

Inna Stylee

by Katie Martin

"Tall and tan and young and lovely, the girl from Ipanema goes walking, and when she passes each man she passes goes, Aaahh." Joao Gilberto

What to wear? I know I'm not the only one frantically mulling over this question before heading off to a reggae festival. After all, I'll be hooking up with family and friends I haven't seen in a while; some I only see once a year. I'll also be meeting lots of new and interesting people. I want my clothing to make a statement about who I am and what mood I'm in. I need clothing and accessories to transform myself for three days! We may be One Love collectively, but we still have our personal vanities.

Music is, of course, always the main festival attraction, but one of the strongest lures is often simply to dress up and participate anonymously among the amazingly diverse crowd. We all dress differently, yet every one of our faces bears the beautiful symmetry of the "golden mean," it's the bright eyes and friendly smiles that make people watching and photography (both taking and posing for pictures) so very entertaining.



Sporting tie-dye, camo and hemp, these festies sum up the fashion standards of any festival.





Nothing like getting in the festival spirit with good food and celebratory clothing!



Empress adorned in rootsy headwear

Kim Salloway



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The rest is just wardrobe... which brings me back to my quandary... what am I going to wear?

Clothing stays on my mind as I cruise through the festival with my camera, trying to pinpoint the archetypes of reggae style. It's almost overwhelming! There are purists in fashion, but most of us combine a variety of elements from among the myriad of clothing styles. Reggae culture is influencing the world and the world is influencing reggae culture, making reggae fans more stylish than ever.

Anything goes, but I begin to see classic characters: gypsy, flower child, queen, king, soldier. The real fun is that you really don't know who's who. Some come particularly to create their own doppelganger or alter ego. Many come "in character" and literally become part of the show. For them, fashion is costuming.

Some costumes have become beloved favorites that people look forward to seeing every year. As a fairy princess with butterfly wings capers by, in a crocheted bikini top, she becomes a moving work of art "a la Burning Man."

Probably the most attention-getting style I see is the sexy, dancehall bombshell. She is definitely not the "girl next door." Dancehall style is tight-fitting and skin-revealing. Body-hugging miniskirts, hip-hugging jeans and skimpy hot pants are worn with chunky platforms for that leggy dancer look. Blingy jewelry and stunner shades complete the ensemble. Mmmm, I can't help but check out a dancehall hottie with his six-pack abs peaking through his mesh "mariner" shirt, a style popular in the Caribbean and abundant on the vendor racks right now.

An African princess strolls by, wrapped in yards of tribal fabric on the arm of a be-robed emperor. Modest and feminine in her exotic headwrap, she browses through beautiful ethnic jewelry featuring carved bone, amber beads and antique coins. Her king walks with a beautiful hand-carved staff, a useful prop for navigating around the often-uneven terrain of a festival.



Hats are beloved at festival time, not only for sun protection but also as a fashion statement.



A butterfly girl flutters through the crowd.

Among the vending stalls I see Bob Marley and Haile Selassie imprinted on just about everything. The innovation of the artists and graphic designers is impressive. Rasta-themed designs and logos are updated with a modern urban flair: the red, gold and green of the Ethiopian flag; gold, green and black of the Jamaican flag, striped sporty tracksuits and jerseys. "Sag" seems universal; many of the youths sport low-slung pants held up with Jamaican-striped belts.

Among the traditional pot leaf tees, peace signs and tie-dyed clothing, I glimpse handmade, one-of-a-kind works of art-to-wear. An enchanting gypsy in a long flowing skirt and leather corset smiles on as I choose some body glitter and scented oils from her aphrodisiacal apothecary. I am hoping to bewitch my own king a little later on...

As I'm done shopping and taking my photos, I stroll back to camp wearing many of my new purchases and feeling pretty irie and somewhat goddess-like. However, even in our little utopia, the classic duality between young and old persists: "Mom, you aren't going to wear THAT are you?" and "Are you actually wearing glitter?" Oh well, try as I might, I guess I'm a generalist – a little bit of this and a little bit of that. I like to keep it simple and just be comfortable – Teva sandals, sarongs, hemp clothing, cut offs, maybe a cotton tank top from last year's festival to show that "I belong."

P.S. I am the one with the camera so watch out (and smile)! ♡

Mother, wife, sister, Katie Martin can often be found at the festivals backstage organizing food for the masses. Year 'round she runs Martel Records with her husband David. Producer, writer, graphic/web designer – Katie is truly a "jill" of all trades.