

## Find Yourself A Festival

**Throughout the Mountains, throughout the year, there are festivals to engage you, your family and friends. In a region renowned for its celebratory events, Paul Cosgrave took a closer look at the portfolio.**

Village pride characterises life at altitude and the Spring Festivals this year between Glenbrook and Blackheath have shown exactly what community living is all about. Typical was Glenbrook's 29<sup>th</sup> annual spring festival with a stage in Glenbrook Park, music, stalls, exceptional food, pony rides, a historical display and shuttle bus service. The Blue Gum Trefoil Guild made a big contribution with its annual art show and funds this year support neonatal intensive care.

Another village fair, Blackheath's Rhododendron Festival, is now in its fifty-ninth year with associated events from August through November. Each year a Rhododendron Princess is crowned and this year it's Kimberly Wilson. Apart from the main weekend's street stalls, entertainment, art show and Grand Parade, there's a ball and special live music highlights like the free three day boutique Jazz Festival and a local 'Composers' Concert'. The famous 'Rhodo Revue' was sold out this year for all performances.

Organising Committee President, Sabine Erika, said this year's event was marked by a real rejuvenation of community spirit. "The thing we all noticed was the contribution from everyone in town. Every shop decorated its windows and there's a great sense of belonging about the Rhodo Festival". Lawson and Wentworth Falls also celebrate the arrival of warmer weather with art shows and village festivals.

The Vintage Retro weekend at the National Trust's Everglades was an excellent platform to show off the garden's superb refurbishments and new Visitor Centre. General Manager, Scott Pollack, said Everglades had been restored to its former glory and the event revolves around the heritage of the main house, built in the 1930s. "There aren't many gardens of this age in Australia and the house is art deco, which was new for the time. The gardens were designed by Paul Sorensen but it was all made possible by businessman Henri Van de Velde, who made Everglades his weekender". From sunlit terraces we looked across to Mt Solitary and enjoyed lawn croquet, refreshments and music from Tango Oz, a section of the Sydney Youth Orchestra under the direction of Sydney's Maggie Ferguson, who learned her tango living in Argentina.

In Katoomba's Carrington Place in October, the Joy of Spring Festival spread the Christian word while in the same location, with a slightly different message, The Carrington staged its annual Oktoberfest. The hotel's annual beer stein has been produced for six years and some serious collectors have the full series. "Oktoberfest's record attendance of more than three thousand guests saw families and children enjoy a bouncing castle, face painting and the beautiful Carrington Place gardens", said general manager, Mark Jarvis. Leura's Fairmont Resort also hosts Oktoberfest.

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unlimited potential ...”**

A brand new festival based on an event in the UK's Isle of Wight was the inaugural Festival of Walking, organised by Elizabeth Walton. "The first year was about awareness, really", Elizabeth told Wonderland. "It's the brain child of Marie Woods of Katoomba Chamber of Commerce, which developed the idea with a grant secured by BMLOT. The feedback is amazing and in this region it has unlimited potential". The festival comprised public and organised walks and Elizabeth, a social media marketing specialist, utilised Twitter to generate coverage on ABC radio.

The Mountains are always made more colourful by the many seasonal festivals like Oberon Summer Festival, Leura's world famous Open Gardens, Bathurst's 'Autumn Colours', Mudgee Wine Festival and Blackheath's Wine Fair, organised for thirteen of its fourteen years by Bob Weaver. "This is a festival to showcase the distinctive cold climate wines of Bathurst, Orange and Mudgee. It's always well supported by local people and visitors come from Sydney, Canberra and Wollongong". There's no greater pleasure than sitting and sipping in soft autumn sunshine, with music and food on tap.

One of the most enjoyable seasonal festivals is the two day Leura Village Fair, when cherry blossoms blow in the breeze like a snow storm in spring. This year I ran into an old friend, musician and music teacher Neill Duncan, enjoying the sunshine with his children Floyd and Pearl. A highly talented multi-instrumentalist, Neill has just opened a new recording studio in Katoomba. "It's fully equipped to specialise in recording all forms of music" (0427 971 177).

Music at its finest is the hallmark of Blue Mountains Music Festival, each March. Co-Director, Bob Charter, told Wonderland next year's program includes Judy Collins, Eire's Beoga, Australia's My Friend The Chocolate Cake and Finland's fiddle quintet Frigg, with ticket discounts available until December 31. Literature, too, makes its mark each May at Varuna's Sydney Writers' Festival. Varuna CEO, Lis Bastian, said it had grown over seven years to secure an enviable reputation for inspiring speakers, books and challenging ideas. "What makes it special is that audiences rub shoulders with visiting international writers, Commonwealth Prize finalists and Australian writers across all genres. In 2012 we'll be unveiling an exciting new and extended program for both adults and young people". Children's literature is also showcased at the annual Norman Lindsay Gallery Festival of Children's Literature.

There are many more festivals to mention than space permits – Kowmung, Springwood Foundation Day, Songlines, Ironfest, Blackheath's Horticultural and Craft Fair and Katoomba's Footlight Festival – so come at any time of year and you'll find a festival to entertain you. Always remember to check Wonderland's 'What's On'.

### **Coming Up**

The Shakespeare Festival (Jan); Lady Luck Festival (Jan); Ukelele Festival (Feb); Roaring 20s & All That Jazz (Feb); Oberon Show + Highlands Steam & Vintage Fair (Feb); BM Music Festival (Mar); Blackheath Wine Fair (Apr); Mt Victoria Great Train W'end (May).

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