

The Inside Loop

Dedicated to Fibre Arts in the United Kingdom

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THE YARN YARD

...don't just knit, knit with art!

Making the most of a Fibre Festival

By Joanne Seiff

Going to a fibre festival is a wonderful experience. Most newbies describe it as truly overwhelming, and many accomplished handspinners, knitters and crocheters also lose their heads when they go to their first event.

Why is it so exciting? Imagine your favourite wool shop, and then multiply it by a hundred. A fibre festival will expose you to more colour, fibre and new concepts than you've probably ever seen before. So, what's first? How can you stay focussed and enjoy this experience to the utmost?

Budget:

Long before the big day arrives, it's important to review exactly how much you can afford to spend. It is truly remarkable how much money can disappear when you let yourself spend with abandon. Hand-dyed silk? Yes, just a little, please! Or a kilo of cashmere? Why not?

In order to stick with a budget, some smart shoppers leave their cheque books and credit cards at home, and just bring cash. Others want to be sure they have enough for a once-in-a-lifetime purchase of a spinning wheel, loom, or other precious item. Whatever your decision in advance, do your best to stick to it.

Some good friends shop together, and hold each other's "plastic money", just to be safe. It sounds silly, but if you have someone



else - someone who is on your side - asking, "Honey, do you really need this?" you might just stop yourself from going completely overboard.

Plan:

Are you planning to come home with a big purchase? Do you want enough yarn for a special sweater or baby booties? Write a list of the yarns, including tension, meterage, colours, and other specifics. Don't forget needles, patterns, and other notions. Come prepared for what you'd like to bring home. This list will come in handy when you're considering just how many skeins of one-of-a kind yarn to buy.



What if your budget is truly small? Festivals are great places to see and experience new things. If you're a spinner, try out new spinning wheels and ask for information and brochures to bring home. See a stunning sweater design? Buy just the pattern, so that you can consider yarn purchases later. Take time to ask questions, visit and learn from demonstrations, and watch all the activity. Look for special bargains and small treats to keep yourself excited about your hobby. Talk to other fair-goers. You'll probably have things in common and make new friends. Other options might include taking a class or visiting the animals on display. It's unlikely you'll come home with your own sheep or angora goat, but you might learn something new!

Prepare:

Festivals are crowded places, often far from home. Bring along something to eat and water to drink. You may not need it, but it's always good to have some food along just in case.

Are you expecting to buy something large? Perhaps a fleece, a loom, or a few sheep? How will you transport them home? Plan ahead by bringing blankets to wrap up your new handmade spinning wheel or dog treats to comfort that new border collie pup. Think out your day carefully so that your purchases will make it home in one piece. There are often vendors that sell fresh sheep's milk cheese or frozen legs of lamb, so if you're looking to buy this for your deep freeze, bring along a cooler or an ice pack. Remember, if whatever you bought started out alive - or frozen - let's hope they make it home that way!



If you have any special needs, such as an inability to stand up for long periods of time or serious allergies, remember to bring whatever you'll need to make yourself feel comfortable. It's OK to take breaks to sit down on a campstool, or to eat only what you

brought from home. Don't expect to find every amenity at the festival grounds. If you're going to need something particular, for example a cup of tea, bring a thermos full, just in case.

Experience:

Relax and enjoy yourself! A day out is supposed to be fun, and it's important to take time to do just that. You may not find exactly what you came to buy, just like a day out at the shops. Instead, focus on what's special, different, handmade, and exquisite about the many things you see for sale. Take time to learn something new and to pet a farm animal you might not normally encounter. Listen to some music and eat a lamb kebab or a new kind of goat's cheese. Open yourself up to all the new delights this event offers. Remember to take lots of photos, and store up memories to dream on... until the next festival!

And the next festival on the UK calendar will be Woolfest, where you will find [The Yarn Yard](#) and many other fascinating vendors. For information on upcoming sheep-and-wool shows, please visit [Woolfest](#), [WonderWool Wales](#) or your local knitting and spinning guilds.

About the Author

Joanne Seiff is a writer and knitwear designer. See more writing and Seiff's patterns at her website, <http://www.joanneseiff.com>. Her first book, *Fiber Gathering*, about U.S. fiber festivals, with over 20 designs, will be published in early 2009.

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