

OKTOBERFEST 2021: TO BE OR NOT TO BE



No one knows whether the Oktoberfest 2021 will take place or not, but reservation requests are already piling up at the festival tents.

"The response is very positive," says organizers. "People are eager to come." In contrast, there is noticeable restraint in hotel bookings. According to hotel chains and travel portals, they are receiving fewer reservations, bookings and search queries for overnight accommodations for the Oktoberfest.

Oktoberfest 2021 Planned from September 18 to October 3

In normal years, over six million visitors come to the world's largest folk festival during the two festival weeks. **They drink, sing and celebrate in the tents in a very confined space.** Without effective vaccination protection, the festival would have all the makings of an international super-spreader event. This year, the Oktoberfest is scheduled from September 18 to October 3.

Nevertheless, according to the organizers, most regular guests have already secured their seats. About 95% of them have ordered their regular tables as they did in 2019. Only very few have canceled. Most reservations come from guests from Munich and the surrounding region, but there are also inquiries from abroad.

It is estimated that the chance for an Oktoberfest 2021 taking place is fifty-fifty. Many are quite confident. But it mostly depends on the vaccination rate to the date.

Hotels, on the other hand, are showing restraint despite often accommodating cancellation policies. The demand for rooms during the Oktoberfest has been "sparse" so far, according to the Motel One chain. Normally, it is significantly higher. "There are some indications that people don't really believe that the Oktoberfest is taking place this year," says a spokesman. "Or that interest is low in view of the pandemic."

Still Plenty of Hotel Rooms Available

The travel agency Expedia also reported that many potential out-of-town guests do not believe in Oktoberfest 2021 - or would not take part in it. The interest for the period is more restrained than in the years before Corona, it says. "However, the booking figures for the Oktoberfest historically always increase towards the end of May or the beginning of June." The lower interest has not yet had an impact on prices.

There are thus plenty of hotel rooms - and tables are also still available, according to Inselkammer. But on Saturdays, it is already getting very crowded, and the planned opening date is practically booked out.

According to the landlords, early June is the latest time to cancel or commit to the Oktoberfest. The city is expected to give the thumbs up or thumbs down in May.

Mayor Dieter Reiter said recently that he would not place any bets on the Oktoberfest in 2021. "One

can be very sceptical." Minister-President Markus Söder takes a similar view: "I think the Lord Mayor's scepticism is absolutely justified and I share it, even if there can be no final assessment today."

Oktoberfest "Light" as an Alternative

The director of the Oktoberfest and Munich's economic advisor Clemens Baumgärtner wants to make a decision as late as possible in order to take advantage of all opportunities "If we don't see an Oktoberfest, we'll have to think about a summer in the city again. That will then certainly take place. In the process, carousels and booths had been set up decentralized and at a distance in the city last year. The exhibitors also hope for a repetition in the event of another Oktoberfest cancellation. But: "Oktoberfest "light" is not the Oktoberfest," says the director of the organizing company of the Munich showmen, Yvonne Heckl.

"A slimmed-down version is not the Oktoberfest. We don't want that," says the spokesman of Inselkammer. "With masks, limited seating and spacing in the tent: that makes no economic sense - and that's not the Oktoberfest as we love and want it. It's no fun." **A vaccination certificate or negative Corona test as an "admission ticket" is not an option in the view of the hosts.** "This is not presentable." Even in the past, random checks at the entrances to the Oktoberfest have occasionally been a challenge.

Another cancellation would cost the hosts a lot of money. Inselkammer alone estimates the running costs without the Oktoberfest at 400,000 euros. The economic value of the world's largest folk festival is 1.2 to 1.3 billion euros.

In 2020, compared to the previous year, not even half of the tourists came to Munich. Guests from the USA, China or the Arab Gulf States were almost completely absent. Business travelers practically stayed away entirely. A total of 2.99 million arrivals in "commercial accommodation establishments" were registered last year. In the previous year, there were more than twice as many: 8.75 million. And instead of more than 18 million overnight stays, the city only counted seven million in the pandemic year. Oktoberfest 2021 would thus be a much-needed boost for the budget of local companies as well as the city.

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