

# CHILDERS FESTIVAL OF CULTURES



**H**eld annually at the end of July, the *Childers Festival of Cultures* celebrates the rich diversity of the Bundaberg Region and beyond. Known as ‘the friendliest festival’ by its regular visitors, the festival sets out to create an atmosphere of openness and warm hospitality in which attendees can listen to music from around the world, eat exotic foods and shop until they drop at the 450 stalls which are set up along tree lined Churchill Street.

Originally known as the *Childers Multicultural Festival*, the event started in 1996. The attendance that first year was around 5000. The following year the

visitor numbers doubled and from there the Festival has grown into one of the most significant regional festivals with current attendance around the 55,000 – 60,000 mark.

The *Festival of Cultures* is a free event with no entry fee.

As the Festival grew organizers decided to close the Bruce Highway and re-route the traffic through side streets to allow for safety through the Festival area. This was done in conjunction with Queensland Main Roads and Police. The Festival relies on the local police force, SES and volunteers from community groups to make it such a well

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run event. The Council and the community invest time, money and energy in the event because it brings great economic and social benefits to the whole area.

In 2002 the festival was rebadged to become the *Childers Festival of Cultures*. This opened up more opportunities for the scope of performances. Now Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander cultures could be included and different musical styles from gospel to folk could find a place on the program.

Each year the Committee comes up with a theme or a new idea to revitalise the event. For example in 1998 we had a large Japanese contingent of artists come to

Childers for 10 days and perform workshops for all ages from Kindergarten and Primary School students to Adult Art Workshops along with an Exhibition brought out from Japan and held in the Childers Regional Gallery.

In 2007 the entertainment was themed “The Beat on the Street”, and performed on seven stages throughout the main street of Childers, with groups from Africa, the Caribbean, Mexico, Ireland, Ghana and Tibet. Music rang out from the Pan Pipes of the Andes and Tibetan Throat Singers. The beat was picked up by Middle Eastern belly dancers and the rock ‘n’ rollers and line dancers from closer to home!



2007 also saw a visit to Childers by Tibetan Monks of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They performed their haunting chanting during Festival Day in the Cultural Centre and created the Sacred Sand Mandala. Hundreds visited during the day to listen to the meditation sessions and to watch the magnificent process of mandala construction using coloured sand brought to Australia from Tibet. This was the first time that a 'quiet' space had been created in the festival and it was a popular move.

The children and youth of the community are never forgotten in festival planning. Children's entertainment is provided by many first class artists from all over Queensland who engage young people in street theatre. Then there are always the rides and slides! The best connection for this younger age group however is in the workshops planned for the week before the Festival. Visiting artists go around all the local primary and high schools and work directly with the classes. One year they will be learning African dance or hip hop, another they will be singing or learning to make objects with lawyer cane.

Seasoned Festival attendees find the best way to sample the cuisine of the Festival of Cultures is to adopt a 'grazing' approach to the day. For several years the Festival Committee has held Gourmet Cooking Classes with Guest Chefs. These are always

popular and have included Italian, Thai, sushi making and cheesemaking. Winery stalls are dotted throughout the Festival area and patrons are able to enjoy wines from across Queensland.

While you may have to park along the highway if you come later in the morning, a Shuttle Bus service is provided to ensure ease of access to the Festival area. Disabled parking is also available in a designated and supervised area. Visiting coaches have an allocated parking area with the service of a connecting shuttle bus to the Festival site.

Emergency Services including Police, Ambulance and Fire Brigade and SES are on hand to assist if the need arises.

The 2008 Festival will be held on the weekend of Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 July – with Sunday 27 being the main festival day. Stage programs start at 9.00am and go through to 3.30pm. The rhythmic sounds this year will lead you into "Salsa City". That red hot salsa movement will have you dancing in the streets. So, feel the rhythm, follow the aroma and find your way there!

For further info contact Festival Director Nancy Calder, 4126 2827 or Childers Visitors Centre, 4126 1994.

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