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Spring Awakening Music Festival Survival Guide





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[Spring Awakening Music Festival](#) (SAMF) had it's second annual electronic dance music (EDM) festival from June 14-16th at Soldier Field.

To go to an all-day concert event such as, say, Warped Tour dressed in black pants and a black t-shirt, stay sober the entire time, and sit off to the side and quietly observe is entirely normal. To do all of the above at Spring Awakening is to stick out like a sore thumb.

It wasn't unusual to see people dressed in tutus or neon bikinis complete with fur boots, or to see men dancing with light-up binky's in their mouths, or even to see concert-goers wearing rabbit masks while chugging down Bud Light.

The tents that lined the pavement would be selling, one would assume, artist merchandise and music. At Spring Awakening, the merchandise of choice included rave glasses, beer, glowing jewelry, and a tent titled 'Funky Stuff', whatever that is.

One cannot stray too far away from the stage without passing the medical tent placed disconcertingly close to it. And even from a good quarter of a mile distance, the music continued to thumpa-thumpa in a way that felt like it was coming from the inside out. As far as the performances themselves go: Let's just say that if I had Epilepsy, I'd be in trouble!

Because getting tipsy or feeling good on questionable substances wasn't in the cards, my tactic was to sit off to the side and write in my notebook. Two men approached me, both inquiring what I was writing about. Upon learning that I was a Journalist in training, they reasoned I was deep and must be a smart girl. It would have been a thousand times more flattering if I could believe they still

remembered ever having said it the morning after, but it was touching nonetheless.

Overall, from the eyes of a newbie, Spring Awakening can be a little overwhelming at first. But the environment is exciting. The music is livening. The people are laid back, inviting, and probably a little influenced by something. It's the kind of place where anyone, no matter who they are, can walk in, join the crowd, and feel like they belong. One attendee's shirt read, "Sex, Drugs, and Dubstep." Could dubstep music be its own version of the wild, freeing, invigorating world of Rock N' Roll? I'd go with yes.

Luckily, as a veteran of SAMF, Becky had an idea of what to expect and comes equipped with great survival guides for all of my fellow Spring Awakening newbies.

The crowds

Once you get over the fact that 90 percent of the people aren't sober and are wearing crazy outfits, not much else surprises you. Most people seemed very nice and every group of people I talked with were happy to help.

The giant mosh of people in front of the stage may look intimidating from a distance, but at SAMF it was pretty easy to navigate. Granted, I didn't have a group of people with me who could potentially get lost, but if you have three or less people, it shouldn't be a problem. At other shows, when you try to push through to get closer to the front it's not so easy but at this festival people either made a direct path or didn't put up a fight.

Although that is true, I'm used to being in large crowds of 20-somethings, so none of this shocked me. So if you're afraid to push your way to the front that's fine too, because it's actually just as fun at the back of the crowd.

There were four stages at SAMF. The first being "Da Colonnade" stage, which was the small stage near the north entrance when you walk in.

Looking toward the left was Da Equinox Stage. It looks like a festival stage and usually had tons of people crowding around it. It was remarkable how this stage was smaller than "Da Main Stage" but was as big as the main stage at Warped Tour at the Midwest Amphitheater. There were bright yellow balloons tied down near the stage as well as a beer tent and a sitting tent toward the back of the stage. This was my favorite stage because it was in the middle of the festival so you could hear the bands as you pass by and get the same experience as a person in the front row. Some bands I remember playing there were Gramatik, Nervo and Zed's Dead.

Going farther south next to the stadium, you see Da Drive Tent stage. It was a tent stage with fun suspended blown-up shapes; almost like pinatas with glitter. This smaller stage was nice because I could get a lot closer to the band and on the hot day Saturday was I could cool down while listening to some party beats.

Last but not least, Da Main stage, a.k.a Soldier Field. Most people stood on the field but the first flight of stands surrounding the stadium were available as well. Every time I walked in there I was in awe of how huge it was and how so many people could fit in one space so easily. The whole festival was very open, but the main stage was definitely the most expansive.

The Music

Despite the atmosphere, this show was about the music. For an avid listener of the genre, I was pleased with the diverse artists. There was some trance; there was trap and of course, dubstep. There were some big names as well as smaller dance bands.

"You experience a lot of different music," a festival goer said.

The only thing I would criticize was the schedule this year. There were great groups like last year but it seemed that one day had more bands to see than the rest.

