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Austin, Texas has been the home of a flourishing art and music scene for over two decades. Despite being in the heart of a fairly conservative state, this college town is home to innovators and bohemians alike. The South by Southwest Festival is one of the best Austin festivals and is one of the largest art festivals in the world. Thousands of visitors descend on the town each March or April for 10 days of exciting performances and social opportunities.

The History Of The Festival

The SXSW Music Festival first took place in 1987. Originally put on as a small city festival to showcase local talent, it had an attendance of over 500 people even in the first year. In 2011 the festival had over 20,000 attendees. Some of the biggest names in popular culture have spoken or performed at SXSW over the years. While the first few years only included a musical component, the Multimedia and Film portions were added in 1994. The Multimedia component was later renamed to SXSW Interactive and continues to use that name. The multiple components allow the SXSW Music Festival to be a full film and technology event as well.

Most of the festival events take place in or around the Austin Convention Center. Shuttles and taxis bring festival visitors in from all of the area hotels and run to events held at other concrete venues, art galleries or display areas around the city. Finding a hotel near the convention center is tricky even if you book a room early and don't mind paying a premium. High demand means guests are making reservations for the next year before returning home from Austin. Picking a hotel that is in another area of the city will increase your travel times each day, but it is often the only choice.

Planning Your Visit

Once you have secured comfortable accommodations and purchased your wristband for the Austin festivals, it is time to check the SXSW schedule for the year and make your plans. There are plenty of different events to choose from. Since they are scheduled back to back, you will have to choose which to attend and which to miss. It is impossible to get across town within a few minutes to visit the next workshop or screening even without the extra traffic created by the festival. You can choose an equal number of musical and film events, or just focus on the interactive offerings. Stick to the live performances and art exhibits if you prefer. SXSW can even be a business opportunity if you do some networking at the various social gatherings worked into the schedule.

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