

→ FESTIVAL PROFILE

FMM SINES

PORTUGAL

Impressive programming together with a perfect summer location makes Portugal's biggest world music festival a must-visit destination. Regular visitor Luís Rei reports on the event

If you're planning on visiting Portugal this summer and are looking for sunny and semi-wild beaches (far away from the overcrowded Algarve), fresh grilled fish and seafood served alongside not just *fado* but innovative music from all corners of the world, then you need to visit Festival Músicas do Mundo de Sines (FMM Sines), which takes place over the last two weekends of July.

FMM Sines is Portugal's main world music festival which first launched in 1999 and takes place in the port town of Sines on Portugal's south-western coast. This tiny coastal town, with a population of just 13,000, is also well-known as Vasco da Gama's birthplace.

Just as the 14th century sea commander found his way to India, FMM Sines is a festival of musical discovery designed for an open-minded music lover with eclectic taste. A whole host of musical genres are

showcased here: from Afro-beat, ska-reggae and jazz and blues; Portuguese folk and radical Jewish alt-rock; *cumbia* and classic Latin gems. Sines city council provides a real cultural public service with the aim being to develop the musical tastes of a mainly young audience used to attending big summer rock festivals, such as Sudoeste, at Zambujeira do

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Mar, also on the south-west coast, which takes place one week after FMM Sines.

If you have plenty of stamina, a good sense of adventure, and can survive on less than four hours sleep a night, then you'll enjoy the warm waters of São Torpes' beaches and

fresh oysters in the local restaurants during the day, and attend all the shows taking place each night.

At FMM Sines no acts play simultaneously, meaning that you aren't forced to make that all too difficult and frustrating decision of choosing between two bands playing at the same time on different stages. Performances take place throughout the night starting at 6pm at the Sines Castle stage until 6, 7 or 8am on the Vasco da Gama Beach stage. The organisers don't allow a show to start until the audience has had a chance to move from one stage to another.

Every year, the Sines Castle stage kicks off proceedings with a Portuguese act. Last summer, FMM presented two of the finest male singers from the Alentejo region (where Sines is situated): Vitorino and Janita Salomé along with the local male polyphony choir Grupo de Cantares do Redondo, who sung about death and wine. Afterwards the crowds made their way down the escarpment that separates the castle and the beach to watch the huge Portuguese Afro-beat collective, Cacique 97 – one of the hottest bands currently in Lisbon's multicultural scene. On the same stage, as the sun went down, the audience experienced some of the most beautiful moments in the history of the 12 editions of FMM festivals: the enchanting sea songs of The Unthanks and the organic and innovative *yoik* of Finnish Sámi Wimme Saari.

David Murray, the American jazz saxophonist, who has probably performed at FMM more times than any other artist, opened the first of the castle sessions in 2010 with his brand new project. Ten years ago,

From left to right: the closing fireworks at the Sines Castle stage; *gimbri* player Nuru Kane in 2006; an afternoon performance at the Vasco da Gama Beach stage; Chinese singer Sa Dingding; the 25-piece band Kasai Allstars who wowed FMM revellers in 2009



A FEAST OF MUSIC

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Above: Seun Kuti and his band, performing on Sines' Castle stage

when Murray played here for the first time with the World Saxophone Quartet, he fell in love with the festival and the town and has since bought a house, moved his family here, and went on to become an honorary citizen of Sines. Last summer, FMM premiered his latest project: David Murray Cuban Ensemble plays Nat King Cole, with Murray playing with several Cuban musicians, as well as the Argentinian singer Melingo and Sinfonietta de Sines, plus locally-trained classical music teachers.

It is typically on this stage where the most high profile acts play. Artists as diverse as Marc Ribot, Debashish Bhattacharya, Toumani

Diabaté, Seun and Femi Kuti, Kimmo Pohjonen, Master Musicians of Jajouka, Tinariwen, Tartit, Rokia Traoré, Värttinä, Gogol Bordello and many more have demonstrated the intoxicating effect of an enthusiastic crowd of 7,000 people (the castle's full capacity) whose undivided attention is on what's happening on the stage in front of them – there are no other distractions inside the castle such as food tents, so the focus is purely on the music.

The castle is also where the festival closes, with a fireworks extravaganza. Last year, Staff Benda Bilili had the honour being the last band to play on the castle stage and gave us one of the best performances of the entire festival with almost two hours of wild Congolese *rumba* with a non-stop energy that provoked a controlled riot among the enthusiastic crowd.

After a set of three shows inside the castle, the night ends on the beach with a line-up guaranteed to make you want to dance. Artists

including Nortec Collective, Novalima, Konono No 1, Boom Pam, Speed Caravan, Chicha Libre, Grupo Fantasma, Forró in the Dark and U Roy have transformed this stretch of beach into a huge open-air nightclub for more than 20,000 people. Around the stage and the never-ending dance floor, there are plenty of food stalls serving everything from regional and ethnic dishes to all types of fast food with several craft workshops taking place, but the main action happens on stage. A true FMM lover enjoys the last moments of each festival with the final act from the mad ska-bhangra-rock-retro-African sounds of Portuguese Balarico Sofisticado DJs until 7 or 8am, when the sun comes up and informs us that we have to wait another 12 long months for a party like this. ●

DATES July 22-24 and July 27-30
ONLINE www.fmm.com.pt/en

