



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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Festival fever hits Airlie Beach

For six solid months a small but merry band of volunteers has been working hard on the Whitsundays' favourite Great Barrier Reef-themed event.

From Thursday morning that hard work begins to pay off, as the 2019 Great Barrier Reef Festival gets into full swing.

Festival chairwoman, Margie Murphy, says she's most looking forward to the atmosphere, and proud to be bringing that to Queensland's television screens.

"Having Channel 7's Queensland Weekender program coming to the festival this year is very exciting and the perfect opportunity to showcase not just the beauty of the destination but also its vibe and people at their celebratory best," she said.

"We encourage everyone to get amongst it this weekend, not just at the new events but also our long-time favourites, and festival icons, the 'Whitsunday Coast Airport Fireworks by the Foreshore' and Rotary Street Parade."

Proudly supported by the region's premier Great Barrier Reef operator, Cruise Whitsundays, this year's festival marks the dawning of a new era for both the event and the Whitsundays.

Tourism Whitsundays CEO, Tash Wheeler, said the rebrand from Whitsunday Reef Festival to Great Barrier Reef Festival, had come at the same time as the unveiling of major upgrades to Whitsunday mainland infrastructure and the re-opening of key island resorts.

"This is an exciting time for the Whitsundays and a perfect opportunity for one of its most popular destination events," she said.

"We look forward to welcoming people to the Great Barrier Reef Festival this year and for many years to come."

For the festival team, the rebrand has meant incorporating new elements into the four-day program of destination-based fun and reinvigorating existing events.

New for 2019 are reef education workshops, and a lantern parade from the Coral Sea Marina Resort.

Other inaugural events include a community art installation on the Airlie Beach foreshore, and a closing ceremony cruise to the Great Barrier Reef with platinum partner Cruise Whitsundays.

Meanwhile a marketing initiative with the Whitsunday Coast Airport has led to the most hotly anticipated fireworks night yet.

Whitsunday Mayor, Andrew Willcox, said the partnership was beneficial to both the festival and the airport, with the region about to reap the results.

“Our Whitsunday Coast Airport has undergone a \$40 million runway and terminal upgrade and I am excited that the airport is the major sponsor of the Fireworks by the Foreshore; the airport is the beginning of the visitor experience in the Whitsunday region and official gateway to the Great Barrier Reef,” he said.

“To emphasise this our new \$350,000 aquarium means visitors to the Whitsundays can now step off the plane and snap a selfie with the heart reef – before they've even left the airport.

“Linking our modern airport to the rebranded Great Barrier Reef Festival and its activities on our spectacular newly revitalised foreshore is a logical step and one we are proud to support.”

Additional Friday events set to benefit from changes to the landscape in downtown Airlie Beach include the night markets, carnival rides and Whitsunday Foodservice Eat Street.

On Saturday’s program are the popular Fraser Ford Revvin’ the Reef and Miss Pin-up Parade, Wilmar Sugar Wearable Art Awards, Rotary Street Parade, and Airlie Magic Mile.

Sunday is the day to explore the Great Barrier Reef with Cruise Whitsundays or enjoy the Whitsunday Transit Family Fun Day, Reef Gateway Hotel Recyclable Regatta, and Chill in the Park, on the mainland.

Live music at Friday and Saturday’s Beats on the Beach includes performances by Timomatic, Thandi Phoenix, 8 Ball Aitken and Elektrik Lemonade.

This year’s after parties are hosted by Mama Africa Bar and Nightclub, Magnums Hotel and the Airlie Beach Hotel’s ‘The Pub’.

For the full schedule and program of events visit www.greatbarrierreeffestival.com.au or follow the festival on Facebook and Instagram.

Ends

Notes for Editors

The Queensland Government, via Tourism and Events Queensland’s Destination Events Program, is proud to support the Whitsunday Reef Festival, which features on the It’s Live! in Queensland events calendar, worth \$800 million to the state’s economy in 2019.

About Tourism Whitsundays: *Tourism Whitsundays (TW) is the organisation responsible for destination marketing and visitor attraction for the Whitsunday region. It is the lead agency recognised by Tourism and Events Queensland and the Whitsunday Regional Council to lead the promotion of the region as a tourism destination. Tourism Whitsundays markets all aspects of the*

region including the Great Barrier Reef, Whitsunday Islands and Coast, accommodation, boating and sailing, fishing, touring, recreational activities, adventure, dining, shopping, weddings and honeymoons, conferencing and business events.

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FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES, CONTACT:

Liza Muller

Publicity and Content Manager

Tourism Whitsundays

Ph: +61 7 4948 5917 or +61 417 765736

Email: liza.muller@tourismwhitsundays.com.au

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