



OPENAIR ST. GALLEN



Photo by Michael Dornbierer

CITY, COUNTRY

St. Gallen, Switzerland

DAILY CAPACITY

27,500

SITE

Nature reserve Sittertobel

CAMPING

Yes

NUMBER OF DAYS

4

ESTABLISHED IN

1977

GENRE

Rock, Pop, Indie, Hip Hop

CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

Encouraging eco-friendly travel by subsidizing train tickets





INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS MEET SWISS NATURE

OpenAir St. Gallen is one of the oldest and biggest open-air music festivals in Switzerland. The first edition took place on the Aetschberg in Abtwil in 1977. Four years later, it moved to its current location, the nature reserve Sittertobel. It is located only about 15 minutes from the local train station and is named after the river Sitter, which forms a natural border of the festival site.

“What is unique about OpenAir St. Gallen is that the campsite is integrated into the festival site. When you enter the

festival site, you set up camp for 4 whole days and nights which creates an extraordinary ambiance,” explains Désirée Messmer, the staff and volunteer’s manager. Messmer is also responsible for sustainability, the organising committee, and public inquiries at OpenAir St. Gallen.



Photos by Julius Hatt (top) and Daniel Gassner

MOTIVATING VISITORS TO TRAVEL ECO-FRIENDLY

“Acting sustainably has always been a major concern here at OpenAir St. Gallen, not least because the festival takes place in a nature reserve,” Messmer says. The first sustainability projects were implemented in 1994 and new ones have been added every year. These include the challenges around audience travel: CO₂ emissions caused by

visitors’ travel arrangements are one of the biggest sources of greenhouse gases for every festival.

Therefore, OpenAir St. Gallen encourages visitors to use eco-friendly means of travel instead of cars and planes.

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Photo by Manuel Lopez

PUBLIC TRANSPORT & REGIONAL PARTNERS

OpenAir St. Gallen recognised that one of the reasons festival goers prefer to arrive by car rather than public transport is because the latter is oftentimes more expensive. As a result, the festival subsidises traveling by public transport to make it more affordable for its audience.

The city buses as well as shuttle buses between parking/main station and festival site have been included in the festival ticket since the very beginning. Up until 2013, the festival offered a 20% discount on train tickets bought together with the festival ticket. When festival and train tickets were bought at the same time, visitors received a further 5% discount on the festival ticket.

In 2014, the discount on festival tickets was abolished, but since then, festival goers have received a 50% discount on train tickets to the festival. To make this possible, OpenAir St. Gallen works with the national railway company, Swiss Federal Railways (SFR). Messmer explains that the festival goers pay 50% of their train tickets, the festival 30% and SFR 20%. Negotiation attempts of a 100% discount have so far led nowhere,

because the festival couldn't afford the several hundred thousand francs SFR would charge for this deal.

In addition to supporting public transport, the festival tries to make travelling by car less attractive. There is only a limited number of parking spaces (3000), which are expensive, costing 60 Swiss francs (approx. 58 Euro) each for four days. Over the years, the festival has increased the number of visitors who arrive with public transport, by bike or on foot to 83% in 2019 (in 2010, the number had still been at 47%).

To keep transport distances as short as possible, OpenAir St. Gallen works with regional partners whenever possible, Messmer says. Rental cars are provided by a company from St. Gallen, audio and light services are offered by companies from the city itself and from Herisau (about 13 kilometres away), and the reusable dishes come from a company in Niederwil (approx. 18 kilometres away).

THE SOLUTION



BECOMING CLIMATE-NEUTRAL THROUGH OFFSETTING

In other areas, the festival has not yet introduced solutions to decrease carbon dioxide emissions. For example: artists who fly into Switzerland for the festival. “In 2019, we had a lot of acts from neighbouring countries, and as a matter of fact, the CO₂ emissions in travel dropped rapidly,” Messmer remembers. “If we wanted to significantly reduce CO₂ emissions from travel, we would have to rely on regional artists as a matter of principle. However, we always want to offer our audience an up-to-

date and appealing line-up, so sometimes we also fly in headliners from overseas.”

Instead of forgoing these artists, OpenAir St. Gallen has been offsetting its residual carbon emissions since 2019 by investing in climate protection projects. According to its own reports, this makes OpenAir St. Gallen the first major open-air festival in Switzerland to become climate-neutral.



WHAT'S NEXT?

For the 2022 edition, OpenAir St. Gallen has installed new sanitary facilities, which according to Messmer use up to 80% less water on average. The festival will also collect leftover food from the food stalls, backstage and at selected spots in the audience area for the first time. “Our partner, Jakob Bösch AG, will use these food leftovers to produce biogas after the festival,” Messmer told us.