


FINDING YOUR GROOVE

Africa is drenched in music – it flows out of car windows, floods through open doorways and drowns out the gossip in bars and clubs. By far the best way to enjoy it, of course, is live. To dip a toe in the water, time your African travels to coincide with one of the continent's signature festivals, where you'll be guaranteed some prime performances. Better still, plan an extended trip encompassing several events, and just dive right in. Where to start? Here, **Emma Gregg** provides you with the lowdown on the best music festivals in Africa. >>



The Sahara: the world's most stunning concert bowl? Join the Tuareg at Mali's Festival au Désert. MORITZ STEIGER



NORTH AFRICA

The Festival de Fès des Musiques Sacrées du Monde styles itself as “a beacon of peace from the Islamic world”

SUSANNA WYATT / JOHN WARBURTON-LEE



MOROCCO

FESTIVAL DE FÈS DES MUSIQUES SACRÉES DU MONDE

Where: Fez

When: 29 May–6 June 2009

Website: www.fesfestival.com

To some outsiders, Fès el Bali, the most complete living medieval city in the world, may seem secretive, hiding its most interesting assets – blue-tiled courtyards, Koranic schools and a lively social scene – behind veils, walls, carved windows and locked gates. But the World Sacred Music Festival is a very open event which offers visitors the opportunity to tap straight into the city’s rich, multi-layered cultural and spiritual life.

The festival styles itself as “a beacon of peace from the Islamic world” and draws performers from many different faiths and traditions. The ticketed concerts, held in the palace courtyard of Bab Makina or the wonderful, cedar-scented formal gardens of the Musée Bathar, are glamorous, high-society events, attended by well-groomed locals keen to see and be seen. There’s a daily programme of free events, too, held at dusk in Bab Boujloud, one of the city’s main squares; these are upbeat family occasions attended by enthusiastic crowds of ordinary locals.

Late in the evening, people move on to the Dar Tazi Gardens, to sway to hypnotic *hadras*, traditional Sufi chants. Between performances, you can explore the spice-scented souks, dodge muffled-hoofed donkeys in the winding alleyways and sip mint tea to the call of the muezzin, feeling less of an outsider and more part of the fabric of the town.

EMMA GREGG



The World Sacred Music Festival allows visitors to tap into Fez’ rich culture

BEST FOR...

- * **Remoteness and adventure** Festival au Désert, Essakane, Mali
- * **North African tradition** Festival Gnaoua et Musiques du Monde, Essaouira, Morocco
- * **Authentic atmosphere** Thousand Stars Music Festival, Arba Minch, Ethiopia
- * **West African jazz** Festival International de Jazz de Saint-Louis, Senegal
- * **The classics** National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, South Africa
- * **South African jazz** Cape Town International Jazz Festival, Cape Town, South Africa
- * **Gay culture** Mother City Queer Project, Cape Town, South Africa

MOROCCAN NIGHTS

“The most important single element of Morocco’s folk culture is its music,” wrote the author and musicologist Paul Bowles, who loved the place. “The entire history and mythology of the people is clothed in song.”

Morocco is home to more than 25 different types of music – from Andalusian, Sephardic and rock to *chaabi*, *rai* and rap – and an ever-growing list of music festivals reflecting both its history and diversity. There’s the Mawazin Festival in Rabat. The Alegria Festival in Chefchaouen. The I Love Hip Hop Festival in Casablanca. And more: the new Dakhla Festival boasts a live music programme alongside kite-surfing competitions.

The best top and tail June – both very different, both equally compelling. The World Sacred Music Festival in Fès el Bali (‘Fez the Old’) is a beautifully mannered celebration of music from all the main world religions, particularly Sufism – a gentle, mystical form of Islam with millions of followers around the world. In the old city, a UNESCO-listed World Heritage site of dense, medieval streets and castellated mud brick walls, Jews, Christians and Muslims live amicably, enjoying an inter-faith dialogue underlined by the past and heightened by music.

