

Exploring the UK Festival scene



What makes a festival? Or more specifically, what makes a British festival? Across fields, seafronts and the paved streets of London, summer brings people of all interests and backgrounds together as one.

In 1971, a year after its debut, a film crew captured the atmosphere of Glastonbury festival (see Nicolas Roeg's documentary *Glastonbury Fayre*). Hair flowed, tan coloured flares danced, tassels waved and light-weight, loose garments seemingly floated with the bodies of their wearers moving in swirling hypnotic motions to the banging of drums. Nakedness was popularly opted for too, body parts swishing as males and females pranced across the field, attempted to swim in pools of mud and zoomed around on the back of a motorbike. It invoked the hippy, nature-embraced style flourishing across the muddy grassy plains in a way that's become symbolic of festive attire today. Things may have changed since the early years — for instance ticket prices. In the 1980s it was less than £20 and it was easy to get in for free by jumping over the fence; in 2017, it cost nearly £250 and there was no chance of entering without a registered ticket. There are substantially bigger line-ups, and less consumption of LSD, but the sense of escapism, togetherness and utopian ideals are still intrinsic

and ingrained in the festival spirit.

While Glastonbury is largely recognised now as being the pinnacle of the festival scene, the Isle of Wight was at the forefront. Beginning as a counterculture event between 1968 and 1970, it was recognised as the British equivalent of Woodstock. Its 1970 line-up consisted of Joni Mitchell standing harmoniously in a yellow maxi dress under the afternoon sun and Leonard Cohen gripping the audience with his tuneful poetry. The Who and The Doors supplied the rock and roll while Jimi Hendrix closed the weekend with his thrilling guitar riffs. All the while, free-spirited teenagers and wide-eyed music fans gathered by the peaceful waters of Freshwater Bay. The festival was re-launched in 2002 at the new location of Seaclose Park, Newport, where it has since hosted artists such as: David Bowie, The Sex Pistols, Bruce Springsteen and Jay Z. Held 21–24 June, this year marked its 50th anniversary with headliners: Kasabian, Depeche Mode and The Killers.

The success of festivals nowadays is that they cater for all genres and regions, encompassing what the UK has to offer whether that be creativity, scenery, home talent or an appreciation for international artists. This year sees the absence of a few known big ones: Glastonbury is taking its

traditional 'fallow year', while the whimsically eclectic Secret Garden Party, a wonderland of neon and glitter in the Cambridge village of Abbots Ripton, permanently came to an end last year and Scotland's T in the Park has announced a hiatus. These aside, though, leaves no shortage especially as T in the Park has been replaced by TRNSMT, a city festival in the centre of Glasgow which happens over the last weekend of June and first weekend of July.

While most festivals are a temporary weekend escape from daily realities, there are some that stretch over the space of a month or so. Edinburgh Fringe Festival (3–27 August) is a plethora of comedy performances, creating a platform for those striving to make it and those recognisably accomplished; while The Proms (13 July–8 September) is a season presented by the BBC featuring daily orchestral performances in London's opulent Royal Albert Hall.

Whatever it is you're drawn to and whether you prefer to engage through media coverage or to experience the festivities in person, both the hippy history and diversity of today add value to the British culture behind the festival season.

Below is a selection of some of the best-established summer festivals that happen annually and are still to come this summer, from indie to dance, folk to pop, orchestral to soca, as well as non-musical offerings of literature, poetry and comedy.

THE GREAT ESCAPE 17-19 May, Brighton

The go-to live source for new music, The Great Escape festival has been giving exposure to emerging artists since 2006. Shows are spread around Brighton across more than 30 locations such as pubs, churches, club nights and the pier, but this year also sees the addition of a temporary 2,000 capacity site built on the town's beach. Alongside the music is The Great Escape Convention with conferences and discussions for professionals, thus giving a deeper insight into the future of the music industry. If you missed it this year make sure to book for next.

DOWNLOAD 8-10 June, Leicester

Dedicated to rock and metal, Download is noisy, high energy and has been whirling fiercely with mosh pits since its arrival in 2003. Taking place in Leicestershire's Donington Park, it's considered a successor to Monsters of Rock – an event that hosted heavy rock icons throughout the 80s and early 90s before dispersing to different locations around the world. Download this year featured Guns N' Roses, Ozzy Osbourne and Marilyn Manson.

BST HYDE PARK 6 -15 July, London

British Summer Time is like a friendly picnic on a family day out in the centre of London. Spread across two weekends with each date a mini festival in itself, performers vary between the stereotypical 'dad bands', the understatedly cool and the scream-inducing chart toppers. Last year's menu featured Justin Bieber and Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, while this year you can find Eric Clapton and Bruno Mars.

LOVEBOX 13-14 July, London

This year Lovebox has moved from its original location of Victoria Park to further west in Gunnersbury but the chances are that wherever it's held is going to feel appropriate given the high voltage party atmosphere emitted from the two-day event. It's been staging the freshest electronic, dance and hip-hop sounds since 2005, but was founded a few years prior to that by DJs Groove Armada and a series of parties accompanying their album entitled Lovebox.

PORT ELIOT FESTIVAL 26- 29 July, Cornwall

A literary haven situated in the vibrantly neat greenery of St Germans, the Port Eliot festival began fifteen years ago as an embracing of books and storytelling. It has since developed to also feature comedy, music, food and fashion but a concentration on words and imagination remains at its core.

BESTIVAL 2-5 August, Dorset

A boutique festival nestled in the secluded picturesque surrounds of the Lulworth Estate, Bestival is an explosion of colour, fun and a wide selection of music. This year one can dream away to the folky sounds of First Aid Kit, dance along with Grace Jones and spend afternoons crafting by tie-dyeing, jewellery making and dream catcher constructing.

NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL 26 -27 August, London

It was started as a coming together of the Caribbean community, a closing of the cultural gap following the tension of the 1968 race riots, and it has since become Europe's largest street festival while encapsulating Britain's multiculturalism. The neat town houses and pastel coloured brickwork become a backdrop for the multitude of rainbow feathers and exuberant costumes with Latin and Caribbean fuelled sound systems that pack the West London streets during the bank holiday weekend.



Francesca Rose is a MA Critical Theory & Cultural Studies student and freelance writer. Her research and musings on fashion can be viewed at www.knotjournal.com