

Sunsplash Antalya Music Festival, Turkey

Times Online's Music Editor tried out one of the new breed of smaller beach-side European festivals



Forget about tents, unwashed hair, crowds and mud, Sunsplash Antalya is a different kind of music festival. Held at the beginning of May, the new week-long Turkish beach-side event was aimed at clubbers with money to burn and a tan to build.

Based at the Antalya five-star design hotel Hillside SU, Ibiza types turned up to slurp cocktails, laze on the beach and groove along to the laid-back sounds of a select line-up of DJs and musicians.

With few takers for the inaugural festival, the atmosphere was seriously intimate with guests casually mingling with the festival's headliners.

Soul-singing, beat-boxing British one-man band Jamie Liddell gave a master class to the same people he later passed at the pool, while treasure of the UK house scene Norman Jay was literally face-to-face with revellers as he played at the hotel's beach bar.

Will it be different once the crowds catch on to this annual festival? The organisers say it won't, promising to cap tickets at 500 to retain the feel of a "private party". Besides, with festival packages, including a stay at the spectacular Hillside SU, starting at £600, this will never be a mainstream event.

The organisers did well to bag big talent for such a small festival. As well as Liddell and Jay, British DJ and producer Phil Asher was on the line-up along with London record label owner and radio DJ Gilles Peterson.

Yes, there was a strong UK contingent to please the largely British festivalgoers, but the event didn't entirely forget its location, putting Istanbul's Baris K on the line-up along with Turkish group Baba Zulu, who took the stage complete with belly dancers and elaborate costumes.

The music started early each day with DJs playing at the hotel's beach bar from 2pm. A few enthusiastic festivalgoers grooved along in their swimwear, but the vast majority saved their energy for later, enjoying the music from sun loungers. Workshops and master classes (think bare-foot participants slouched on cushions, rather than stuffy silent seminars) along with yoga and art tuition filled out the day-time programme.

By 10pm, festivalgoers were at the beach or pool bar listening to DJs before live acts hit the hotel's night club or cleverly-converted conference room.

Now, the festival's challenge is to attract more punters to ensure the event feels more intimate than empty and to sort out the scheduling hiccups that saw festivalgoers wandering the hotel grounds looking for performances that had been delayed or moved.

But with sun almost guaranteed on the "Turkish Riviera" and a hotel offering the kind of comfort no tent could match, this festival already has one up on the rest.

The second Sunsplash Antalya Music Festival will be in May 2010.

www.sunsplash-antalya.com