NOVEMBER 2026

THE WANDERER

AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST RV CLUB MAGAZINE

OUTBACK FESTIVALS

MUNDI MUNDI BASH | PARKES ELVIS FESTIVAL
ORD VALLEY MUSTER



CMCA

CAMPERVAN AND MOTORHOME CLUB OF AUSTRALIA | CMCA.AU

NOVEMBER 2026 | VOLUME 41. NO. 11

THE WANDERER

VOLUME 41 NO.11

LONG LIVE THE KING

The central New South Wales town of Parkes certainly knows how to throw a party, and Briar Jensen pulls on her petticoats to join the fun.

PICS BRIAR JENSEN AND SUPPLIED



Elvii stopping traffic © Brent Young

"Y'all know how to have a great time in Parkes," Florida-based Cote Deonath tells me. "It's a bucket list for all the Elvii (Elvises) in the States to come over here and headline this incredible festival," adds the world-renowned Elvis Tribute Artist (ETA). Fellow ETA, Emilio Santoro from the UK, agrees. "It's like every other Elvis festival on steroids," says the young heartthrob who showcases Elvis's early years. "It's a dream come true to be out here."

You can't help but get "all shook up" by the fun and frivolity of the annual Parkes Elvis Festival, often likened to Schoolies for grownups. Everyone is chipper and cheerful, here to share rock 'n' roll good times, and Parkes rolls out the welcome mat.

As Elvis festival director Brendan Shipley says: "Parkes becomes a place where people of all ages, backgrounds and walks of life come together through a shared sense of fun, friendship and community spirit." That spirit starts with Mayor Neil Westcott. "I'm sure I'm the only mayor that has to dress up like this," says the fifth-generation farmer in his bejewelled blue jumpsuit, made to measure in Canada. "But there's always a bit of play-acting in politics," he grins. "When I see the absolute joy this festival generates, it's just a thrill and honour to be mayor of such a wonderful shire."



Dancing in the park © Destination NSW;
Right: Mayor Neil Westcott





Above: Emilio Santoro (L) and Cote Deonath (R) among artists at The Dish

WHY PARKES?

How did a rural town in central New South Wales, famous for its radio telescope featured in the movie *The Dish*, come to host the largest Elvis festival in the southern hemisphere?

The idea percolated after an Elvis-themed birthday party at Parkes' Hotel Gracelands (since closed) in 1992. Following his mum's birthday bash, the local newspaper editor flagged the festival idea to Gracelands' owners, Bob and Anne Steel. Anne suggested holding it around Elvis's birthday in January, a typically quiet time for local businesses.

From 195 attendees in 1993, the festival grew organically but struggled financially until 2004, when Destination New South Wales came on board with sponsorship and catapulted the weekend event into a five-day festival. Nowadays it attracts up to 30,000 visitors and contributes about $15 million to the regional economy. It's endorsed by Graceland in Memphis – the home of Elvis – and hosts one of the preliminary rounds of their annual Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist Contest, with the Parkes winner travelling to Memphis for the semi-finals.

PARTY TIME

Entry to the festival is free, as are many events. Headline artist shows are ticketed, often including a meal, but those same artists also perform in the gratis program on the main stage in alcohol-free Cooke Park. With food carts and market stalls selling retro gear and Elvis merch, the park thrums with carnival vibes, with misting fans providing respite from the sweltering midsummer heat. Many pubs and clubs offer free shows too – with air-conditioning.

The adjacent main street morphs into Festival Boulevard and pumps with buskers, DJs and dancers. Shops are primped with Elvis paraphernalia, and retail staff dress in theme – each year's festival taking inspiration from a Presley movie, with 2027 to be Elvis on Tour.

We struggle to fit in the myriad activities, including Elvis movies, trivia, bingo and poetry slams, art and photography exhibitions, gospel performances, renewal of vows ceremonies and rock 'n' roll lessons. There are Elvis and Priscilla lookalike contests and dance competitions for all ages. Some people come purely for the love of dancing, whether its rock 'n' roll, jive or swing.

When the NSW TrainLink Elvis Express rolls in, bringing festival performers and patrons from Sydney, well-wishers throng the station giving them a rockstar welcome. The look of surprise and delight on the faces of disembarking passengers is priceless. It's mirrored by the platform crowd – excited to see the ETAs and the passengers' eclectic fashions as they alight the train.





