

Celebrate autumn's abundance

The High Country turns on two special mountain festivals for lovers of all things beautiful.

Autumn is the season for celebration in the mountain valleys of north-east Victoria. Dramatic bluffs stand clear and sharp against azure skies and fragrant wood smoke wafts on crisp air, hinting of winter. Harvest flavours abound, from the sweet crunch of freshly picked apples to the savoury warmth of newly-roasted chestnuts.

The riotous colours of the region's deciduous trees are the most dramatic seasonal attraction, particularly in and around Victoria's unofficial autumn capital, Bright. So spectacular is the annual exhibition that the town could have been named for its brilliant autumnal displays, when foliage turns to crimson, burgundy, amber, saffron, rose and gold.

The Ovens, King and Kiewa Valleys, together with the nearby high country, are year-round destinations for outdoor adventure enthusiasts – from skiers and snow boarders to hang gliders and rock climbers – but in autumn the high-adrenaline menu takes a back seat as visitors feast on the region's scenic and gourmet assets.

To mark the season, the annual Bright Autumn Festival places a strong emphasis on the abundance of high-quality produce found at local farms, wineries, restaurants and stores.

“Each year we try to get new items for the program so regular visitors find something different as well as their favourites,” said festival spokesperson Sue van Winden.

From lavender farms to green tea crops, alpacas to emus, berry patches to walnut groves, the region's provenders will open their doors to gourmants and gastronomes, displaying the rich diversity of Ovens Valley produce. Winery and brewery tours are also scheduled throughout the festival. Completing the sensory feast, various Open Gardens flaunt glorious autumn displays and an art exhibition is planned.

Another aspect of this 45th annual Bright Autumn Festival pays tribute to the region's golden past. While Central Victoria was the site of the State's richest gold discoveries, the mountain valleys of the north-east also held alluvial deposits, sparking rushes of their own in the mid-1800s.

Wandiligong, a tiny, National Trust-classified village a few kilometres from Bright, was the site of a small gold rush. Tours of the town, which once had a population of about 2000, are planned as part of the Autumn Festival. Visitors may also try gold panning.

The festival highlight is Gala Day. It spills onto Bright's streets on Saturday, 3 May. A number of the town's major roads close as a full day of carnival celebrations takes over the town. Festival fun will include a monster market, craft displays, brass and highland bands, and a concert in the park. This year's Grand Parade is themed “At the Movies,” providing plenty of creative scope for the expected 40-plus floats and other entries.

MOUNT BEAUTY MUSIC FESTIVAL

Just over the Tawonga Gap in the picturesque Kiewa Valley, autumn is celebrated to the tune of the Mount Beauty Music Festival. Now in its ninth year, the festival will be held on the ANZAC Day long weekend, from Friday, 25 April to Sunday, 27 April.



“The festival – which began life as the Mount Beauty Music Muster – was retitled last year because the name implied a country event, belying the diversity of music packed into the three-day weekend,” said festival spokesperson Kirsten Seaver.

The many styles on offer during the festival include rhythm 'n' blues, folk, country, Latin, reggae, jazz, rock, pop and classical – as well as poetry recitals and comedic performances – ensuring there really is something for everyone. Every available venue in the sub-alpine town is utilised for the festival, appropriately labelled “Mountains of Music”.

The now-traditional Thursday-night dinner dance launches the festival on 24 April. The headline event will feature the popular Joe Gaia Band.

The weekend program also incorporates performances by bands and soloists who include Peter Denahy, Lloyd Spiegel, Megan Puls, Karen Lynne, Tracey Roberts, San Lazaro, Sometimes Jack, Pacific Curls, Hey Diddle Fiddle, Tripod and The Dream Puppets.



- AT A GLANCE -

BRIGHT AUTUMN FESTIVAL

26 April – 11 May

www.brightautumnfestival.org.au

MOUNT BEAUTY MUSIC FESTIVAL

25 – 27 April

www.musicmuster.org.au

Festival passes available for the entire weekend or a single day, single night or combined day-night. Dinner dance tickets may be purchased only with weekend passes.

