The Arnold Classic Experience: What I wish I Knew  
  
Tanned skin, pumped muscles, deafening excitement, and more caffeine and protein powder thrown at you than could ever be imagined; THIS. IS. THE. AHHHNNNOLD!

It doesn’t matter if fitness is your passion or you are simply a grandma of a grandson who lifts occasionally on the weekends, you have heard of the Arnold Classic. A weekend of chaotic high-energy meet and greets, picture taking, line waiting, and competitions that range from bodybuilding to fencing to even pole dancing, this is THE weekend of all weekends for fitness! Sure the Olympia stage might be bigger in competition, but with its convenient location in Columbus Ohio, the Arnold Classic is collectively the largest health and fitness expo in the world!

Have you ever experienced a quarter million people in one place at one time? If not, you can for only $20 a day! Being this was my first experience, I had both high expectations, while at the same time really had no expectations.   
Here's what I learned that I believe are things to know for those planning to attend next year:

**How BIG is Big?**

It is bigger than you can ever imagine it to be! It’s hard to put into perspective just how many people actually attend this event, but I am willing to bet if you have never been, there is no way to wrap your mind around it, until you get there! While at times you feel like a herd of sheep being prodded around, the atmosphere is hard to have any form of sour attitude.

**Packing**

No need to over pack your suitcase for the weekend, but expect to come home with more than you came with! This might be obvious, but you definitely don't need much more than a few gym outfits and 1-2 nice outfits for the weekend! You will spend the majority of time in the same clothes so save that potential room for all the samples you will bring home. Don't forget a jacket though! It's Ohio in early March, don't be surprised if it snows one day or is 20 degrees. You will be spending some time walking outside to the expo and the 15 minutes of showcasing your aesthetic physique getting to the expo is not worth catching a cold!

**Accommodations**

Staying as close to the expo as possible, even if it's more expensive up front; you will end up saving money and time if you can avoid the hefty parking prices that can start at $20/day and dead-stop traffic! While hotels are the obvious choice, adventure out and look at nearby air B&B’s for a more home-like feel. I had the chance to visit a few during my stay and the pricing can be extremely affordable for what you get! There are plenty of restaurants around the convention center, so having a car is not needed. If traveling is a must to get to the expo, restaurant, gym or store, various taxi services like Uber are everywhere!

**Workouts**

Try different gyms at different times! If you are trying to engulf yourself in the experience and meet your favorite people, then going to places like Powerhouse Gym, Beyond Limits, and Crunch Fitness all are perfect for that. Nearly anytime of the day you are sure to experience the madness, even more so in the morning and evenings! If you are trying to get a real workout in, expect to travel outside of the city! Unless in contest prep, I recommend just enjoying your weekend and taking workouts light-hearted. If you are committed to a workout program, treat this week as a deload week and just enjoy your time. Be prepared to have the “whatever is available” mentality when at the gym.

**Stocking up on Samples**

If you are wanting samples of supplements, go early morning and if at all possible go both Friday and Sunday. Saturday is complete madness and unless you enjoy 2 hour lines at your favorite supplement company’s booth for a few samples and maybe a slice of a protein bar, you won't be accessibly getting much! One interesting note I learned while at the expo this year, was that companies are moving more towards pre made samples, opposed to packaged samples. Make sure to eye out the booth before committing yourself to waiting in a long line if you are not needing an immediate tasting and are looking for samples to take home.

**Water is a Must**

Stay hydrated! Between all the walking, talking, and pre workout samples you will be downing, dehydration is all too common. Staying hydrated will keep your energy up and reduce a chance of headaches away. I recommend carrying around at least one, if not two, water bottles throughout the day and not always opting for the pre made pre workout sample when there is BCAA’s offered.

**Prioritize like Pacman**

Prioritize the booths and people you want to meet first! Do not feel you need to follow the booths in order; knock out the important ones first or you may find yourself at the end of a line 700 people long! Hitting the perimeter of the expo is the fastest way to reach your destinations, but regardless of your path you take, you will feel like a human version of Pacman making lefts and rights to get to your destination and avoiding people coming at you.

**The Buddy System**

Phone service is non-existent inside the expo so if you have a friend, keep an eye on them! Okay, you may have service, but it will be delayed and trying to find anyone is like a needle in a haystack... a very large haystack at that! Have a game plan in case you lose one another so you can quickly rejoin and continue the experience together!

**Approaching Inspirations**

If you see someone you look up to, don't be afraid to approach them, but make it the right time. Fitness inspirations/athletes are usually more than happy to be engaged with, but don't be a dick and interrupt their workouts or when they are eating. Be respectful and give them their space when they are trying to fit in some personal time for themselves.  
  
Ultimately the Arnold experience is liking asking a person what to expect a trip to Vegas to be like: it's completely unique and you can make it what you want it to be! Collectively I would say it's chaotic, fast paced, and high energy! It's incredibly fun and incredibly tiring at the same time. At times your patience will be tested, but with a little planning ahead of time, your experience will be a positive one with memories and friendships that can last a lifetime.