

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

With Glastonbury taking a break this year, you will need to look elsewhere for that elusive festival vibe. But, from graffiti gatherings to the Buddhafield festival, there are plenty of smaller-scale events where you can tune in or drop out

Photo: Rex Features



The organisers of the Glastonbury Festival have recently announced that their next festival in 2007 is to increase its capacity by a further 20,000, which will bring its numbers to 175,000. This is nearly the population of Bath and a far cry from the first Glastonbury Fayre in 1970 which mustered a measly 1,500 unwashed hippies. Regardless of how many people attend, somehow Glastonbury is the epitome of what a festival should be, but what are those elusive qualities?

Part of the very nature of festivals is to celebrate and develop alternative lifestyles. If you have spent a lot of time in the Green Fields at Glastonbury you should be right at home at The Big Green Gathering (www.big-green-gathering.com). It grew out of the Glastonbury Festival and even takes place in Somerset. Commendably, the event has won awards for its disabled camping area which was the first of its kind. "This is the largest outdoor

green event in Europe, if not the world, and we really need to shout about that," shouts organiser Brig Oubrige. The main themes of this year's festival will be 'energy', tackling climate change and the renewal of the anti-nuclear movement.

Protest can take on new and entertaining forms at festivals. The Cannabis Coalition (www.cannabiscoalition.org) organise a protest gathering in Brockwell Park, London each year to bring awareness to their campaign to free the weed. Unfortunately, they were unable to proceed with the event last year and this year's is still to be confirmed. Not because they couldn't get it together but because of restrictions being imposed by the local council who, unsurprisingly, took objection to the open flouting of the law. Undeterred, the Coalition are still searching for a suitable location for this year's gathering.

Strictly speaking The Anarchist Bookfair is a conference and not a festival but, hey, rules are

made for breaking and the spirit of this event embodies what is an essential part of festivals: an open exchange of ideas and free thinking. Set up in 1983, the event at The Resource Centre on Holloway Rd, N7 now attracts 3000 'anti-establishmentists' for discussions and meetings each year and is held in October (freespace.virgin.net/anarchist.bookfair).

A festival needs creativity and although the county of Surrey is better known for being home to wildlife parks and stately homes, for a few days in late June the Aerosolics festival will be ripping it up with live art and graffiti competitions (www.aerosolics.com). Graffiti artists are now known as 'Writers' apparently, and you will be able to watch eight crews battling it out in the first UK round of Write For Gold, which is like the world cup of graffiti competitions with the finals aptly being held in Germany later in the year. ▶