

# Springtime festivals

*“Get enticed by the mouth-watering smell of Polish food”*

**M**elbourne has a long list of annual springtime festivals and with the return of warm weather just around the corner there's no better time to check out the variety of fantastic events on offer.

Melbourne's spring festival roster brings the whole world to some of our most familiar landmarks, fusing together Melbournians' renowned love of food, drink and all things colourful and creative.

Over the next few months, the city will be host to three major cultural festivals, showcasing customs and cuisine from all around the globe: the Ganesh (Hindu) Festival, the Polish Festival, and the Melbourne International Festival.

The annual Ganesh Festival is held on September 7 and celebrates the birth of Ganesh – the iconic elephant-headed god of wisdom and prosperity.

The festival begins at the Darebin Arts & Entertainment Centre, where introductory performances are staged and the Hindu deity makes an appearance. Participants then make their way via foot and tram to Bundoora Park. There, the traditional immersion-in-water ceremony is performed to symbolize rebirth, a key concept in the 1000-year-old Asian religion. Once the ceremony concludes, the fun and feasting begin in earnest, with lively music and performances as well as mouth-watering Indian

cuisine. Priding itself as a family event, the festival also caters for children, in the form of colouring competitions and prizes for the best traditional costumes.

The main objective of the Ganesh Festival is to raise awareness of Hindu culture within the wider Melbourne community. The general public are encouraged to come along free of charge, and partake in the exotic delights of this fascinating and ancient culture. With its recent inclusion in the Darebin Music Feast Festival, this year's Ganesh Festival is expected to top last year's crowd of 300, and organizer Tuuli Forward hopes curious non-Hindus form a sizeable contingent.

The following month, Melbourne once again hosts the immensely popular Melbourne International Arts festival. Held over 16 days (October 9 – 25), this prestigious event showcases visual and performing arts from international and local artists. With a crowd of almost half a million last year, artists will again exhibit innovative music, theatre, multimedia, dance acts and visual arts from all over the globe.

Among the offerings is the internationally acclaimed Jerusalem Quartet, hailed by *Ensemble Magazine* as “one of the best quartets in the world”. They are playing at The Arts Centre, Hamer Hall on October 15. Continuing the line-up is Jenny Kemp's *Kitten*, a compelling three-act fable that



combines an experimental sound score by Darrin Verhagen with choreography by Helen Herberton. This is scheduled for the Malthouse Beckett Theatre from October 3–25. And also, there is Liza Lim's energetic new opera *The Navigator*, which will be directed by the controversial 'trouble-maker' of Melbourne's theatre scene, Barrie Kosky.

Although predominantly art-house in nature, the International Arts Festival is an event aimed at people of all ages and incomes. Assistant manager Amber Stuart says that in addition to providing entertainment for children, the festival accommodates for those on a tight budget, with free events as well as concession-priced tickets for students and artists.

Then on November 16, as clear-blue skies herald the rapid approach of summer, Federation Square will be decked out in white and red once again for the annual Polish Festival. Now in its fourth year, this lively and much-loved festival attracted some 40,000 people last year, and 2008 is set to be the biggest and most exciting yet.

Polish kultura is high on the agenda at the festival, with Polish singers, dancers and musicians performing both modern and traditional works. There is also a variety of unique merchandise on offer, ranging from amber jewellery, books and Christmas decorations to Polish travel packages. Meanwhile, children can get involved in face-painting, colouring competitions and lolly give-aways at the all-day Kid's Stop marquee.

The festival's PR coordinator Helena Sosnowska says food and hospitality lie at the very heart of Polish culture, and this is perhaps the ultimate drawcard of the festival. Inevitably, the biggest crowds form at the Yarra River side of Federation Square, as people enticed by the mouth-watering smell of Polish food gather to sample the various delicacies in store. For meat-lovers there are world-famous Polish *kielbasy* (sausages) and *bigos* (hunter's stew), while vegetarians can snack on *placki* (potato pancakes), *paczki* (doughnuts) and assorted cakes. And what better way to end the festival than to wash it all down in the shade of the beer garden “which converts hundreds of people to Polish beer every year”, Helena says. ☐

**By Mateusz Buczko and Melissa Thwaites**

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