

Rhythm NATIONS

Music-festival fans Kim Chaloner and Pippa Hetherington discover rich and diverse concert landscapes during the course of some recent African journeys

Who doesn't love a music festival? But forget Glastonbury, Coachella or even Burning Man - it's on our own continent that some of the hippest music festivals on the planet are happening right now. As well as providing opportunities for a cultural exchange of music and ideas, these festivals provide an all-important forum for self-expression. They celebrate and revive interest in the traditional masters of African music alongside the upcoming and the new. They're an invitation for global tourism and the world's media to cast Africa's image in a new light. They benefit local vendors and communities thanks to training-, information- and skills-sharing, thus making a critical contribution to economic and social development. They also trigger conversation and debate: last year, Malawi's Lake of Stars Festival faced criticism from journalists for sidelining local stars in favour of British acts. We pondered whether it favoured male stars over female.

Amid the challenges and costs of setting up temporary infrastructures to showcase talent, festivals such as Lake of Stars and Bushfire (in Swaziland) expose people to world-class artists and give local musicians a global audience. When we were there, people from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, the USA and Norway mingled and engaged with artists, expressing themselves and partying together in beautiful settings. We witnessed something special, raw and unfiltered: the power of music. Here's how to take the plunge, and what to expect...

MAKE SOME NOISE

Clockwise from top The come-down after the musical high of Lake of Stars at the lake-front Gecko Lounge at Cape Maclear; Kayak Africa's pristine and deserted Mumbo Island camp; an artistic alternative to other carbon-emitting modes of transport.





MALAWI

WHAT, WHERE, WHEN Every October, 3 000 visitors flock to two beachfront stages and a Festival Village on the palm-fringed shores of Mangochi on Lake Malawi at the Lake of Stars festival (Lakeofstars.org). It's a platform for British and international talent, as well as for forums on the economic and social benefits of tapping into Malawi's creative resources. It also supports programmes for women in small businesses and the arts.

THE VIBE Mellow yet simultaneously high octane. Expect attention-grabbing, costume-clad (we don't only mean bikinis) bodies soaking up beach sunrises and sunsets.

WHO'S THERE Rub shoulders with music legends such as Zimbabwean musician, composer and guitarist Oliver 'Tuku' Mtukudzi; *balafon* (a West African percussion instrument) muso Aly Keita; hit UK

rock and soul band Noisettes; Zimbabwean-born UK singer-songwriter Tinashé (who combines pop tunes with the traditional *mbira* and storytelling); Chiozo, a dreadlocked Rastafarian reggae star planning to walk 18 000km from Cape Town to Cairo in aid of Africa's music industry; DJs with names like Goldierocks and One Beat; hip-hop artists; wild Peace Corps volunteers and jamming locals.

NEED TO KNOW If you're travelling by car, get detailed directions as there is a scarcity of road signs. Look out for the free booklet *The Eye*, which lists medical services, hotels, lodges, activities and restaurants. Note bilharzia warnings at the lake.

'To hear African artists in Africa is a dream come true for any audience'
— Shingai Shoniwa of Noisettes

TRAVEL NOTES Thanks to the fabulous Harvey World Travel, who custom-designed a travel package for us (including flights, car hire and accommodation), we arrived in Malawi without a hitch, having flown from OR Tambo International to Blantyre's Chileka International Airport. About an hour from the airport, we came to the lush tea estates of the Shire Highlands and spent an afternoon sampling Zomba Pearls, Sunshine Oolong and other fragrant teas at Satemwa Tea Estate (Ulendo-collection.com).

The next day we headed north to the old colonial capital, Zomba. Our hotel, Sunbird Ku Chawe (Sunbirdmalawi.com), situated on the Zomba Plateau, organized a 4x4 trip so we could soak in Emperor's View (named after the late Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie), Chingwe's Hole and William's Falls.

One road trip later we arrived at the festival location, Mangochi, in time to see Malawi's Minister of Tourism skydive onto the beach. We bedded down at festival host hotel Sunbird Nkopola Lodge at Club Makokola (Clubmak.com) and sampled local fish *kapango* with *nsima*, a ground maize flour and local staple.

After the sensational festival, we kicked back on a deserted beach at Cape Maclear, about 55km from Club Mak. We were then treated to an island-hopping day trip by Kayak Africa (Kayakafrika.com) and a sunset festival after-party at Gecko Lounge, on the water's edge. After a stop at the Mua Catholic Mission for a peek inside their impressive art gallery, we reached our final destination: Lilongwe (Malawi's capital), where we visited Madonna's favoured hotspot, the private Kumbali Country Lodge (Kumbalilodge.com), which sports its own dairy and permaculture operation. After a rushed bout of shopping at Lilongwe's bazaar (great clothing!), we set off back home from Kamuzu International Airport.

WHEN THE STARS COME OUT TO PLAY

Clockwise from top left A Londoner in his 'onesie', a new design by Nina Ribena from the UK's We Are All in One; Cool runnings; a UK diva with an African heritage: Shingai Shoniwa of electro-funk rock band, Noisettes; strong coffee and death-by-chocolate - every girl's favourite.