Here, in venues that include a museum and a disused quarry, opera singers rub shoulders with gospel choirs; West African praise singers with Whirling Dervishes. Morocco’s Sufi brotherhoods whip up a late-night frenzy in the Dar Tazi gardens, spurring crowds on with chants, flutes, trumpets and hand-drums.

Two weeks later, in a gloriously windswept coastal town of white-washed cubes and fairytale fortifications, you may find 400,000 Moroccan youths crowd-surfing to a furious set by British-Asian outfit Asian Dub Foundation. In past years, percussionist Yaya Ouattara from Burkina Faso and Moroccan-Senegalese drummer Mokhtar Samba have sent things skywards. Down near the ramparts that overlook the harbour (the same ramparts where Orson Welles shot scenes for his film version of *Othello*), men in tunics and tasselled hats clack their enormous iron castanets (*qaraqeb*), pound their bass side-drums and sing out chants while doing acrobatic, Cossack-style knee bends and spinning their tassels like corkscrews.

FESTIVAL GNAOUA ET MUSIQUES DU MONDE

Where: Essaouira

When: June 2009

Website: www.festival-gnaoua.net

The richly rhythmic music of the Gnawas (or Gnaouas), a spiritual brotherhood that has its origins in sub-Saharan Africa and melds animist, Berber and Arab influences, is mysterious, hypnotic stuff that can send the musicians spinning (literally) into a trance. During Essaouira’s four-day Gnawa festival the pounding rhythms of drums, reed pipes and castanet-like *qaraqeb*s ring out from Place Moulay Hassan, and *lilas* (small, intimate music sessions) last long into the night. All are free.

Essaouira prides itself on its creative energy; its picturesque lanes and squares, sparkling light and relaxed, tranquil atmosphere attract many painters, woodcarvers and other artisans.

The coastal city of Essaouira ignites with activity during the Festival Gnaoua et Musiques du Monde



FESTIVAL GNAOUA ET MUSIQUES DU MONDE

This is the Essaouira Gnawa festival, a sizeable event with nine stages and some 400 artists (250 of them local). The descendants of West African slaves, the Gnawa brotherhood are not only musicians but healers and mystics who communicate with the spirit world in all-night trance-inducing ceremonies called *lilas*.

Gnawa *maâlems* – masters of the ubiquitous *gimbri*-lute – invite international jazz and blues musicians to play with them, to find a way in to their deceptively simple polyrhythms and pentatonic scale. The visiting artists who cram onstage with the Gnawa do so in a spirit of adventure. They follow in the footsteps of transatlantic jazzmen such as Don Cherry, Bill Laswell and Pharoah Sanders, all of whom have explored Gnawa fusion in a series of projects; 2007’s tenth anniversary festival saw Loy Erlich, Essaouira’s artistic co-founder, give Seventies psychedelic rock classics a North African spin with his one-off project, Band of Gnawa.

And just as the Sufi Nights series in Fez had locals and even the odd Glynedebourne fan dancing themselves into a trance, so Essaouira’s late-night *lilas* send their audiences into other dimensions.

By Jane Cornwell



There are many highlights to music festivals: one of them being dance

FESTIVAL GNAOUA ET MUSIQUES DU MONDE

MOROCCO

Top: Alive day and night – Marrakech's famous Jemaa El Fna square

Bottom: Plenty to fall head over heels for – horse racing as part of the Festival International du Sahara de Douz



THE MOROCCAN NATIONAL TOURIST OFFICE

FESTIVAL NATIONAL DES ARTS POPULAIRES

Where: Marrakech When: July 2009 Website: www.marrakechfestival.com

Marrakech is a town with more festival atmosphere than most – its huge central meeting place, the Jemaa El Fna, is famous for its busking drummers, dancers, fire-eaters and snake-charmers, and there's a permanent jangle of music ringing out from its streets and souks. The six-day Popular Arts Festival takes the best of these traditions and packages them neatly into a series of performances based loosely around a chosen theme. Free shows take place in the Jemaa El Fna and in the old courtyards of the Badii Palace, an impressive 16th-century ruin which lies south of the Medina.

