

DAKAR



West Africa's most Westernised capital certainly has a lot to offer the music lover, as Katharina Kane reveals

If there were one image to describe the nightlife of Dakar, it would be that of a skinny-heeled strap sandal, dug six centimetres into soft, golden sand. Dakar's music-loving crowds sparkle – so brightly you barely notice the battered state of the taxis they spill out of, and the peeling paint of the cubs they patiently queue at. Pass the Thiossane, Youssou N'Dour's famous club and you feel like a special invitee at a fashion show – rows of chattering girls, poured into the tightest

of dresses outdazzle one another. Or try Orchestra Baobab at their regular stint at the Just 4 U, where the 'real ladies' take to the dance floor in billowing *boubous* and dangling gold jewellery.

Dakar is famous for its vibrant music scene, a dynamic and varied arena that has brought forth such international stars as Youssou N'Dour, Cheikh Lô and Baaba Maal. And on any Saturday night, you have the choice of seeing some of those artists live, be it on a heaving dance floor or in a tranquil restaurant garden. For Dakar's street sounds, including the city's vibrant hip-hop and reggae scenes, you usually have to look for more informal settings, including school yards, sound system-enhanced street corners and tucked-away nightclubs.

Dakar's nightlife starts late. No one is supposed to return home before five – which is how most club nights end with hot chocolate and croissants at Dakar's famous patisseries. If such late nights don't appeal, you can

always take in the daytime sounds. Book a taxi for a tour around town, and see what tickles your eardrums. Chances are, you'll spend much of your time in gridlock, wedged between a colourful *car rapide* (minibus) and a string of yellow cabs. But even then, your driver is likely to have his distorted radio turned to the latest hip-hop or *mbalax* hit – Dakar's über-sexy dancebeat. Or while you're footing it through the daytime heat, you'll probably pass what looks like spontaneous pavement parties – groups of impossibly elegant ladies draped in shimmering fabrics and sky-high headwraps. These are wedding parties, the best occasions to see *griots* perform their traditional praise songs, usually carried across the quartier by a shrill megaphone or clattering mic.

To find out what is happening around town, the pocket-sized glossy magazine *Le 221* with its extensive concert listings is an essential companion.

the huge Dakar branch is one of their flagship places. A tranquil arts café during the day, it frequently houses large live events at its large open-air theatre. A great place to see rising stars in atmospheric surroundings. **89 rue Joseph Gomis, +221 823 0320, www.institutfr-dakar.org**

Koch B
This cleverly-designed open-air space with its lounge chair and swimming pool has trendy written all over it. Viviane N'Dour performs here frequently and is always surrounded by Dakar's most stylish crowds. If, for a night, you want to feel part of the Senegalese in-set, squeeze into your most shimmering gear, splash out on champagne,

and mingle here with Dakar's jet set. **Route des Almadies, +221 820 64 67**
Blue Note
If the Koch B revels in its own hype, Blue Note across the road tries hard to carve out a reputation for being one of the leading 'alternative' venues – a good place to enjoy some sophisticated Afro-jazz with a fine glass of white wine, or a dose of quiet folk while digging into a delicious dish of something. **Route des Almadies, +221 820 45 51**

Pen'Art
This cosy live bar frequently shares the programming of the Just 4 U next door – artists will often play one venue on a Friday,



Daara J working the crowd at Just 4 U

the other on the Saturday. The atmosphere is completely different, though. This place is tiny, and has something of a stuffy living room feel, with listeners being squeezed into tiny sofas within touching distance of the stage. Soul crooner Carlou plays here regularly, making it definitely worth a visit. **Boulevard du Sud, Point E, +221 864 5131**

Thiossane
Youssou N'Dour's mighty nightclub venture was once the shining beacon on the scene – but things have changed a little. It's still a great address for artists on Youssou's Jololi label, but strangely, it's only open when Youssou is in town, which isn't all that often. Still, this is where you stand the best chance of seeing the man live – though rarely before 3am. **Scap Rue 10, +221 824 6046**

Kilimanjaro
This is the stage belonging to the great Thione Seck, Youssou's eternal rival, though a lesser-known name abroad. Friday

Yengoulène
This has been described as the 'Thiossane of the *banlieue*', a leading live venue for the kids of Dakar's outskirts. The club's colourful front screams creative underground, and it's indeed a place that gets heaving with young and stylish folks. It's *mbalax*-heavy, and gets staggeringly lively when stars such as Viviane take to the stage here. Proper, buzzin' entertainment. **Nord Foire, +221 869 0710**



is the night to see the grand Thione live, always impeccably suited-and-tied. This is a night of well-behaved, well-dressed fun, and always worth a visit, especially as Thione Seck is rarely seen on the world music stages of Europe or the US. **Soumbédioune, +221 822 69 91**

