

# WHY DO EVENTS COST WHAT THEY DO – AND ARE THEY WORTH IT?



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**A** full pass to the DC Bachata Congress is \$199, but at the New York Salsa Congress it's \$299. In London or Oxford a salsa lesson and social is around £7 but with a live band it bumps up to £10. in Bordeaux you can get 3 hours of workshop with Felicien and Isabelle plus a kizomba party with pro DJ for 25€, but in Dublin you pay 30€ for only 2 hours with them plus a normal party.

Even if you've been dancing for a while, it can be difficult to understand the variation in pricing. Let's run through some of the constraints that all organizers have to consider when pricing their events, and how it affects you.



## Venue

For most events, the cost of the venue is the largest part of the budget. It's not always easy to find a space that has a danceable floor, will rent to you at a convenient time, and is the right size for your event. Different cities or even neighborhoods have wildly different rental costs. For my weekend kizomba workshops, I have paid anywhere from \$20 to \$150 an hour for a studio. For a blues weekend event I helped with, it took months to scout a Saturday night venue that wouldn't charge us thousands of dollars. Obviously in large cities, space is at a premium, but rental cost can also be high in smaller towns that have few event venues. In the town you live in, you'll soon get a sense for what a normal baseline price is, but when you're traveling you will want to consider this before dismissing an event as unreasonably priced.

## Instructor Time

There is a huge price range when it comes to hiring different instructors. I wish I could tell you it was based on competence, so that a more expensive event always meant better teaching! In reality, it's a combination of factors: whether the instructor depends on dance for their livelihood, how popular they are on YouTube, whether the organizer has a personal relationship with them, how long they've been teaching, and so on. For many events, having certain instructors is the whole point, and so the pricing will have to be built around the instructor's fees.



You also have to look at how many instructors and how many concurrent class times are going to be offered at the event. Logically, more instructors costs more money and is a better opportunity for you. However, upon investigating the schedule of a large event you may find that certain instructors will teach on just one day of the weekend or only at a certain level.

## Instructor Travel

This one tends to be a little more straightforward.

The longer (if not the farther) the instructor has to travel, the more expensive it's going to be. Events advertising international instructors will tend to be more expensive. That said, many organizers cleverly list their instructors' place of origin rather than their current dwelling to make you feel that you are paying for a special opportunity.

### DJ or Band Cost

A general rule is that a live band costs more than a DJ, a large band costs more than a small one, and a pro DJ costs more than an amateur. For some events, there may also be travel costs associated with bringing the music. As with instructors, the renown of these musical professionals will also make a difference in price.

### Equipment Hire

There may be other assorted costs when organizing an event: sound systems, wood floors for carpeted hotel venues, cameras and other recording equipment, printing costs, etc. While you may not be able to guess at them before attending, they can add significantly to the costs organizers need to cover.



### Pricing of Other Events

Particularly with party nights or one-day workshops, it's important for organizers to price competitively so that they keep their local attendance. Sometimes in larger scenes that results in events costs being pretty low, because promoters start undercutting each other in an attempt to win people. Larger events can vary more from their competitors particularly since they may have quite different expenses, but if they aren't offering a unique experience, dancers may choose other events for their travel plans.

### Expected Attendance

Assuming the event just needs to break even, the price of a ticket would be the total of all the expenses divided by the number of people coming. In scenes where organizers can expect a lot of people to come out, prices can be much lower. This is also one of the reasons that large events with pre-registration may only announce price hikes one deadline at a time. Based on the number of people that register in each tier, the organizers can calculate how much they must charge in order to make their money back.

### Profit

Did you know that some dance events are organized by non-profit organizations? It's

quite common in the world of lindy hop and blues dancing, but there are also Latin events like the Grand Canyon Salsa



Festival(<http://grandcanyonsalsafestival.com/>), which seek only to cover their costs. It's rather more the exception than the rule.

Still, many promoters have a philosophy of making things as affordable as they can for the dancers in their scene. They aim to run at just enough profit that they have a buffer against lower attendance or unexpected expenses. There are also a fair few organizers seek to make a large profit from their events. Considering the amount of work that goes into them, though, it makes sense that some organizers would want to get some return on all the time and effort they invest.

### **So, is this event worth it?**

What are you as a dancer to make of all this? If you live in a place that doesn't have too many dance events in your preferred style, it's likely you'll attend them regardless of how competitively they are priced. If, on the other hand, you have many to choose from, or if you're trying to decide among several festivals you might choose to fly to, cost is probably not the only factor you're thinking about. Here are some thoughts from your fellow dancers on how to decide if an event is worth the cost of attending.

### **Music**

"The music. It always comes down to the music. If I can get a decent fix of blues music at a blues dance exchange, I'll do the dance exchange. [...] I'd rather dance on my own to great music at a festival with no other blues dancers than be grumpy at a blues exchange that doesn't schedule enough blues music," says Ruth in Melbourne.