NORTH AFRICAN FESTIVALS: GETTING THERE

MOROCCO

Visas

Not required by tourists from the UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. South Africans need to obtain a visa.

Flights

Atlas Blue (www.atlasblue.com), **Easyjet** (www.easyjet.com), **Royal Air Maroc** (www.royalairmaroc.com) and **Thomson** (www.thomsonfly.com) between them offer flights from London to Marrakech, Rabat, Casablanca or Agadir; **Royal Air Maroc** (www.royalairmaroc.com) fly from Paris to Fez.

Overland to Essaouira

Bus or grand taxi (shared taxi) from Marrakech (167km) or Agadir (175km).

Overland to Fez

Train, bus or grand taxi from Rabat (170km), Casablanca (248km) or Marrakech (389km).

TUNISIA

Visas

Not required by tourists from the UK, Ireland, USA or Canada. Australians and South Africans can buy a visa on arrival.

Flights

British Airways (www.ba.com) and **Tunis Air** (www.tunisair.com) fly direct from London to Tunis.

Overland to Douz

Bus from Tunis (8 hours).

TUNISIA

FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU SAHARA DE DOUZ

Where: Douz When: Late December 2008

Website: www.festivaldouz.org.tn

Around Christmas time, the small, pleasant town of Douz becomes a magnet for Tunisian nomads and desert-dwellers. They have been converging here, on the fringes of the Sahara, since 1910, when the inaugural festival, dubbed La Fête du Dromedaire, featured spirited displays of skilled camel handling. Today, the festival runs for four days, and brings together participants from all over North and West Africa, including belly dancers, camel-racers and traditional drummers in voluminous skirts. There's also a craft fair, where artisans display delicate silver jewellery and bags, boxes and shoes made from animal hide. When they're not cheering on the races or browsing the exhibitions, locals settle down to share hubble-bubble pipes and catch up on the gossip.



CHANG PERSHOUSE / GETTY IMAGES



African cultures collide in Essakane's Festival au Désert
EFFIE FOTAKI

MALI

FESTIVAL AU DÉSERT

Where: Essakane

When: 8–10 January 2009

Website: www.festival-au-desert.org

Obscure, remote and refreshingly uncommercial, Mali's annual celebration of desert blues-rock has caught the imagination of African music aficionados from all over the globe since its inception in 2001. But while it crops up on the wish lists of a good many travellers, relatively few end up making the trip. Perhaps it's the long slog into the Sahara, the hot days, cold nights, sandstorms and complete lack of mod cons that put them off. Even so, many of those who brave the worst go on to become festival evangelists, declaring it a life-changing experience.

Participating is as much about appreciating the journey and the middle-of-nowhere atmosphere as the musical line-up, which is dominated by Tuareg acts (Tinariwen were co-founders), is rarely confirmed in advance, and follows a rather erratic schedule. As with most African music festivals, the action takes place after sunset. The main stage is set up in a natural amphitheatre of soft dunes; there's also a market area where traders peddle jewellery, textiles and crafts, and a race track of sorts where, by day, you can watch camels belting along at competition speed.

FESTIVAL AU DÉSERT: TOP TIPS

- * Network before you set off. Look out for online notice boards set up by festival-goers looking for like-minded travel companions.
- * Brush up your French: you'll need at least a smattering to get by.
- * Independent travellers can hook up with tour companies, drivers and boat captains once they're in Mali. Touts offer transport by vehicle or *pinasse* (boat) from Djenné and Mopti to Timbuktu, and by vehicle from Timbuktu to Essakane. Be prepared to haggle hard. The truly adventurous can opt for travelling the desert leg to Essakane by camel – an arduous three-day trek.
- * Security at the festival is reasonably good, but if you're sleeping in a shared, open-sided Tuareg tent (the standard option) you'll have nowhere to secure your belongings. Consider taking your own tent instead.
- * Take windproof clothing – nights are very cold – and a headscarf against the dust and sand.
- * Seal all your electronic gear in dustproof bags.
- * The festival organisers provide drinking water and basic Malian food such as fish, chicken or goat stews, all of which inevitably get a bit gritty from sand. If you can't manage without comfort foods such as muesli bars, biscuits or bananas, take your own. You can buy beer on site.
- * Take more money than you think you'll need. Transport in Mali is expensive, banks are very few and arranging a transfer from your home account can be difficult.