One festival goer said the days weren't equally distributed with artists, *"I wish it was more spread out. I'm only going on Saturday, but I'm having a blast!"*

On Friday there were bands like Nero, Bingo Players, Zomboy and Moby. A pretty good mix of electronic but not an all-crowd pleaser.

Nero was my favorite because he has a lot of songs that I like and I could tell the crowd did too. When he opened with some clips by Knife Party, people enjoyed it, but everyone really started moving when he played his own tracks.

On Friday, Moby played a great set with awesome pyrotechnics. I'd say less than 75 percent of Soldier Field was filled with people at that point. Moby was big in the '90s and early 2000's. He had more mellow tracks than hard-hitting drops.

On Saturday, it seemed like there were many more bands like Nervo, Felix Da House Cat, Zedd, Gramatik, Zed's Dead, Wolfgang Gartner and Bassnectar to name a few. If there was a god of dubstep that would be Bassnectar. I think the significant difference in crowd size on Saturday night was in part due to Bassnectar.

I had never heard Felix Da House Cat before, but he was great live. Even though he was on a smaller stage, Da Drive Tent stage, it seemed very intimate and I could appreciate his set.

Zedd played an awesome set on Da Equinox Stage. Although he did something similar to Nero in that he played other peoples songs before he started with his, people were pumped up when he played his radio tune "Clarity." He knew how to excite the crowd and I enjoyed every minute of it.

Wolfgang Gartner opened before Bassnectar at Da Main Stage, which shows how popular he has become in the past year. In 2012, he was the fourth or fifth band during the middle of the day, not the band before the headliner. He played a great set that made everybody jump and get hyped for Bassnectar.

Bassnectar's set was unbelievable. There were so many people who all came together to hear him play. I was pretty close to the front, maybe 300 feet or less from the stage. After listening to his set for an hour, at least attempting to do so, I went over to the stands to survey the crowd.

I say attempt to because the bass in his name is no lie. After a while, all I heard was bass and not much else of a beat, but the people ate it up! It isn't my favorite kind of house music but I do like some of his songs.

I was amazed by how much it was filled up, probably even more than a typical Bear's game. The

entire field was packed plus the first set of stands and going back into the concessions.

Then the show reminded me of 2012's SAMF because it started to rain. During Skrillex's set last year, he was on a man-made spaceship on-stage playing his robotic beats while lasers and bright flashes shot out to the crowd. In the middle of his set it started to rain. So instead of seeing a straight line of lasers, they were speckled dots in the sky. Bassnectar's set was similar because it started to rain as well. Some people went to huddle under the stands but most stayed on the field to enjoy the show and it's speckles.

The Culture

The dedication to this show, much like other EDM festivals, is astounding. People go from noon to midnight listening to this music and dancing around, while possibly drinking or taking drugs or both, then go party all night afterwards. If that wasn't enough, they do it again for the next two days.

The rave culture is very interesting and crazy in that sense, but most people are very nice. A lot of the people I talked with during the fest were all about the music, the good vibes, the energy. People with masks over their mouths and beaded bras alike were friendly and were willing to share their bracelets or stories with me.

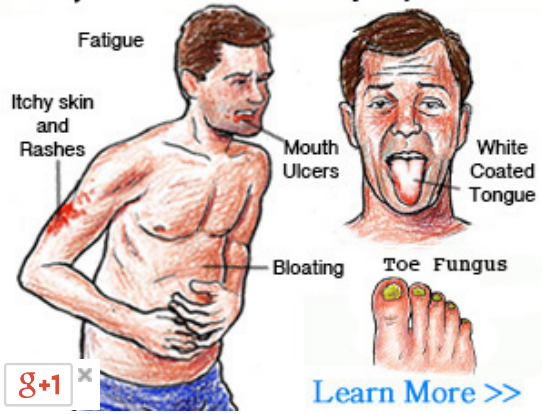
Comparing with 2012

Each year of SAMF was unique, but I think this year was much more organized and bigger. SAMF 2012 was divided into two days instead of three. I think because it was the first year, people were checking it out to see what it would be like to have a major EDM show in Chicago. I do think the line up was better spread out last year but the tickets were just as expensive. At least for me, I had to choose what day I wanted to go. Now that the festival is divided into three days, people have more choices in what day to attend. Plus it seemed more organized, and it seemed many more people attended.

Another festival goer said it didn't sell out in 2012. *"I think it's going to be better this year from all the hype."*

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