult to get tickets, and after the perfect weather this year, demand will be even higher next year, I should keep my mouth shut and share posts from the haters to dampen demand.

And yet, when I really enjoy something, be it Glastonbury or Skating Polly, I can't shut up about it, because I want people to experience the extreme pleasure I get from these things.

Just don't buy the ticket with my name on it, or I will hate you forever 😞