



Clockwise from main image: Colombian group Rancho Aparte; the waterfront of Gdańsk; Gdynia's Maritime University; Senegalese multi-instrumentalist Diabel Cissokho; Antonis Antoniou of Monsieur Doumani; singer Çiğdem Aslan; the Solidarity memorial in Gdańsk

Globaltica

Simon Broughton explores the northern Polish coast on a visit to Gdynia's annual 'world cultures' festival

When you think of Poland, the seaside isn't perhaps the first thing that comes to mind. But in the summer, Poland's 500km of Baltic coastline is a huge draw for visitors. Gdynia, where Globaltica is held, is one of the Trójmiasto (Three Cities), on the Baltic Sea. Situated next to each other from north to south, Gdynia is a modernist port built in the 1930s, Sopot an upmarket 19th-century resort, and Gdańsk is one of the great Baroque cities of Europe and, of course, the birthplace of Solidarity in the 1980s. Gdańsk has an international airport and each city has a distinct character and identity so there's plenty to explore around Globaltica.

The festival, now in its 13th year, takes place in Kolibki Park, on the southern edge of Gdynia. A stage is erected in a clearing beside the trees that go down to the beach. You're not particularly aware that you're on the coast, but if you want a dip, the sea is just a few minutes walk away. "We have to cater for a wide range of audiences, from families in Gdynia with small kids to people coming from the other

cities, as well as visitors from abroad," explains Piotr Pucyło, an amiable graphic artist and the festival's director. It's described as a 'world cultures festival' and takes place over four days with free film screenings, workshops and smaller events before the ticketed concerts in an Old Carriage House and on the main stage on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. Main stage prices are cheap at 30 złoty (€7) per concert or 40 złoty (€10) for all of them. Five nights at the festival campsite and all concerts costs 99 złoty (€23).

"Most people won't be familiar with the artists in advance," says Pucyło. "But over 12 years they have come to trust us to make a programme that will satisfy them on an artistic level. We are trying to get the very best out of the limited budget we have." So while they can't afford to fly artists in specially, they do get an impressive line-up from who is available on tour. Last year the main concerts included Senegalese multi-instrumentalist player Diabel Cissokho, Damily from Madagascar, Monsieur Doumani from Cyprus,



Rancho Aparte from Colombia and Romania's Fanfare Ciocărlia, among others. There was also local music from the current favourite Polish band, Kapela Maliszów.

This year Pat Thomas, AlSarah & the Nubatones and Refugees for Refugees are on the bill, so the quality is high. "Poland is a very homogeneous society, so it's also part of the idea to bring people closer to other cultures," adds Pucyło. I'm brought face to face with Alevi culture while sitting in a 19th-century carriage building that makes a wonderfully intimate concert venue. *Songlines Music Awards* nominee Çiğdem Aslan and Tahir Palali are performing a duo concert of Turkish Alevi music. "We Alevis don't go to the mosque,"

says Palali with a smile, "we gather to worship in places like this." Aslan's voice is perfect for the yearning sound of these songs and Palali's plucked *tenbur* accompaniment is delicate yet profound, the rasp of his fingernails on the strings adding bite to the texture. "We don't like the pious, because the pious don't know love," Palali adds. "This song ends with the realisation that *'the consciousness that created the universe is within you.'* There's a high level of mystical culture in Alevi thought."

With the main musical activity in the evenings, there's plenty of opportunity for outsiders to explore the region. The story of Gdynia is extraordinary. After Poland won its independence in 1918, Gdynia was rapidly developed as the country's port, as Gdańsk (then called the Free City of Danzig) was essentially controlled by the Germans. They started building the port in 1921 and the city around it in 1925. In 1927 Gdynia handled one percent of Polish trade, a decade later it handled 49%. Over the same period the population soared from 1,000 to 100,000.

The visible legacy of this today is the architectural unity of the city, with clean, functional, modernist lines. The buildings are mostly white and some – like the Maritime University on the harbour – echo the shapes of ships. Inevitably post-war building has interfered with the homogeneous style, but Gdynia is still one of the best-preserved modernist cities in the world and there are several walks you can take to see the highlights. There's a translucent light, too, that lends a special magic in the summer.



While Gdynia is clean and functional, Gdańsk is flamboyant, wealthy and of huge strategic importance. It's where Poland's main river, the Vistula, reaches the sea. As the 18th-century Prussian king Frederick the Great said, whoever controls Gdańsk is "more master of Poland than any king ruling there." The main street, Długa, is lined with ornate mansions attesting to the city's mercantile wealth as one of main Hanseatic ports – today the facades are replicas as the street was totally destroyed during World War II. Other attractions include the Bazylika Mariacka, or St Mary's Church, the largest brick-built church in the world, the waterfront, jam-packed with tourists, and the excellent European Solidarity Centre, opened in 2014. The metallic, rust-coloured building evokes hulls from the former Lenin Shipyard next door and houses a brilliant museum about the rise of Solidarity and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, which

arguably started here. Lech Wałęsa, former Solidarity leader and Polish president has his office in the building.

Because Gdynia port is a window on the world, Piotr Pucyło says the people of the city are naturally open to

other people and cultures. Back at the festival the audience are jumping to Rancho Aparte – a distinctive band from Colombia's Pacific coast with red beret-wearing vocalist, Dino Manuelle, plus a pair of squealing clarinets, euphonium and percussion. They've had an eventful day. One of their percussionists developed a stomach inflammation and the doctor at Gdynia hospital was a Globaltica fan and got the guy seen to, let out for the concert, and then taken back at midnight for further treatment. What's more a lady from the audience who'd been in Pacific Colombia offers to go back with them to the hospital to help out. That's the sort of festival it is! ♦

+ DATES This year's festival will be July 19-23
+ ONLINE www.globaltica.pl