

Exit Festival - Probably the Best Festival in the World!

A record number of festival goers descended on the picturesque town of Novi Sad, with over 10,000 Brits enjoying delights of the Petrovaradin fortress for this year's Exit Festival in Serbia.

Eager revelers arrived early and the campsite was overflowing by nightfall and as the first day of the festival arrived, the atmosphere in Novi Sad was buzzing with anticipation. Says EXIT's Rajko Bozik "The English audience was great – friendly and in a good mood. There was a great atmosphere in the festival's campsite and on the fortress, and many friendships were started among visitors from UK and Serbia/Balkans."

As the sun began to set on the eve of the first night, the view from the terrace on the fortress was simply stunning. With the thousands of people walking in expectation across the bridge like an army of ants making the pilgrimage to the festival entrance. Tanya Stephens and Groove Armada began the proceedings on the main stage, but it was The Prodigy that shook the 18th Century fortress walls with their opening track Breathe. Revving up the crowd to insanity, Exit was left in a state of euphoria and the band's car was totally mobbed when they tried to leave the site. "It was the best festival we played this year!" exclaimed Liam Howlett.

While all this was going on the crowd were treated to an amazing fireworks display before rock legend Robert Plant & The Strange Sensations took to the stage giving the crowd all the Led Zeppelin classics they had been waiting for and then culminating with the Stanton Warriors & Rodney P until sunrise.

Meanwhile on the Dance Arena the 25,000 strong crowd were treated to the delights of Aussie Deepchild, and then Trentemoller live, with one fan from Scotland saying "It's so good it's not right!" Next up was Green Velvet and Richie Hawtin who was took things tougher. "Exit was one of the most interesting gigs for me this year. The location was amazing and to feel the warmth of the people dancing and freaking out to my music was inspirational! Respect to the people of Exit for pushing the boundaries with their choice of lineup and bringing great new music one step further east!" enthused Richie Hawtin. Magda concluded the night with her selection of choice techno and her appreciation of the faithful crowd who showed her a true Serbian welcoming.

As the sun rose so did the temperature and the party people made their way back to their beds across the river in Novi Sad. But no time for rest as the beach party started at midday with Jo Mills bringing a slice of DC10 to the banks of the Danube. Pete Gooding and Alex Gold were also playing over the next few days for those who did not wish to sleep (or couldn't).

Onto Day 2 and Friday was the turn of all girl group The Pipettes to kick things off on the Main Stage. "We were hit immediately by the enthusiasm of the crowd, we've never played a better party!" exclaimed Gwenno from the band. They were followed by the Brazilian band CSS with singer LoveFoxy modelling some very unique outfits including a sequined jumpsuit. Then it was the Beastie Boys turn to take command of the crowd with all their biggest hits and humorous stage antics. Followed by Zinc back to back with Friction and EXIT resident MC Dynamite bringing in the morning.

Cut to the Dance Arena where Ibiza's We Love... crew played host, bringing with them the legendary Danny Tenaglia, 2020 Soundsystem live, Nic Fanciulli, Paul Woolford and Serge Santiago. Outstanding performances by all with a perfect 'Exit moment' when Danny Tenaglia donned a pair of large gold comedy sunglasses and busted some dance moves on the stage. Priceless - A true festival moment!

Exit festival has over 25 stages of all sizes and musical genres, a walk through the mystical fortress is like a magical wonderland.... Featuring the Café del Danube, the Elektrana Stage, Reggae Stage, Latino Stage, Urban Stage, Explosive Stage, Cinema, Happy Novi Sad Stage, Futureshock and trillions more. First up is the World Music Stage where the amazing group of percussionists from Novi Sad called Bateria SambaNsa were playing Brazilian rhythmic music.

Next up, the Reggae Stage hosted by Brixton's Terratone crew who have been performing at the festival for 6 years and are considered residents of Exit! "The Serbian people are a joy to be amongst and treat everybody like royalty, the very little they have they openly share with you, it is truly touching" Wenti Coke enthuses. And this is a sentiment shared by many UK visitors to the festival. Said Mark, a punter from Manchester "The people of Serbia where so welcoming and friendly towards the festival goers to the point where we have made friends with many of them. The festival has a friendly atmosphere and is set in an excellent location."

And there's the MTV Movement stage – an intimate and rocking charity driven stage supporting social issues at EXIT. This year they launched the campaign 'Movement', promoting Tolerance and Diversity and encouraging people to free their minds from prejudice. Acts included The Loose Cannons, Kissy Sell Out, Rob Garza (Theivery Corporation), Bez (Happy Mondays) and Tayo, with surprise sets from Tom Finlay's Groove Armada and Green Velvet doing an 80's set no less. Diverse to say the least!

And onto the Fusion Stage where Serbian and regional bands perform. A group of Serbians explained that although the festival is a great party, it still means freedom to them. EXIT festival started as a student initiated project against the Milosevic regime in 1999 and although it has grown to into an internationally recognised event, EXIT still stays true to its roots and supports issues that effect the Serbian youth such as student mobility, youth activism and visa abolishment. Says EXIT's Rajko Bozik "Because of visa regimes young people from Serbia and Balkan can't travel easily, so having so many international visitors to EXIT was great opportunity for our local audience to find out more about festivals in UK and Europe. We hope very soon it would be easy for young Serbs to go to Glastonbury, just as it's easy for young Brits to come to EXIT."

And comparisons to Glastonbury are rife. With the variety of unique stages and performers, this year's EXIT also featured Ms Lauryn Hill playing the diva, Basement Jaxx belting out their hits and the ultra smooth Snoop Dogg bringing the 'bling' to Main Stage, finishing with the delectable sounds of LTJ Bukem & MC Conrad.

Saturday also saw Roger Sanchez, the Godfather of house Frankie Knuckles, Buraka Som Sistema live, Justin Martin and Hannah Holland on the Dance Arena. "It's great to see Serbia progressing in providing a place for people from all over the world to come together and enjoy electronic music. There were a lot more European attendees and for me it is very positive to see people like Frankie Knuckles on the line up. I really enjoyed playing this festival with a great crowd and wonderful organization" stated Roger Sanchez after rocking the 25,000 throng of revellers.

Sunday, the last night of the four day event featured the Audio Bullys, Pendulum DJ set, another amazing fireworks display and the mighty Wu-Tang Clan on Main Stage. With Wu Tang's Masta Killah exclaiming after their performance "Man, they are crazy out there, crazy". Meanwhile in the Dance Arena, Sebastien Leger preceding John Digweed, both playing at EXIT for the first time before handing over the decks to Eric Prydz, another first time performance. Said John Digweed "One of the best festival gigs that I have ever done. Amazing venue, thumping sound system and great crowd". And as the sun came up on the last morning, it was left, as tradition has it, to local hero Marko Nastic to end EXIT's four day musical and magical fest.

EXIT is truly an amazing experience and although it gets bigger each year the sentiment is still the same. It is great to be part on an event that actually means something and makes a stand to make things better for the young people of Serbia.

EXIT's General Manager Bojan Boskovic sums things up "Every year we aim to out-do the previous year and this year is no exception. We, as the State of EXIT, wish to bring various people together, mainly inviting international and regional bands, artists and performers to Serbia in order to promote the interaction of different cultures, traditions and beliefs through music and social activities. EXIT has become a social force that is a symbol of togetherness and cultural diversity, that every year brings more and more people from various backgrounds and cultures, together."

Long may the State of EXIT reign!

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