

MERREPEN FESTIVAL

A HAPPY PLACE

Now in its 26th year, Merrepen Festival in Naiyu in the Daly River region has a reputation for charming visitors with its all-rounder program of music, dance, visual arts, film, traditional food and sport.

By Anna Dowd

The Merrepen Arts Centre is part of the historic heart of this weekend long event. Opened in 1986 as a women's centre, local painters began to congregate, sitting under the trees together to make pictures and tell stories.

Fast forward to 2013 and Merrepen Arts has a core of 20 artists working in mediums including painting, weaving and most recently, a series of limited edition screen-printed silks, cottons, linens and hemp. Designers from Darwin to Sydney are lining up for the fabrics, excited by the use of vibrant primary colours and designs reflecting local flora and fauna.

Kieren Karritpul is a 19 year old Merrepen artist who grew up sitting and watching, learning from his mum and aunties at the Arts Centre. His prints are already making big waves in the art world. He says creativity is his happy place. "Making art makes me feel happy when I'm down, it makes me relax."

For visitors to the Festival, relaxed and happy is the order of the weekend. After an art fix, you can take in some traditional dance, learn the basics of sand palm weaving or catch a screening of locally produced films. Or expand your culinary experience by trying local foods like turtle, barramundi and echidna. There're plenty of trade secrets to gain. Apparently, echidna, takes three hours to cook and de-quill.

By Saturday night, the relax-o-metre is usually in the high to extreme range with the festival concert – a star filled evening under the sky – this year featuring Wendy Matthews, Tracey Bunn and the Emu Sisters.

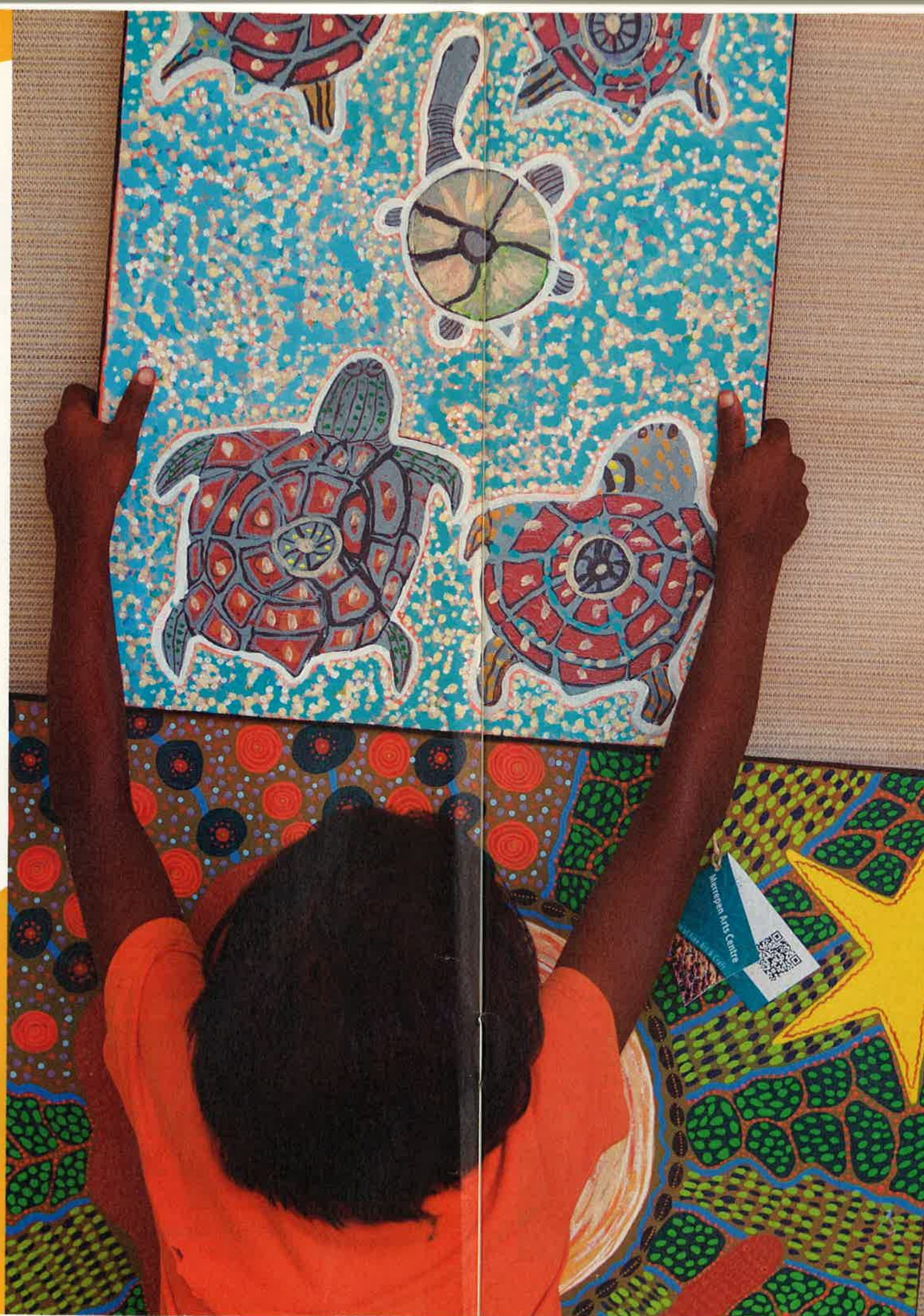
And if that schedule doesn't fill your diary, there happens to be an entire sports carnival going on over the weekend as well. Teams from across the Top End including Tiwi Islands, Numbulwarr and Ngukurr come to play Aussie Rules, basketball and Softball – culminating in a triple sport, grand final fever on Sunday.

Lizz Bott, CEO of Merrepen Arts, has seen a few festivals through and knows how special it is for the community. "People love welcoming visitors and respect them for taking time to come here." As one of the oldest, remote community festivals in the Northern Territory, Merrepen is a happy place for visitors and locals alike.

WHEN: Fri 31 May – Sun 2 Jun

WHERE: Marrepen Community | Daly River region

INFO: merrepenarts.com.au



Festival Programme

FRI 31 MAY

8.00am: Sporting carnival begins with regional teams competing in football, softball and basketball

SAT 1 JUN

The sporting carnival continues throughout the day

10.00am: Merrepen Arts Centre exhibition and sale of prints, paintings and artefacts. Launch of new range of screen-printed fabrics

11.00am: Multicultural dancing (also at 2.15pm)

12.00noon: 'Fi' weaving workshops run by local ladies

1.30pm: Fire-making competition

3.00pm: Screening of a local film (also at 4.30pm)

6.00pm: Mass in St Francis Xavier Church by Father Peter

7.00pm: Riverside Concert – Wendy Matthews, Tracey Bunn & The Emu Sisters, plus dance performance by the Djilpin Dancers

SUN 2 JUN

8.00am: Sporting carnival continues throughout the day

10.00am: Art sale continues

11.00am: Multicultural dancing (also at 1.00pm)

2.00pm: 'Fi' weaving workshops run by local ladies

All sporting Grand Finals held throughout the afternoon

7.00pm: Sunday Mass in St Francis Xavier Church by Father Peter



All images courtesy of Merrepen Arts. Left: local child helps hang the art show. Above: Photo of bush trip and some examples of printed fabric.

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Kieren Karritpul is a 19 year old Merrepen artist