

Flower power rules the Range



by Amy Shaw

But there's plenty more in the state's garden icon.

While the Carnival of Flowers leads the calendar in the Garden City, visiting practitioners will find plenty more to see and do.

Think Toowoomba and you think flowers – this is the Garden City.

Okay, okay and a slice of cold weather, but we do live on top of a mountain.

About 700 metres above sea level, that fresh, crisp mountain air and the smell of scented flower gardens will take you into another world, far away from the stress of time recording, file velocity and the practice of law.

Just 125 kilometres, or a leisurely two-hour drive, west of Brisbane, it is the jewel in the crown of the Darling Downs. And it is the annual 10-day Carnival of Flowers festival this month which shines the brightest for our city.

Inspired by local businessman Essex Tait back in the '40s, it was suggested the city hold an annual carnival to help boost economic activity following the hard times suffered during World War II.

The carnival began in the Spring of 1950 and was such a resounding success that it has been held every year since and flourished into an iconic Queensland event.

The first Carnival of Flowers started with a street procession led by a bullock team. As the years passed, its appeal widened, attracting tourists from across Queensland, interstate and internationally. Fast forward to 2010, when more than 80,000 spectators lined the inner city streets to experience the Grand Floral Parade, which is now the only fresh floral parade and longest running floral event of its kind in Australia.

Local firm South Queensland Law has always been keen on community involvement and this year staff have entered their third float in the Grand Parade.

Countless hours have been spent meticulously nurturing more than 600 petunia pots in readiness for the big event, while the gardens at South Queensland Law's new premises, two turn-of-the-century houses, will be full of dazzling colour.

But the carnival is far from the only thing which attracts people to this beautiful city. Springtime sees the city's 285 parks and gardens and residential homes transformed into a vibrant blaze of colour and life, with the carnival offering a celebration of flowers, food, wine culture and entertainment.

Enjoy the serenity and peace in the 4.5-hectare Japanese Gardens at the University of Southern Queensland, take in the breath-taking views of the Lockyer Valley and beyond from Picnic Point or stroll through the Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, the oldest public art gallery in regional Queensland, established in 1938.

Take a step back in time by visiting the historic Cobb & Co museum, Spring Bluff Railway Station, City Hall (Queensland's first purpose-built town hall), the National Trust's Royal Bull's Head Inn, built in 1859, the Empire Theatre, originally opened in 1911 as a silent movie house, the Jondaryan Woolshed and the Milne Bay Military Museum.

The Chocolate Cottage and Black Forest Cuckoo Clock Shop at Highfields features Australia's largest display of German grandfather and cuckoo clocks, and is well worth a visit, as is the Rimfire Winery.

There is the Darling Downs Zoo, midway between Toowoomba and Warwick, and are plenty of bushwalking options at Ravensbourne National Park and along Toowoomba's escarpment.

Whatever your choice, there is more to Toowoomba than meets the eye and immersing yourself in the delights of the Garden City will soon refresh your work-frazzled state.

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