FULANI TRAVEL



The main stage at Essakane is set up on the dunes

There's plenty of glitz at Cape Verde's Carnival da São Vicente



EMMA GREGG

SENEGAL

FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DE JAZZ DE SAINT-LOUIS

Where: Saint-Louis When: 28–31 May 2009

Website: www.saintlouisjazz.com

Illuminating the fascinating crossover between trad jazz and blues, contemporary jazz and traditional West African music, this is West Africa's biggest jazzfest. Established since 1992 in the attractive little town of Saint-Louis, it offers a platform to young musicians from all over the region as well as welcoming international guest stars.



CAPE VERDE

CARNAVAL DA SÃO VICENTE

Where: Mindelo When: 21–24 February 2009

The elegant, traditional town of Mindelo – home to musical goddess Cesaria Evora, among others – explodes with colour and noise for four days of pre-Lenten revelry in the run-up to Ash Wednesday. The whole town turns out to watch costumed dances, concerts and firework displays, with locals of all ages getting well into the swing of things. At the weekend, processions of kindergarten kids take to the streets, accompanied by thundering samba bands; other high-spirited events follow. Shrove Tuesday is a public holiday, allowing everyone to enjoy a brief respite before hitting the town once again for the biggest parades.

Mardi-Gras-style carnivals are the highlight of the year in most African towns with a Portuguese past, such as Bissau in Guinea-Bissau, Luanda in Angola and Maputo in Mozambique, but Mindelo wins hands down for enthusiasm and style.

MALI

FESTIVAL SUR LE NIGER

Where: Ségou When: 29 January–1 February 2009 Website: www.festivalsegou.org

Here, the setting is everything – the journey to Ségou from Bamako is straightforward, and the town is rather beautiful, its elegant old mud-plastered houses arranged alongside the broad River Niger. The river is, as you'd expect, the backdrop for the festival, dynamic by day and magical by night when spotlights paint the water red, blue and yellow, and pirogues lit with lanterns and fires paddle quietly by.

Ségou has a cultured atmosphere that's perfectly suited to an event which focuses on traditional Malian music. The programme covers a broader mixture of styles represented than at the better-known Festival au Désert, where nomad blues-rock dominates: in Ségou, you'll hear consummate kora playing, plus balafons, talking drums and praise-singing djelis. By day, you can watch puppet shows, learn how to make bogolan (patterned mudcloth), or just relax under the mango trees with a cool Gazelle beer.



EMMA GREGG



Things can reach a feverish pitch at the Roots Festival

THE GAMBIA

ROOTS FESTIVAL

Where: Banjul, Juffureh, Janjanbureh & Kanilai

When: June 2010 **Website:** www.rootsgambia.gm

Ever since Alex Haley, the black American author of the bestselling novel *Roots*, traced his African ancestry back to The Gambia, others have been eager to follow in his footsteps. An all-day pilgrimage to Juffureh, the rural village that adopted Haley as its long-lost son, is one of the highlights of the week-long, biennial Roots Festival, The Gambia's biggest public celebration.

For the African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans taking part, the up-river pilgrimage is an emotionally-charged journey which reverses, centuries on, the route followed by many thousands of captured Africans, incarcerated in the holds of slave ships. Complicated feelings rise to the surface when, on arriving in Juffureh – a down-at-heel, impoverished backwater, cleaned up for the occasion – enthusiastic crowds yell out "Welcome home!"

