

By [Jessica Webb](#)

PAX is one of the most exhilarating things I do each year. PAX lasts only four days, but the thrill permeates throughout the whole year. For those who don't cosplay, the excitement begins with the attempt to purchase tickets. (For those who DO cosplay, the excitement begins months or years in advance as they choose characters to recreate, spending money and creative juices on perfecting the look).

Ticket sales are not announced in advance and tickets sell out in a matter of minutes. The moment I learn PAX tickets are on sale, I drop everything and immediately visit the PAX site to get in "the queue." This queue is unlike any other line where I'd be able to monitor my glacial progress toward the front. Instead, I must simply sit and wait and hope that I'm one of the lucky ones who joined in time. If I cosplay, this is even more critical as I've already invested a good deal into this experience. It's a group effort and I coordinate with friends to see who will hit the front first and buy our tickets.



The ticket gamble

This year tickets for Friday are already sold out when I join the queue. Over the next 30 minutes I watch Saturday sell out, and then Sunday. Pessimism creeps in as I think I'm too late - that this is the year I won't get to go: Game over.

Suddenly it's my turn! There are still tickets, even if just for one day! I tell my friends to jump out of the queue: I've won!

Over the next few weeks, I have many sad conversations with people who didn't manage to snag tickets at all. I check my mail obsessively to make sure I don't miss the tickets. When they arrive, I plaster the envelope to my fridge. I check the PAX site daily to see if the schedule is up. When it is, I plan out my entire day minute for minute, and then I create a backup plan.

A single day at pax

I get up in the morning, groggy but enthused, and eagerly dole out our PAX badges like Christmas presents. At the Convention Center, I finally view the PAX ticket queue embodied: Here are the thousands who battled for tickets; we are brothers in arms, all awaiting the opening of the doors with palpable anticipation.

PAX is becoming more like Disneyland each year: It's a huge event with a dizzying array of possibilities, and the line for each activity is like waiting for Space Mountain. The doors open and I rush inside at a fast walk, exiting the crush of bodies. I immediately forget my plan and backup plan. My new plan is "Don't wait for anything," and my new goal is to see as much as I can without waiting in any more lines.

PAX's Monday crowd and me with my PAX badge.

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First we speed toward the virtual reality demos upstairs. That is a fabulous decision as we beat the crowd to try some amazing gear developed by VRTX ([to see more about the VRTX VR headset, see my fellow Blinker, Brian's blog about VR at PAX](#)).



Here I am trying out the VRTX headset.

Here I am trying out the VRTX headset.

Next we rush down to the Expo Hall to catch the exhibitions and try out some games. The hall is overwhelming - it's dark, loud, packed, and full of giant-themed displays and colorful attractions. The wait to try an Oculus exceeds an hour. Lines for the most popular games have been capped, as the staff isn't sure everyone already in line will even have time to play. We barely pause to watch a lady ride a mechanical bucking dragon, then zoom by some PAX-goers in puffy sumo-like animal suits wrestling in a cage fight. We breeze through the Twitch area to check tournament scores then stop to pick up cool merch, drool over neat metal dice, and find out more about an awesome startup that 3D-prints custom miniatures for tabletop gaming.

PAX-goer riding a mechanical bucking dragon.

PAX-goer riding a mechanical bucking dragon.

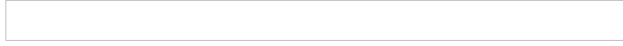
Me with a Monster Hunter axe at PAX

Me with a Monster Hunter axe.

We sacrifice some time to visit one of our favorite web comic artists, Abby Howard, and get

sketches from her. She draws a picture of me as a cat and I can't contain my smile. Later, I see that she made this web comic about her experience at PAX, which basically says it all.

Our group samples a bunch of indie games: Moonrise, Xing, Gemini, Adventure Time, Shovel Knight, Wander, Pop Bugs, and Together to name a few. I beat the tar out of my friend at a goofy little game called Super Rookery, which we giddily play with some ye olde NES controllers. I win candy. I test play a co-op game with a stranger and we make friends playing together. It's magical.



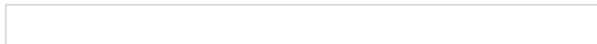
I win at Super Rookery and receive some candy and a business card.

We drop by the crowded handheld lounge briefly just to check it out, but don't have time to stop and play since we are rushing to catch a panel on trolling, but the lounge looks pretty packed anyway.

Gamers in the handheld lounge.

Gamers in the handheld lounge.

At the panel I laugh at the fact that all the former trolls are now community managers at major gaming companies. Their stories are hilarious! However, we have to leave early to make the very last session of D&D. We rush a couple of blocks over to the D&D 5E host hotel to check in, create characters, and familiarize ourselves with the new rules. This edition doesn't necessarily use a grid or map like I'm used to, so it is a little weird, but I get to play a rogue and sneak attack some undead. Fellow Blinker Brian joins in the fun.



Brian and I on our way to try some D&D 5E.

After lunch, I play Xing while using the Oculus—the one thing that I bother to wait in line for, all of 25 minutes. During the wait, I make friends with some guys ahead of me and talk to them about their difficulty meeting women gamers as lady after lady walks by. Playing Xing with the Oculus is an awe-inspiring experience, especially since Xing is a beautiful game.

Playing Xing with the Oculus headset.

Playing Xing with the Oculus headset.

Finally, we dash to Benaroya Hall just in time to catch the end of the Omegathon with thousands of attendees cheering together, united in their love of games. We also watch PAX creators Mike and Jerry duke it out in a competitive round of Pac-Man, which is extraordinarily amusing.

Because it's the final day of PAX, everything is closing early and we accept that we have packed in as many fun things as possible. We head to a pub for drinks and to revel in the story of our day.

Findings & recommendations

So there you have it: PAX is just too big to do in one day. It's difficult to get tickets, especially for more than one day. We end up having to run from place to place to even get a taste of the fun things we want to experience. However we ARE able to do a lot of fun things that we wouldn't be able to experience anywhere else, like sample indie and unreleased games, and try new gaming technologies.

On the whole, PAX is an unparalleled experience, but as a PAX veteran I have some recommendations for helping attendees get the most out of their day:

- I think it would be great to see reservations for popular game trials for those on a limited time budget, as well as a more streamlined daily schedule so it's easy to diversify one's activities.
- I'd love to see more monitors around streaming the tournaments and game demos while I'm waiting in line to attend a panel or a D&D session.
- I'd also love to see the size of the handheld lounge doubled, as it's obviously a popular place to meet fellow gamers while taking a break from the bustle.

The excitement of PAX is still hanging with me, like Christmas lights you can't bear to take down. I can't wait to go back again next year!

Jessica is a member of the project management team at Blink UX specializing in advocating for gamers. When not shepherding projects she can be found indulging her passion for exploring digital universes.