

# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Hidden in the mountains of British Columbia is a boundary breaking music festival that's kicking taboos to the curb and approaching public safety and harm reduction from a refreshingly human perspective...

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**T**he West Kootenays are woke, but that's nothing new. Once a destination for silver rushers of the late 1800s, the culturally rich region of British Columbia was built on the promise of a better life. In the '60s, the lush locale became a verified hideout for evaders of the Vietnam War draft, and today the evergreen encrusted mountains outside of Kelowna remain a mecca for counterculture's loyal crusaders. Perpetuating that movement is Shambhala Music Festival, an independently run arts and music event that embodies the same whimsical spirit of those wayward travelers who first stepped foot on the mythical grounds hundreds of years ago. Set in a picturesque valley on a cattle and produce farm known as Salmo River Ranch, Shambhala is like another world with its massive immersive structures, state-of-the-art production and forested backdrop. Its come-as-you-are vibe of acceptance and non-judgment are atypical of the modern world too.

What began as a private gathering for a few hundred friends in the middle of the woods has become the stuff of legend, lauded by electronic fans and artists alike as one of the world's best music festivals. The first iteration was a modest one, and it would take time before names like dubstep virtuoso Excision and three-time Scribble Jam DJ winner Skratch Bastid would become synonymous with the event. But when something is this valuable, it will eventually be unearthed, just like the precious metals that once sat deep within its hills.

Founder Jimmy Bundschuh may have gotten this ethereal party started when he was just 18 years old, but 22 years later, his values remain the same — keep it community-driven, keep it anti-corporate, and keep it safe. And damn, does he have a stellar team to reinforce that last intention.

## A HAPPY HOME

When we arrive on Thursday morning we are welcomed like family, or "farmily", as the artists, staff, and longtime attendees refer to one another. For the next four days, Shambhala will operate like

a quaint town complete with vendors who sell colorful, homespun parasols and food items like hamburgers made from the ranch's own livestock. Yoga and flower-crown crafting workshops blossom in the garden that's set between two of the six fully produced stages (or seven if you include the secret Rabbit Hole stage that festival goers may "fall into" by accident). Safe havens like "The Sanctuary" provide solace to those who need a quiet place to rest and unwind if anxiety rears its ugly head, and there's even a fully stocked pharmacy onsite, should an attendee need medication for an unexpected ailment or infection. The only common commodities attendees won't find are beer and hard alcohol. The general consensus among Shambhala's founders and leadership is this: alcohol impairs decision making, and in an environment where people are likely to experiment with drugs, it's best to minimize the risks. However, the desire to drink is a faraway itch for most people on the farm. To fans, Shambhala is home — a place where they feel whole, loved and taken care of. "All of our public safety services are anonymous and judgment free," explains Shambhala Public Safety

Coordinator, Simon Hunt. "We don't want people to be afraid and not come to us; we just want them to come." Hunt, whose love for Shambhala began when he was a funk drummer with a general admission ticket, has officially served on the leadership team for nine years. His respect for his "home away from home" can be heard in his words, and felt in his warm, dark eyes.

Hunt gets shit done. More than 25 years of experience in emergency management — where he has descended from helicopters into forest fires and coordinated mountain rescues — make him the right fit.

"It's a combination of my life's greatest passions — EDM, nature, and helping people in their time of need," Hunt emphasizes. "It's a very special role for me to play, and I love emanating that essence of care and safety throughout the festival." He is one of about 1,000 people, a third of all volunteers and staff, who are dedicated to public safety. The festival sees approximately 12,000 ticket holders, plus an additional 2,000 artists and industry members each year, so there are many