Clockwise from top: Toki Toyokazu © Brent Young; Street parade © Destination NSW; Retro wheels; Performers light up the stage © Destination NSW





DRESS TO IMPRESS

Backcomb a beehive, brush in the Brylcreem, pull up your petticoats and pop on your blue suede shoes for this retro extravaganza. Sure, dressing up isn't mandatory, but it enhances the fun. While us girls frock up, our blokes aren't so keen. We compromise, buying them matching musical-themed shirts, and after they're asked multiple times for photos, they agree, it's worth making an effort.

An inexpensive pair of aviator or cat-eye sunnies is a good start, but you can buy anything from bargain white jumpsuits through to tailored Priscilla ensembles in Parkes. Families and friends often dress alike or as characters from the year's movie theme. Festival regulars, like the elegantly attired Gail from Albion Park, who has wardrobes of retro outfits for herself and friend Deborah, spend all year working on their costumes.

Each year Melbourne mum Diane sews matching outfits for herself and four adult daughters for every day of the festival. They ditch their guys for some all-girl fun, which starts as soon as they leave home, and their highlight is entering the parade.

Choked with floats and vintage cars in the street parade, the boulevard becomes one long catwalk, as people show off their ingenious outfits. We see blow-up Elvis-abducting aliens, a geriatric Elvis patient with a nurse, Plucka Duck Elvis and troupes of exuberant Elvii and Priscillas.

In the thick of the action are pros Emilio and Cote, who were both captivated by Elvis before they donned school shoes. "He was my superhero," says Cote, who was smitten after watching an Elvis movie with his grandmother as a three-year-old. "He looked like perfection and even had a cape." Presley's music still transcends generations.

"Elvis was probably the best-looking man to ever walk the Earth," says Emilio, when I ask why the King has such enduring appeal. "And he's one of the most talented musicians, one of the most talented vocalists. But I think it comes down to his energy. He had some type of awe about him you can't help gravitate towards. You can feel this charisma, it's unmatchable really."

But the high calibre of tribute artists certainly does match his charisma – in evocative gospel, soulful R&B, rockabilly rhythms and bopping pop, which have women hankering for the artists' sweat-soaked scarves as they sway in their seats and dance in the aisles.

This festival infuses a mega dose of dopamine that persists for weeks (along with Elvis earworms), that leaves me yearning to return.



Clockwise from top: Street parade fun © Destination NSW; Elvii abducted by aliens in the parade; Dancing in the streets; Flaunting it at the station © Destination NSW

JOURNEY *PLANNER*

Parkes is about 360 kilometres west of Sydney. The annual Parkes Elvis Festival is held during the second weekend in January. In 2027 it runs from 6 to 10 January. There's a packed program, so be sure to allow time before or after to explore the region.

Take in the Henry Parkes Centre, home to the Gates of Graceland replica, the Henry Parkes Museum, Parkes Motor Museum and The King's Castle – filled with Elvis memorabilia owned by yellow Wiggle Greg Page. Also visit The Dish at the CSIRO Parkes Observatory, and the open cut gold mine at Peak Hill. A festival shuttle bus operates between these locations.

STAY

Accommodation at festival time is stretched as tight as Presley's leather pants. Many RVers rebook the same caravan park from year to year. Temporary festival campgrounds in parks and ovals are offered by community groups, and the festival shuttle bus loops past them all.

If you're new to the festival, consider staying in the nearby towns of Forbes and Peak Hill, which are connected by a festival shuttle bus. The towns of Bogan Gate and Eugowra offer a courtesy bus to and from the festival.

parkeselvisfestival.com.au
visitparkes.com.au







Top down: Miss Priscilla 2025 winner Gracey Jones; Fashions steal the show

100% AUSTRALIAN OWNED AND OPERATED
TRAVEL IN COMFORT & STYLE
SEATS R US
SEATS, TURNTABLES, RECLINERS, SOFAS AND MORE
MOTORHOME SEATS
DISTRIBUTOR FOR SUPERIOR SEATING AUSTRALIA
MOTORHOMESEATS.COM.AU • 07 3274 4139

Fuelcharge
SAVE 11c
PER LITRE ON DIESEL
up to 1,000L per member per year

Why Use Fuelcharge?
- 24/7 access to fuel across Australia
- Available at over 115+ **IOR Diesel Stops** nation-wide
- All major caravaning routes covered
- Secure and encrypted payment technology
- Route planning tools
- Fuel receipts and transaction reporting tools

Get Your Discount Here
1. Scan to download the app
2. Sign up
3. Pre-authorise payment
4. Select the discount & fill up
5. Your discount will apply automatically

For more information visit **fuelcharge.com.au** or call **1800 414 012**
Terms and Conditions Apply

iOR