Even greater emotional challenges – and highs – await those who, later in the festival programme, choose to undergo a special version of the traditional initiation rites of the Jola tribe, under the auspices of President Jammeh himself in his home village, Kanilai. It's a hot, noisy, exuberant occasion involving the sharing of tribal lore, the ritual sacrifice of some hapless chickens, and the effervescent drumming, chanting and dancing of huge crowds of villagers, most of whom appear oblivious to the ear-splitting ceremonial cannon fire that lasts all day and well into the night.

The festival also includes concerts and carnival parades in The Gambia's beach resorts, where you can shake your stuff to the fiery rhythms of *ndagga* and *mbalax*.

GHANA

PANAFEST

Where: Tamale, Kumasi & Cape Coast

When: July 2009

Website: www.panafest.org



Every two years, Ghana stages one of the best homecoming festivals in Africa, reaching out to African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans and other 'friends of Africa' keen to explore the past. Panafest, short for Pan-African Historical Theatre Festival, lasts for ten days and is a lively mixture of events. Pilgrims gather at Cape Coast, one-time hub of the transatlantic slave trade, for a moving, candlelit Emancipation Vigil to honour the victims of slavery. Later, it's party-time, with booty-shaking entertainment from traditional West African drummers and dancers.

WEST AFRICAN FESTIVALS: GETTING THERE

MALI

Visas

Apply in advance. There are consulates in Paris, Brussels, Geneva and Washington DC.

Flights

Royal Air Maroc (www.royalairmaroc.com) fly from Paris to Bamako.

Overland to Ségou

Bus from Bamako, 3.5 hours.

Overland to Essakane

Tour companies offering Festival au Désert trips with transport, camping and catering include Balanzan Tours (www.balanzantours.com) and Saga Tours (www.sagatours.com); others are listed on the festival website. To travel independently, start by heading for Timbuktu (by plane from Bamako, or by road and/or river via Mopti), then hire a 4WD.

SENEGAL

Visas

Not required by UK, USA, Canada or South Africa nationals. Australians and New Zealanders require visas.

Flights

Air France (www.airfrance.com) fly from Paris to Dakar.

Overland to Saint-Louis

Bush taxi from Dakar (3.5 hours).

THE GAMBIA

Visas

Not required by UK or Commonwealth nationals. US citizens can apply via the embassy in Washington (www.gambiaembassy.us).

Flights

The Gambia Experience (www.gambiaflights.co.uk) offer direct flights from London, Bristol, East Midlands and Manchester to Banjul.

CAPE VERDE

Visas

Issued on arrival on Sal. To save time at passport control, make an advance application through your airline or tour operator.

Flights

The Cape Verde Experience (www.capeverdeexperience.co.uk) offer direct flights from London and Manchester to Sal. **TACV** (www.flytacv.com) fly from Sal to São Vicente.

GHANA

Visas

Apply in advance. There are consulates in London, Ottawa, Washington DC and Pretoria.

Flights

British Airways (www.ba.com) fly from London to Accra; **Air France** fly from Paris.

EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Music festivals



The Sauti Za Busara breathes even more life into Zanzibar

WWW.BUSARAMUSIC.ORG

TANZANIA

SAUTI ZA BUSARA, ZANZIBAR

Where: Stone Town When: 12–17 February 2009

Website: www.busaramusic.org

Tanzania swings to a heady mix of musical styles – from traditional taarab and ngoma to funky Swahili hip hop (better known as *bongo flava*) – all of which you'll find here. Founded in 2004, Sauti Za Basura (Sounds of Wisdom) is still a new event, but its relaxed, child-friendly atmosphere has already earned it an enthusiastic following among both Tanzanians and tourists. Stilt walkers and acrobats entertain the crowds between musical acts.

KENYA

MAULIDI, LAMU

Where: Lamu

When: Early March 2009

In the run-up to Maulidi, the Islamic feast to mark the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed, the narrow streets of Lamu town

– normally sleepy and thoroughly laidback – begin to swarm with visitors. Muslim pilgrims from all over the region gather here for the all-night recitation of the Maulid. Once the serious stuff is over, everyone throws themselves into a four-day knees-up, complete with swimming competitions, dhow races, and fiercely contested donkey races along the waterfront.



