



Tickets to OSCON are expensive, but one of the free hall or exposition passes will also get you into many of the sponsored sessions.



4,400 attendees create a buzzing hive mind of ideas, connections and possibilities.

OSCON 2014

Graham Morrison travels almost 5,000 miles from the Shire to the biggest open source conference on the planet.

We've been going to O'Reilly's Open Source Convention – better known as OSCON, for eight years. Not just because of the incredible number of fine India Pale Ales on offer, or the highest concentration of microbreweries this side of the Orion Spur, but because Portland is a friendly, warm and creative city host to an incomparable variety of bars, beards and body art; the perfect backdrop to a week of geek communion.

And each successive year here helps OSCON imbibe more of Portland's spirit. This year's event was noticeably less corporate and less ostentatiously

sponsored, for example. Of course, there's still the major backers – bluehost.com, PayPal, Citrix, Google and HP plus a plethora of smaller companies. But many of the extracurricular functions wouldn't be possible without their contributions. Monday night's Attendee Party, for instance, with its surreal combination of oxygen bar, quad-copters, bungee-trampolines and glittery cupcakes was funded by three different sponsors. However, this year's event felt hackier, more makery and more open source-friendly than previous events – truer to its roots as a Perl conference, and we enjoyed the difference. All of

which gave the many, many corridor meetings, the Birds of a Feather get-to-togethers, the after-session parties and the sessions themselves an atmosphere not unlike a University campus.

This year's event started unusually on a Sunday (and singularly; Monday–Friday service resumes in 2015), and one of the most inspirational parts of this year's conference was that you saw children in the halls and corridors, and sometimes, in the sessions themselves. This was because on the first day, Sunday, there was the beta version of an experimental track that O'Reilly called Kids Day. On this track, 70 kids of all ages – and we spoke to attendees who could have been anywhere between 6 to 16 – got their hands dirty learning Python, modding a Java game with a touchscreen Raspberry Pi or hacking *Minecraft*.

Open Source satellites

This refreshing approach continued through to Tuesday's keynotes, where you had to pity the sponsors that followed enthusiastic teenage coder Shadaj Laddad, after he delivered a talk full of wonder and the freshly squeezed potential he's found through programming. We also loved Wendy Chisholm's coming out session for introverts, where she, along with what appeared to be 95% of the other attendees, admitted that they're not super-confident supreme beings after all, and keeping up appearances can be exhausting. But it was Will Marshall's final talk on the briefcase-sized imaging satellites his company is launching that got us emailing Planet Labs to ask for an interview. They're throwing hundreds of these units into orbit and creating a system that updates a complete image model of the Earth every 72 hours, potentially down to individual fields, houses and trees. More importantly, they're going to create an open API to deliver universal access to this data, and to allow anyone to perform their own analysis. Each satellite is also powered by a tiny x86 computer running Ubuntu.

On Wednesday, Simon Wardley's keynote was preceded by an impromptu slide informing the audience of the UK Government's intention to switch internal documentation to ODF and PDF/A, which was greeted by an enthusiastic cheer. In a doubly surprising UK reference, Tim O'Reilly later talked about technological and cultural revolutions, and in a part where he's referencing the difficulty of recognising

Shadaj Laddad gave an impassioned talk about how programming is shaping his future.



Simon Wardley started his talk by giving a huge shoutout to the UK Government for committing to open document formats.

how best to serve your users, he mentioned **gov.uk's** design principles (<https://www.gov.uk/design-principles>) document, and how this list is a "fabulous idea about how you start with [your users] needs."

Tim Bray (co-creator of the XML specification and lots of other good things) is currently concerned about privacy, and his talk was mostly about pleading with developers to add proper encryption.

"We don't want to talk about this stuff because it involves two really horrible things:" he said, "really hard math and... politics." He went on to make what we think is a vital point, "But I'm going to argue that you should get interested and here's why: first of all, you can ignore the math these days. There's good libraries for that. And as for the politics, politics and policy are reality, and if you want to blow that stuff off then you've just lost the right to complain."

OSCON is always going to be a difficult proposition for Europeans and people a long way from the North West coast of the United States. But if you're lucky enough to work for a company with money to spend on training, we can think of no better way of doing so. For anyone else who can afford it, it's without doubt worth the trip. 

Below left Wendy Chisholm admitted she was an introvert. Along with almost everyone else.

Centre Will Marshall is holding one of his satellites. It's tiny, based on an x86 PC and runs Ubuntu!

Below right Tim O'Reilly shares his usual insight and wisdom into the way things are going.