HOLIDAY PLANS *Marie Claire* travelled to Malawi courtesy of Harvey World Travel, one of the largest and most well-established retail travel brands in southern Africa. Since the first branch opened in South Africa in 1997, its franchise network has expanded into Botswana, Swaziland, Namibia and Lesotho. There are now over 90 Harvey World Travel agencies in South Africa. Harvey World Travel specializes in holiday packages to premier travel destinations. For more information from experienced travel consultants about personalized travel packages to Malawi and other beautiful corners of the world, including Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, South America and Australasia, call 011-532-8050 or visit Harveyworld.co.za.



SWAZILAND

WHAT, WHERE, WHEN At the end of May each year, the House on Fire (House-on-fire.com) amphitheatre and surrounding showgrounds in Malkerns, in the picturesque Ezulwini Valley in the Kingdom of Swaziland, are ablaze with the Bushfire Festival of the Arts (Bush-fire.com). The brainchild of thespian and impresario Jiggs Thorne, it's a dynamic programme of arts, culture and activities culminating in a socially conscious event that supports Young Heroes (Youngheroes.org.sz). You'll find an art and photographic gallery, Thorne's family farm, collaborative efforts, statuary, incredible lighting, a Fair Trade market place, renowned craft shop Gone Rural and organic produce. Artists mingle with journalists, photographers and documentary-makers, strangers and friends at Mandela's Farmhouse Restaurant over fantastic curries and good wine.

THE VIBE Expect thousands of revellers camping in the rain, an intimate, relaxed and cosy atmosphere and a definite sense of fun.

WHO'S THERE Past performers have included internationally celebrated artists Vusi Mahlasela; Soweto String Quartet; Ladysmith Black Mambazo; Hugh Masekela; Swaziland's rising symbol of hope, singer-songwriter Bholoja; Winyo, from Kenya, strumming a soulful acoustic guitar; and our very own The Parlotones. Up-and-coming stars included Bongiwe Dlamini, who is part of the Temaswati Project, an a capella group of Swazi female artists sponsored by l'Alliance Française du Swaziland; and Sotho Sounds, young shepherd musicians from the remote Lesotho Highlands who 'transform junk into funk' on instruments ranging from used oil cans to inner tubes and scrap metal.

NEED TO KNOW Pre-booked tickets are limited to 4 000 per day, so reserve yours early. Think twice before leaving the grounds by car (especially before headline acts) to return later. We were caught in a terrific car jam and missed the Bushfire debut of SA songstress Lira.

TRAVEL NOTES Arriving at the showgrounds after a five-day tour of the Swazi Kingdom, we were met by news billboards proclaiming 'Raging Bushfire Draws Crowds'. It was not an understatement. There would be 9 000 visitors on the Saturday alone, yet the event maintained an air of calm sophistication. We had driven to Swaziland from Jo'burg, overnighing at Nisela Safaris (Niselasafaris.co.za) at Big Bend at the foot of the Lebombo mountains, a hospitable place that served up delicious chicken curry and a good night's rest. The next two nights were spent

'Bushfire helps to open the minds of Swazi people to music and the arts' – singer Bongiwe Dlamini

at Mkhaya Game Reserve's Stone Camp and Hlane Royal National Park's Ndlovu Camp (Biggameparks.org). There's no electricity at either of the two camps, so expect an authentic bush experience. Phophonyane Falls Eco Lodge and Nature Reserve (Phophonyane.co.sz) is just four kilometres from the arts and crafts hub at Pigg's Peak, and offered delightful R&R in 'honeycomb' rondavels before we arrived at Brookside Lodge and Conference Centre (Brookside-lodge.com) for the three-day Bushfire event.



THE SOUND OF AFRICAN MUSIC

Clockwise from top Malkerns amphitheatre House on Fire is the fantasy-land venue; hamming it up in gold lycras; a member of the capella group Temaswati Project, which performed at Bushfire in 2010; Swazi songbird Bongiwe Dlamini enthralls her crowd; Bushfire is an avid supporter of local Swazi arts and crafts



MORE AFRICAN MUSIC FESTIVALS



ZANZIBAR

Sauti za Busara (Sounds of Wisdom), Busaramusic.org

Widely regarded as 'the friendliest festival on the planet', this six-day event features musicians from Zanzibar, Tanzania, East Africa and the diaspora. Fringe events include fashion shows, dhow races and open-mic sessions, plus street parades in the historic Stone Town. Takes place in mid-February every year.

GARDEN ROUTE, SA

Peace Party at Peace of Eden, Peaceofeden.co.za

This day-long 'petite event' (festival-goers number 700 to 1 000) takes place annually and sees a diverse array of comedians, DJs and bands come together under the auspices of its beneficiary, Greenpeace. The aim is to draw attention to all things green and sustainable.



MALI Festival au Desert in Essakane, Festival-au-desert.org

In early January each year, three days of Tuareg music and live acts from Mali, Africa and the outside world honour Mali's musical past and celebrate its stars of the future. The festival site covers an area of about two square kilometres in a setting boasting traditional Bedouin tents and dunescapes.



ANGOLA Luanda International Jazz Festival, Luandajazzfest.com

The inaugural event will take place from 29 to 31 July this year. At the time of going to press, contracts were still be finalized, with 20 Angolan and international artists tipped to be visiting from the USA, Brazil, South Africa, Cape Verde, Portugal and Mozambique. **mc**

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