Donkey races during Maulidi

DAVID WATERS

MALAWI

LAKE OF STARS

Where: Senga Bay When: 10–12 October 2008

Website: www.lakeofstars.co.uk

At a time of year when most young British festival-goers have packed away their muddy tents and resigned themselves to the fact that summer is well and truly over, what could be more alluring than the prospect of one last end-of-season fling?

This is the secret appeal of Lake of Stars, a low-key festival in a little-known corner of southern Africa, which beckons DJs, bands and diehard party people down from the chilly north for three days of mellow music-making and stomping club sounds. With a beachside setting lovely enough to revive the Ibiza-babe in any adventurer, it's quietly whipping up a storm of popularity among young British travellers. Last year, one convert described it as "like a mini-Glastonbury – but with endless sunshine and sand instead of endless fields of mud". The main stage is close to the crystal-clear water of Lake Malawi, perfect for a dawn dip after an all-night session; accommodation is in one of several castaway-style lodges and campsites.

What makes Lake of Stars particularly special is that it raises funds for local causes – and all artists play for free. The brainchild of Will Jameson, a young Brit who took his first leap into club promotion while still a final year undergraduate in Liverpool, the festival has the clout to attract talent from the UK, South Africa and beyond including big names such as Mary Anne Hobbs, Groove Armada's Andy Cato and Felix B from Basement Jaxx, plus a glut of rising stars.



Malawi's Lake of Stars festival takes low-key to a new level. The results? Fantastic

LAKE OF STARS FESTIVAL

Music festivals

CAPE TOWN INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

Where: International Convention Centre & Greenmarket Square, Cape Town

When: 3–4 April 2009

Website: www.capetownjazzfest.com

Boldly promoting itself as one of the best jazz festivals in the world, this high-profile event takes over the massive Cape Town International Convention Centre for two nights of seriously mellow music-making. The organisers have big ambitions for the festival, and hope to make it a ten-day event by 2010.

Bringing together major South African and international artists on five stages, the festival pulls in crowds numbering well over 30,000. The programme includes a rich mix of edgy homegrown styles such as kwaito, hip hop, gospel, fusion and house, alongside more traditional fare from world-class pianists, vocalists and bands. In past years, headlining stars have included Cesaria Evora, Manu Dibango, Hugh Masekela, Herbie Hancock, Youssou N'Dour, the Mahotella Queens and Miriam Makeba.

The week before the main events, as a consolation to those who don't manage to grab tickets, there's an outdoor Community Concert in Greenmarket Square. It's a great chance to catch up-and-coming local artists, it's a lot of fun, and it's free.



Simphiwe Dana performing at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival

SOUTH AFRICA

CAPE TOWN MINSTREL CARNIVAL

Where: Athlone Stadium, Cape Town **When:** From 1 January 2009

Website: www.capetownminstrels.co.za



Shiny satin suits, multi-coloured face paints, highly polished trumpets, twangy banjos and natty marching drills are the order of the day at Cape Town's century-old Klopse Kaapse celebrations, run by the city's black and Malay population.

The festival started out as a satirical pageant. In the nineteenth century, troupes (*klopse*) of former slaves whitened and painted their faces to counter-imitate white American minstrels who used to 'black-up' with cork and make-up. Klopse Kaapse songs poked fun at local leaders and current events. Under apartheid, the festival, dubbed the Coon Carnival, was strictly controlled.

These days, the carnival is an enormous, all-inclusive event. Every weekend in January, the troupes strut their stuff in a series of parades and concerts, while competition judges weigh up their musical skills, discipline, sartorial brilliance and general showmanship. The festival culminates at the end of the month with a spectacularly colourful jazz parade which spills out into the city streets.

EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICAN FESTIVALS: GETTING THERE

KENYA

Visas Available on arrival.

Flights

British Airways (www.ba.com), **Kenya Airways** (www.kenya-airways.com) and **Virgin Atlantic** (www.virgin-atlantic.com) fly direct from London to Nairobi. **Air Kenya** (www.airkenya.com) fly from Nairobi to Lamu, daily.