Some of you love to dance while a band plays, some want to hear the DJ live mixing, and some would rather dance to old favorites in the versions they know. Many of you need to have certain genres well represented (Dominican bachata, urban kizomba, salsa romantica...) or you won't show up. Music is the foundation and inspiration of our dancing, after all!

### **Instructors and Classes**

"With expensive events the consideration is also what classes are being offered and will I actually gain something by attending," says Nina in Sydney.

If your main reason for attending an event is to learn something new and improve your dancing, the most important place to check is the event schedule. I have opted not to attend an event simply because there was no schedule or list of class offerings, even just two weeks before the event. I agree that it's important to know what you



might gain before shelling out for a pass.

### Who Else is Coming

Richard in Boston says, “I tend to go to events that I think my friends and/or classmates would probably attend, and whether there’s live music.”

Ravi in Wellington, NZ shares, “If I

know there are some amazing dancers and I know I will treasure that moment forever then it is an amazing party to go to. In some way I can ignore everything else but the beat and it gives meaning and purpose to my existence,”

This is why Facebook has lists you can look at in events for “Attending” “Interested” and “Not Going,” right? We all want to go where the party will be good and we can enjoy time with our friends.

### Event Culture

When I say event culture, I mean the values and attitude encouraged by and present at the event. For example, I like events that emphasize teaching the culture and authentic origins of a dance.

What matters to Brodie in Melbourne is “whether they have a solid safer spaces policy/code of conduct/whatever is high on my list because I’m sick to fucking death of events not having this stuff sorted out.”

For Jurni (<https://www.facebook.com/joan.m.roco>) in the USA, “The friendliness of the community is on the top of my list. Without question, the smaller communities are the easiest. Though I’ve seen large communities, through the efforts of the organizers really make it work. A great example is an event in Seattle where out-of-towners were given special bracelets, locals were told to make sure we were friended and danced. And we were.

“I have a special reason for needing a friendly community. You see, I’m transgender. I’ve been told, at a dance event, that I shouldn’t be here, that I should go to SF and dance there. I’ve attended a dance and wondered why I’m refused, only to learn later that there is an unwritten rule against same sex dancing by the organizers.”

Of course, even in a city like San Francisco that is well known as a stronghold for the LGBTQ

community, a tolerant culture is no guarantee. I got drawn into a FB discussion reacting to the SF Zouk Congress’s selling lead passes “for men only” and follower passes “for women only.” I found the organizers’ rationale unsatisfactory and I know

Ticket Information		Powered by 			
TICKET TYPE	REMAINING	SALES END	PRICE	FEE	QUANTITY
SUPER EARLY BIRD - Lead (men only)	Sold Out	Jul 28, 2016	\$135.00	\$8.42	Sold Out
SUPER EARLY BIRD - Follow (ladies only)	Sold Out	Jul 28, 2016	\$135.00	\$8.42	Sold Out
EARLY BIRD - Lead (men only)	Sold Out	Jul 28, 2016	\$145.00	\$8.97	Sold Out
EARLY BIRD - Follow (ladies only)	Sold Out	Jul 28, 2016	\$145.00	\$8.97	Sold Out
3rd Lot - Lead (men only)	Sold Out	Jul 28, 2016	\$160.00	\$9.79	Sold Out
3rd Lot - Follow (ladies only)	Sold Out	Jul 28, 2016	\$160.00	\$9.79	Sold Out
4th Lot - Lead (men only)	Sold Out	Jul 28, 2016	\$175.00	\$10.62	Sold Out
4th Lot - Follow (ladies only)	Sold Out	Jul 28, 2016	\$175.00	\$10.62	Sold Out
FINAL LOT - Lead (men only)	4 Tickets	Jul 28, 2016	\$190.00	\$11.44	<input type="text" value="0"/> 
FINAL LOT - Follow (ladies only)	2 Tickets	Jul 28, 2016	\$190.00	\$11.44	<input type="text" value="0"/> 

something similar would turn me off attending another event.

### The Package

Angela in Fort Collins, CO does a nice job of putting it all together: "I like to think of things in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. I look at all the things

that are being offered at the event - who's teaching and what's being taught (if there's workshops included), where the event is located and how easy it is for me to travel to it, and anything that makes it stand out from your run-of-the-mill dance event (i.e. silly contests, food, jazz or bar crawls, social activities). I weigh all of this against the cost of the event and the cost of traveling to it."

I'd say my own decision-making process takes into account all of these factors. While none of them individually are enough to make me register and pay, a failure in any of them could certainly disqualify them from my itinerary. Ideally, I'd like to attend a reasonably-priced event with quality music, competent instructors, and an inclusive culture that some of my friends are also attending.



What about you? Is there one thing that makes or breaks an event for you? Do you have an equation you use to calculate an event's worth? Share in the comments below!