

Nyon: from the Romans to rock

Founded as a settlement during the Roman Empire, Nyon's historical heritage and cultural calendar – featuring the upcoming Paléo music festival – make it a must-visit destination this summer.

By Catherine Nelson-Pollard | In 52 BC, the Romans established a colony on the shores of Lake Geneva and called its centre *Noviodunum* (Nyon). Sandwiched between the water and the Jura Mountains, it was a perfect spot for Julius Caesar's retiring soldiers, so houses, Roman baths, a Basilica and an amphitheatre sprang up for the entertainment of these new citizens.

Fast forward to today's Nyon, where locals still head off to a town venue to be entertained for six days during the height of summer (July 21–26). But now, they are accompanied by legions of visitors too – many carrying guitars, gallons of iced tea and cases of beer.

Their destination? A modern-day amphitheatre, 84 acres north of Nyon – the grounds of Paléo – one of Europe's biggest open-air music festivals, with over 227,000 visitors each year and four million since it all began.

“Paléo for me really is *the* sounds and smells of summer in the canton of Vaud. The most exciting part is seeing the big

bands on the main stage. This can be electric with bands such as Muse or Texas who light up the sky with amazing music and light shows,” says Kathy Trefalt, from Trelex. “Paléo is part of summer here in Switzerland and I couldn't imagine July without it!”

This year's line-up

Some big names in the world of English-speaking rock are due to perform this July, including Placebo & The Kaiser Chiefs on Tuesday (July 21st), The Prodigy & Franz Ferdinand on Wednesday (22nd), Moby & Snow Patrol on Thursday (23rd) and Tracy Chapman on Saturday (25th).

For lovers of French music, Francis Cabrel, Bénabar and NTM will be playing during the weekend.

Each year, the area of the festival called *Village du Monde* features music from a special country or region. This year's spotlight is on India, with music and dance performances from the state of Rajasthan, an Indo-Pakistani fusion mix from the UK, as well as other Indian acts.

From folk roots spring the The Beach Boys and Jamiroquai

Paléo started back in 1975 as a small folk festival, held in the local *Salle Communale*. Since then, the festival has played host to groups from around the world, attracting big names like Chuck Berry, The Beach Boys (playing in pouring rain in 1987), Oasis, Gilberto Gil, The Who, Manu Chao and Jamiroquai.

The festival also serves as a launching pad for new talent.

Placebo and Muse first played to small audiences at Paléo in 1997 and 2000 respectively, and have since been back as big-name bands. Ben Harper first played at Paléo in 1994 to an audience of 1,500. He came back in 1996 to play for 8,000. The last time he appeared, he performed on the big stage before an audience of 30,000 fans.

Carolyn McKenna, a student at Scotland's Edinburgh University, has been coming to Paléo for the past four years in a row – partly to experience this new talent.



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“Not only is it a great place to see the big names in music but I know I will discover bands that I’ve never heard of too. There is such a great variety on the programme and a real different mix of music lovers of all ages and nationalities,” she says.

Rite of passage

From the moment the programme line-up is announced, Paléo is on everyone’s lips, and music fans are queuing up before ticket sales even open. Such is its popularity that the festival is usually nearly sold out the day tickets go on sale.

During the week of the festival, the town, its shopkeepers and the public alike revel in the atmosphere. So do the local teenagers, as the event is a kind of rite of passage for many of them. If they don’t spend the entire six days camped out on-site, they are sure to attend each day for a healthy dose of rock, reggae, hip hop, rap, jazz and world music.

From 16:30 onwards when the gates open, fans can wander the grounds, listening to the varied sounds coming from six different stages. The Grande Scene (capacity 30,000) and the Chapiteau (capacity 8,000) are for the bill-topping acts. The Club Tent (capacity 2,000) and the De-tour Tent (capacity 500) are for new trends and new talent. The Dome Tent (capacity 3,000) is for World Music and La Ruche for comedy, street theatre, etc.

Fans can also admire assorted art installations scattered throughout the area, sprawl out in hammocks, or snack at the hundreds of food stands and restaurants that stay open until the early hours. Children are welcome: those under 12 get in free, and the very young can romp in a supervised entertainment area.

When revellers retire for the night, Paléo keeps on working. A festival this big needs to operate 24 hours a day to run smoothly, and although it employs a core team of paid professionals, there are also numerous enthusiastic volunteers to help out.

One of these, Victor van Cleeff, has been helping out for the past 11 years. “I love it,” he says. “Not just for the music but because there is such a special atmosphere amongst the volunteers. There are nearly 4,000 of us, but each year that we meet up, we still manage to see familiar faces.”

Nyon also has many other draws for visitors, including a castle with a beautiful terrace that overlooks the lake and rooftops of the picturesque Old Town. The city centre has cobbled streets, a weekly food market, a Roman museum and a pretty port area with cafés and restaurants. Ferries bring in many of the visiting tourists. The town is also host to three other annual festivals: Visions du Réel (documentary film), Caribana (mu-

Enjoy the music

Paléo Festival
July 21–26
www.2009.paleo.ch

Tip: Many locals advise taking a day off work to recover, as some of the main bands don’t appear until 23:00 or even midnight.

sic) and F.A.R. (arts), but it is Paléo for which Nyon is probably most famous.

An atmosphere of *bonhomie*

Despite its size there is very rarely any trouble at this festival, just an atmosphere of *bonhomie* (French for good-humour) and good music. Free local public transport is provided to and from the grounds.

The final Paléo night ends with a massive fireworks display set to classical music. As the music lovers troop home, they are no doubt counting the days until Paléo rolls around next year.

Want to check out the action yourself? Although tickets went on sale in April (some day tickets selling out in the first hour), all hope is not lost: 1,000 more are released on the Paléo website each morning at 9:00 during the six days of the festival.

paléo
festival nyon