TANZANIA

Visas Available on arrival.

Flights

Kenya Airways fly from London to Zanzibar via Nairobi.

MALAWI

Visas Tourist permits issued on arrival (free).

Flights

Kenya Airways fly from London to Lilongwe via Nairobi.

Overland to Senga Bay

Bus from Lilongwe (4-5 hours).

SOUTH AFRICA

Visas Tourist permits issued on arrival (free).

Flights

BMI (www.flybmi.com), **British Airways** and **South African Airways** (www.flysaa.com) fly direct from London to Cape Town.



A YEAR OF CELEBRATIONS

Music is woven so tightly into the fabric of African culture that just about every public event is marked by some kind of musical performance, from impromptu jamming sessions to full-blown multi-stage concert programmes. Here's a complete calendar of the biggest and best to rock the continent.

There are plenty of moves, and smiles, on show at Zanzibar's Sauti Za Busara festival

JANUARY

SOUTH AFRICA Cape Town Minstrel Carnival See page 43. From 1 January. www.capetownminstrels.co.za

MALI Festival au Desert See page 37. Essakane, early January. www.festival-au-desert.org

MALI Festival sur le Niger See page 38. Ségou, late January or early February. www.festivalsegou.org

FEBRUARY

CAPE VERDE Carnaval, São Vicente See page 38. Mindelo, mid-February.

TANZANIA Sauti Za Busara, Zanzibar See page 41. Stone Town, mid-February. www.busaramusic.com

BURKINA FASO Festival Panafricain du Cinema de Ouagadougou (FESPACO) Film festival, also featuring at least two concerts from big names such as Youssou N'Dour and Baaba Maal. Late February in odd-numbered years. www.fespaco.fbf

MARCH

KENYA Maulidi, Lamu See page 41. Dates vary with the Islamic calendar.

Muslim pilgrims from all over the region gather in Lamu for the all-night recitation of the Maulid



APRIL

SOUTH AFRICA Cape Town Jazz Festival See page 43. Late March or early April. www.capetownjazzfest.com

SOUTH AFRICA Splashy Fen At the foot of the Southern Drakensberg Mountains, this huge festival featuring the best in South African pop and rock is South Africa's answer to Glastonbury. Underberg, KwaZulu Natal, Easter weekend. www.splashyfen.co.za

NAMIBIA Windhoek Carnival This knees-up, also called Wika, includes a masked ball, parades, concerts and plenty of enthusiastic beer-quaffing. Mid-April. www.skw.com.na/wika

MALI Fêtes des Masques, Pays Dogon Masked dancers, some on stilts, take centre stage for a dramatic and colourful performance, in which rival troupes compete against each other to re-enact scenes from tribal history. Purists argue that the spiritual roots of these dances have been corrupted for the benefit of tourists, but you're still left with the feeling that you're witnessing an ancient and thrillingly authentic event. Dates vary with the astronomical calendar.

ZAMBIA Kuomboka Traditional ceremony of the Lozi people, celebrated at the peak of the Buluzi floods in Barotseland, and heralded by resounding Maoma drumming. Dates vary with the floods. www.barotseland.com

ZIMBABWE Harare International Festival for the Arts (HIFA) Draws big-name African and international artists. Late April and early May. www.hifa.co.zw

MAY

SENEGAL Festival International de Jazz de Saint-Louis See page 38. Late May. www.saintlouisjazz.com

MOROCCO Festival de Fès des Musiques Sacrées du Monde See page 34. Fez, late May or early June. www.fesfestival.com

JUNE

MOROCCO Festival Gnaoua et Musiques du Monde Essaouira, late June. See page 35. www.festival-gnaoua.net

THE GAMBIA Roots Festival See page 39. Late June in even-numbered years. www.rootsgambia.gm

SOUTH AFRICA National Arts Festival Africa's largest and grandest arts festival, a ten-day world-class event featuring classical music, jazz, opera, theatre, poetry, cinema and dance. Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, late June or early July. www.nafest.co.za