Couleur Café
An understated bar in Ouakam, a residential Dakar suburb. Something of a calm light on Dakar's dazzling scene, with occasional live performances by old-time folkies Les Frères Guisse and younger guitar-strumming acts. **Carrefour Ouakam, +221 569 52 60**

Alizé Club
Drive past here during the day, and you'll be forgiven for thinking this place has long closed. Not so on a weekend night, when it becomes a hothouse of furious *mbalax* dancing. Artists such as Ceddo and Fallou Dieng shake up the crowds – a few minutes into their performance and it'll be rotating backsides, seductively swaying hips and passionate leaps all around you. Watch and learn. **Av Cheikh Anta Diop, +221 822 25 89**

RESTAURANTS WITH LIVE MUSIC

Apart from the established clubs and bars, numerous restaurants feature live acts, too, many of them of excellent quality. The classy Moroccan place **Shéhérazade** in Mermoz showcases regular performances by Les Frères Guisse and other Afro-folk acts. **Casa Créole** on Boulevard Djily Mbaye (+221 823 4081) features Afro-jazz act African Reen and other groups on its pretty terrace restaurant, and the trendy sea-view restaurant **Terrou-Bi** on the Corniche-Ouest (+221 577 01 61) has started to invite legendary Pape Niang and other *variété* bands to perform in its sought-after space.

FESTIVALS

Over the last years, festivals have mushroomed on the city's fertile creative soil, and you can barely spend a week here without stumbling across some sort of celebration. Some of the most exciting music festivals include:

Festival Music Ebène
An annual event in May, that gets major acts from Senegal and around Africa on stage for the fight against malaria.

Hip-Hop Awards
December is the best time to see Dakar's vibrant hip-hop scene in full swagger, plus numerous rap artists from across the region.

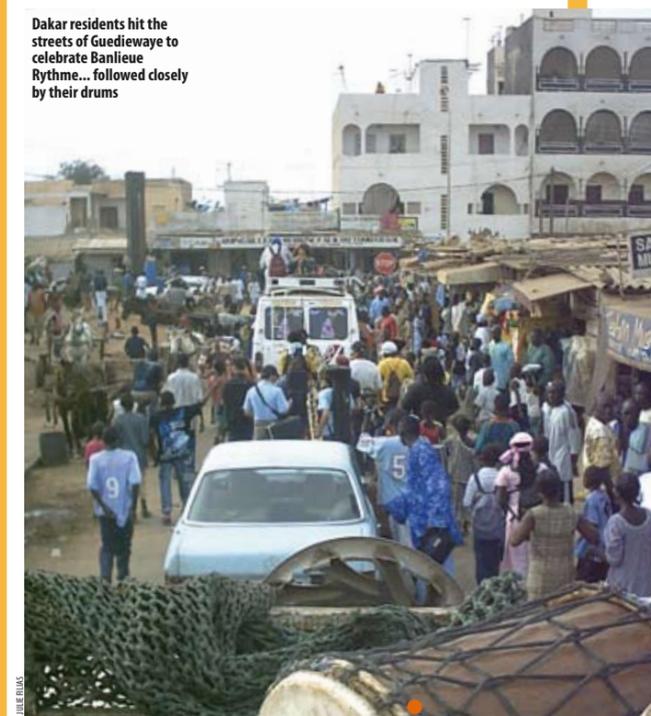
Banlieue Rythme
This is the streetwise version

of the Hip-Hop Awards. Initiated by hip-hop kids of Guediwaye, a rough Dakar suburb, it celebrates the bubbling underground scene in clubs and youth centres of the banlieue. **www.banlieue Rythme.com**

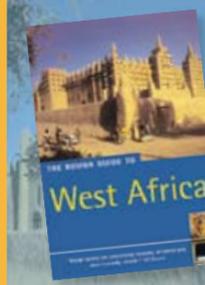
Africafête
Every December, the established production house Africafête, who count artists such as Pee Froiss and Aliou Mbaye Nder on their roster, hold a large festival in venues around town.

Afrikakeur
This annual comedy and music festival is usually held in early June at venues across Dakar, and features numerous renowned stars from Senegal and beyond. ●

Dakar residents hit the streets of Guediwaye to celebrate Banlieue Rythme... followed closely by their drums



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