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## Mud, sweat and beers: the things they don't tell you about Glastonbury

**Our highly experienced festival-goer, Tom Charles, reports from Glastonbury on what you might expect as a first-timer and what might attract you as an old-timer.**

In recent years the Glastonbury festival has seen an increasing gentrification of its revellers. The last weekend in June is fast becoming a bit of a headache for the middle class; do you go to Glastonbury or Wimbledon? Despite this shift in demographic, there are still a lot of myths that surround Glastonbury; the mud alone has a reputation that extends perhaps beyond possibly even the music. Then there are the horror stories associated with the toilets, stories that would be enough to put off even the most intrepid festival first-timers. Thankfully the real Glastonbury experience is a lot more pleasant than some people make it sound but that's not to say there aren't things about it that come as a surprise for first-timers.

First, Glastonbury is massive. That's what nobody realises. Absolutely huge. It's hard to get a feel for the scale of things by watching TV highlights because the coverage flits from stage to stage with no mention of the seemingly endless and strength-sapping slogs through the mud that are necessary to travel between one venue and another. It's all very well that Noah and the Whale start their set on the western edge of the site 15 minutes after Paul Simon gets off stage at the Pyramid but it's going to take you at least half an hour to get there, what with the mud and the floods of people on their way in the opposite direction. Mud marching aside, the 900-acre super-site is what makes the festival what it is. How else would Michael Eavis and Co fit in such a multitude of venues of every different shape and size for every persuasion? Glastonbury is home to not just musical stages but also a cinema, a couple of shower blocks and even a handful of art dealers. There will surely be something for everyone in one of over 100 different stages and even if nothing tickles your musical fancy at 2.15 on Saturday afternoon you can still rely on the cabaret and circus fields to be showcasing some of the best acts worldwide all day every day.

A common misconception of festivals in general is that as soon as you set foot on site you can wave goodbye to hygiene and comfort for the next few days. Mercifully, at Glastonbury this is not the case. As well as the showers, if you're willing to queue up for a bit there are businesses offering hair washing/straightening and even a handful of places to get a manicure. There are also six-man tipis available at an extra cost so that you and your mates can enjoy that bit of extra comfort as well as avoiding the hassle of putting up your own tents on arrival. It's not quite glamping in the Kate Moss vein but it's certainly glammer than putting up your two-manner in a howling gale. Of course, for those on a smaller budget there's still always the option of the Tesco pop-up tent and a packet of wetwipes.

By now I'm sure you're asking yourself, "But what about the beer?" This is a fair question. For those who have been to festivals before the experience of paying £4.50 for a paper cup full of warm lager is probably one they wouldn't choose to repeat. At Glastonbury the organisers have recognised the increasing age and arguable refinement of their audience, offering two reasonably priced real ale bars situated near to two of the more 'dad-friendly' venues. You can sample a full range of the Otter Brewery's products as well as a couple brewed exclusively for the festival; there are also representatives from others from the south-west like Sharp's and the St Austell brewery. Sadly, the paper cups remain.

So it's got showers and a couple of good pubs, there's guaranteed to be someone playing that you want to see: what else do you need? How about a babysitter that'll take care of your kids while you go off gallivanting in your galoshes for the weekend? Glastonbury has that covered too. After returning from my third Glastonbury this year the main thing that left an impression on me

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was the huge number of families that the festival is now attracting . Gone are the days when a festival was the exclusive domain of young people willing to rough it in tents for a few nights . There is so much for the whole family at Glastonbury that there is no reason why you can't bring the kids along. Just remember to put the extreme terrain tyres on the buggy before you leave. The ever-expanding kidz field continues to go from strength to strength and currently boasts a full- size helter-skelter and a giant sandpit. Kids acts have even begun to encroach on the festival-proper, with the Wombles taking to the Avalon stage this year after far too long an absence.

So don't think of Glastonbury as a muddy field in Somerset: think of it as a thriving mini-tropolis complete with roads, neighbourhoods, families and more than its share of quirky charm. Think of it as the third biggest city in the south-west of England, which, for five days a year, is precisely what it is.

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