JULY

MOROCCO Festival National des Arts Populaires See page 36. Marrakech, mid-July. www.marrakechfestival.com

SOUTH AFRICA Bomvu Cultural Drumming Festival Five-day drumming, dance and psychedelic-trance festival, including a drumming marathon, open to all. Coffee Bay, mid-July. www.bomvubackpackers.com

TANZANIA Zanzibar International Film Festival

Huge ten-day festival which includes many musical events, exhibitions and workshops as well as film screenings. Stone Town, mid-July. www.ziff.or.tz

GHANA Panafest See page 39. Late July in odd-numbered years. www.panafest.org

AUGUST

CAPE VERDE Festival da Baia das Gatas Full moon rock festival on the beach at this tiny (but fast-growing) resort town on the island of São Vicente. Mid-August; dates vary.

NIGER Cure Salée / Gerewol The much-photographed male beauty pageants of northwest Niger take place after the rains. Young Fulani men seeking a wife adorn themselves with thick face paint, and then set about displaying their sex appeal through ritual teeth-baring and eyeball-rolling. Visitors don't have much opportunity to participate, but you're likely to hear music and see plenty of highly decorated nomads if you're passing through. Agadez region, August or September; dates vary.

SEPTEMBER

SOUTH AFRICA Rustlers Valley Festivals Series of music events with a new age vibe, marking the Spring Equinox (around 21 September), Christmas, New Year and Easter. The Rustlers Valley Farm was devastated by a bushfire in 2007 and owner Frik Grobbelaar died in April 2008, but the festival organisers, determined to get back on their feet, are hosting an Equinox event this September. Rustlers Valley, Free State. www.rustlers.co.za

SOUTH AFRICA Hermanus Whale Festival The seaside town of Hermanus, an hour and a half's drive from Cape Town, is South Africa's self-appointed land-based whale-watching capital. During this five-day festival it pushes the boat out in celebration of the mighty migrating mammals. It's common for southern right whales to swim so close to shore that you can see them clearly from the cliff paths. The festival programme includes concerts and cabaret nights. Hermanus, Western Cape, late September. www.whalefestival.co.za

LIBYA Ghadames Festival Traditional music, with richly costumed dancers and Arabic-style drumming, to accompany rites of passage. September or October.

OCTOBER

MALAWI Lake of Stars See page 41. Senga Bay, late September or early October. www.lakeofstars.co.uk

SEYCHELLES Festival Kreol A colourful, week-long showcase for Seychellois music, dance and cuisine. Late October.

NOVEMBER

GHANA Hogebetso Festival The Anlo Ewes of eastern Ghana pay homage to their mighty chiefs, dressed in colourful royal regalia, with drumming, singing and dancing. Anloga, early November.

FESTIVAL GNAOUA ET MUSIQUES DU MONDE



African music is never short of an energetic beat

MALI Diafarabé cattle crossing Every year, once the seasonal grasslands of the northern Sahel have completely dried out, the semi-nomadic Fulani pastoralists of the Malian Sahel congregate at the village of Diafarabé on the banks of the Niger for a ritual river-crossing ceremony. Families are reunited for a precious few days – a time of great celebration and spontaneous music-making. November or December; dates vary.

DECEMBER

ETHIOPIA Thousand Stars Music Festival Three-day festival of traditional Ethiopian music and dance, deep in the remote Rift Valley. Arba Minch, southern Ethiopia, mid December. www.gughe.org

SOUTH AFRICA Mother City Queer Project (MCQP) The beautiful (and not-so-beautiful) people of Cape Town's gay and lesbian community dress to kill for a glamorous party which takes a different theme each year. Cape Town, mid December. www.mcqp.co.za

NIGERIA Oki Festival Fishermen's festival, in which Kalabari dancers wiggle like fish, turtles and crocodiles to lively drumming. Port Harcourt, 25 December.

TUNISIA Festival International du Sahara de Douz See page 36. Douz, late December. www.festivaldouz.org.tn

FIND OUT MORE

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