



Byron Bay - world's sexiest beach

Forbes Traveller presents the world's 25 sexiest beaches.

Only one Australian beach has made it on to a US travel website's list of the world's 25 sexiest beaches.

Byron Bay was the sole Aussie beach to get a nod from Forbes Traveller, which compiled the list based on research by their own journalists, and other industry experts including tour planners, meteorologists, hotel owners and marine biologists.

The far north coast NSW beach was lauded for its "chalky-white sands, deliciously temperate weather and occasional visits from dolphins and migrating whales".

Byron Bay's cosmopolitan population, local festivals and nudist beach were also given the thumbs up. Forbes Traveller journalist Bruce Kluger said it was difficult to narrow the field to just 25, and that the criteria for the sexiest beaches was a special combination of "sensuality, sassiness and scenic beauty - both geographic and human".

It's a description that would fit many of Australia's beaches. However, no other part of the country's coastline made the exclusive list. The snub has already drawn criticism from at least one region that relies heavily on its beaches as one of its biggest tourism drawcards.

Surfers Paradise Management CEO Lilliana Montague today defended the Gold Coast's 42 beaches in an article in the local newspaper, saying that sexiness was a state of mind.

"You can feel sexy without having to be told you're sexy," she said. Tourism Australia chairman Tim Fischer said he believed Byron Bay may have pipped the Gold Coast because it better balanced development with natural beauty.

"Full marks to Byron Bay on what I call the Bold Coast... which stands for Balance Over Licentious Development," he said.

"I congratulate them on their win and say to all the other beaches, don't give up... you have plenty to offer, right around Australia."

Byron Bay ranked alongside other stunning destinations such as Eleuthera in The Bahamas, Lover's Beach on the Baja Peninsula, and Fiji's Natadola Beach.

Rio took two of the top 25 places, with Ipanema Beach and Copacabana recognised for their hedonistic atmosphere and plethora of bronzed bodies, and two of Hawaii's iconic beaches, Ka'anapali and Kauapea, also made the grade.

Europe also featured highly, with the Greek Islands, France, Spain, Cyprus and Italy rating a mention.

Greek pop star Sakis Rouvas confident in Eurovision bid

Greek pop star Sakis Rouvas brought his country a third-place finish in his first Eurovision outing in 2004 with the song "Shake It." Fans of the Eurovision Song Contest are counting down the last few days until this year's pop extravaganza as entrants are in the final phases of their frenzied rush to promote their songs in many locations on international tours.

Earlier this month, as Turkish entrant Hadise was on a six-day Balkan tour, another young hopeful from Turkey's neighbor across the Aegean, Greece's Sakis Rouvas, visited Istanbul during his promotional tour, speaking in interviews and singing his Eurovision song on TV programs.

This year Greece's chances for a good score in Eurovision are high, given that Rouvas' first Eurovision outing in 2004, with the song "Shake It," brought the country a third-place finish and gave Rouvas international fame.

The 37-year-old pop sensation, who won the World Music Award for World's Best-Selling Greek Artist in 2005, is now preparing to represent his country with the song "This Is Our Night" in the 54th Eurovision Song Contest, scheduled for May 12-16 in Moscow.

Rouvas spoke about his charmed career and his second try on Eurovision during his recent Istanbul visit.

You are representing Greece with the dance song "This Is Our Night" in this year's Eurovision Song Contest. Isn't participating in the same contest five years later a challenge for your career?

I agree, but I love to challenge myself. Being part of this contest is truly a challenge, but it's given me a kind of great excitement and I am pretty confident about my song.

What are the chances for "This Is Our Night" in this year's contest?

People's musical tastes change over time, and I believe "This Is Our Night" is a very catchy dance song, but we are going to see the results altogether. I love my song, and I would love to sing it on stage.

What do you think about the Turkish song "Dóm tek tek"?

Hadise is a very beautiful singer, and she has an excellent voice. Her song is very up-tempo, and it becomes her. I feel like it's one of the best songs of the Eurovision song contest ever.

You made your professional debut in Athens in 1991, and you have been singing for almost 18 years



now. What was your dream in the beginning?

I didn't have a clue at all in the very beginning; all I wanted was to sing. I only wanted to find a way to express myself as a singer, and I wanted to be on stage.

Critics always mention your dancing skills on stage. Who are your favorites from the international pop scene when it comes to dance?

I would mention the one-and-only queen of pop, Madonna. For me, Madonna is the one. I can't imagine a better name on stage with all her charm. She is my one and only favorite.

For the choreography of your song you worked with Focas Evangelinos, who previously did the choreography for the 2005 Eurovision winner, Helena Paparizou, and also for your previous song. How long have you been working on this choreography?

I have been working with Focas Evangelinos for a long time. He's the one I have been working with as a choreographer for so many years. Moreover, he's one of my best friends. We started to work on special choreography for "This Is Our Night" after the Greek finals, and it's been more than a month now.

In 1997 you collaborated on stage with Turkish pop singer Burak Kut in a concert organized by the United Nations in Cyprus. You were also awarded for your contribution to bi-communal understanding. Can you talk about this?

Actually, in the beginning I recorded the song "Someday" for the Greek release of the Disney Movie "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," and Burak Kut did the same for the Turkish release. Then we thought "Why not sing this song on stage together?" and we came up with this project. It was a very beautiful experience for both of us. Burak Kut is a very good singer.

You gave a concert in 2004 with Turkey's Eurovision winner Sertab Erener in Istanbul. Who else you would like to collaborate with among Turkish singers?

I would say Tarkan, without any hesitation. I know he's been the most famous male singer of Turkey for so

long, and it's really hard to maintain this amount of success. Tarkan is great on stage, and he has an excellent voice.

Throughout its history, Eurovision witnessed performances from international acts such as Abba and Celine Dion, but it seems like it's losing that old magic. Do you agree?

I totally disagree. I don't believe that it's losing its magic. On the contrary, it's still the one-and-only major song contest in Europe, and there are thousands of Eurovision fans all over Europe. Millions of people watch the show every year, and it's still a kind of magical experience for any artist.

You have released more than 10 albums so far. What are your future aspirations?

It's been 14 albums so far. I recently released my brand new album in Greece, and in the next few months my English-language album will be out. Meanwhile, there are two upcoming movie projects that are very exciting for me. We shot one in Greece and the other in Los Angeles. The movie we shot in Los Angeles is a psychological thriller. I play a killer in that movie, and it's a pretty exciting horror film.

Did you know about Hadise before she was named the Turkish entrant in Eurovision?

I had never heard about Hadise before. I knew Tarkan, Sezen Aksu and Sertab [Erener]. But no one should miss Hadise. She's so talented, and she's a great singer.

Which countries do you think are the most likely to get the highest scores in this year's Eurovision show?

My favorite is Abba [laughs]. I like Hadise's song, I am also confident about my song. It's a very nice dance tune.

"This Is Our Night" has the sound of the '80s. Do you think it will get support from the Turkish audience?

"Shake It" is more oriental and more ethnic, but Eurovision listeners change in their tastes over time. Now we have an audience who watches more and more MTV. Younger generations are more likely to listen to solid pop and dance sounds, and "This Is Our Night" is a pretty catchy pop song.