

THE REGGAE FESTIVAL: It's a Family Affair

By Irene Johnson, Editor



Sierra Nevada World Music Festival offers arts and crafts, balloon making, face painting, interactive drum workshops, kid & family yoga, storytelling, free book give-away, bounce houses, water play, a festival parade and more! Photo by © Lee Abel

Here at the *Reggae Festival Guide*, we've really been enjoying family-friendly festivals and festivals with offerings for the youngest rockers among us. Our publisher Kaati has a granddaughter of toddler age and I myself have two young daughters, inspiring us to especially take notice while on the festival circuit. And it seems we're not alone. Pregnant mother goddesses with painted bellies to parents with their kids in wagons in tow – people want to share their love of reggae music, as well as the festival experience, with their kids.

From the [Uppsala Reggae Festival](#) in Uppsala, Sweden, to the [LB27 Reggae Camp](#) in Cegléd, Hungary, to the [Durham Caribbean Festival](#) in Ajax, Ontario, to the [Island Reggae Festival](#) in San Jose, CA, festivals worldwide are answering the call, making reggae festivals safe and fun for fans of all ages. At some festivals, this may mean strict rules against use of drugs or alcohol. Some adult-oriented festivals, like Jamaica's biggest reggae festival, [Reggae Sumfest](#), has one solution for the thousands of fans who travel from all over the world: all-inclusive hotels that provide babysitting and kid's programs. Other festivals might focus energy and funds into making the facilities and grounds as clean and accessible as possible. Many festivals offer free admission to kids under a certain age, making it financially possible for the whole family to attend. And most, we've observed, offer some set of activities, program or area especially for the youth.

In addition to expanding your children's awareness of reggae as a genre and giving them lasting memories of reggae legends live on stage, you can also let them indulge

in the activities kids love. Increasingly, festivals seem to offer a variation of arts and crafts, face painting, games, group music activities, yoga, storytelling, dancing and more, making the overall festival experience a pleasant family-oriented vibe that is much appreciated.

The reasons motivating this family-friendly shift are many. On a basic level, in order for parents to enjoy themselves, the kids need to be stimulated, kept busy and have fun with age-appropriate activities and opportunities to burn that endless energy they always seem to have. More holistically, a vision for many reggae festivals is to exemplify the core tenets of reggae.

For example, [Sierra Nevada World Music Festival](#) (SNWMF) in Boonville, CA, is "dedicated to nurturing a world family peacefully united in celebration of the universal spirit of music... and committed to ensuring that the festival be family friendly – a place where youth can be exposed to the beauty of many cultures celebrating together and experience that our similarities are greater than our differences."

Likewise, the [Positive Vibration Festival of Reggae](#) in Liverpool, U.K., states, "Reggae uplifts and inspires people of all ages, including children and young people. With this in mind, we host a number of creative, educational and dance workshops for children, young people and families" – which includes an arts and crafts competition, participatory arts, soft-play activities, capoeira classes and special introductory dub poetry workshops.

The [Ziontific Summer Solstice Music Fest](#) in Russell, MA, frequently falls on Father's



Elizabeth Randolph of Haven Arts Studio, was 8 months pregnant at the [California Roots Festival](#), and she not only enjoyed the festival, but also taught a live art workshop with her family all three days. Photo by Marissa E. of Bulldog Media

Day weekend, prompting many families to enjoy the festival as a getaway and campout under the stars in celebration of their fathers. Zontific's KidZone is jam-packed with a variety of active games, kid's yoga and playgroups, tons of crafts from dreamcatchers to mandalas to mask making, youth chorus, drum circle and more.

In Benicàssim, Spain, [Rototom Sunsplash](#) celebrates its 25th anniversary this year and has been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as an Exemplary Event for promoting a culture of peace and nonviolence, a philosophy that permeates each area of the festival. Youth enjoy MagicoMundo: six areas with water games, giant wooden games, construction, crafts, recycling and experimentation, painting and sculpture workshops, a free expression

zone, storytelling, library, relaxation area and a corner with activities and talks for parents. It's "a place to grow and learn, always from a perspective of absolute respect for the little ones and their universe, with spontaneous play and experiences as a means to explore this exciting world; a journey to be experienced as a family."

The philosophies of these festivals and others hint at the importance of including youth and accommodating families – the heart of the matter goes far beyond creating a great festival. A festival is a tangible experience we can give the next generation that reflects the beliefs of reggae culture. Uniting with so many strangers that become sisters and brothers through this shared experience, in the same place, at the same time, dancing and singing together in celebration of the same song about love, peace and social change – that's a powerful experience unique to



The Island Reggae Festival in San Jose, CA, provides hours of entertainment through free unlimited carnival rides and games. Photo by Justine Ketola



RFG Editor Irene Johnson sharing the reggae festival experience with her daughter Elena.

festivals. Making festivals family friendly makes it more possible to share this experience and promote these values with our kids.

So, as you plan your next festival calendar, in addition to who's in the line-up, take a look at what offerings are made available for the kids in your life. It is both our joy and responsibility to bring up the next generation of reggae fans who will become active members of this community.

