SAVANNAH in The ROUND



Festivalgoers dancing to Mojo Webb.



Port Douglas locals Ian and Lisa loved the vibe.



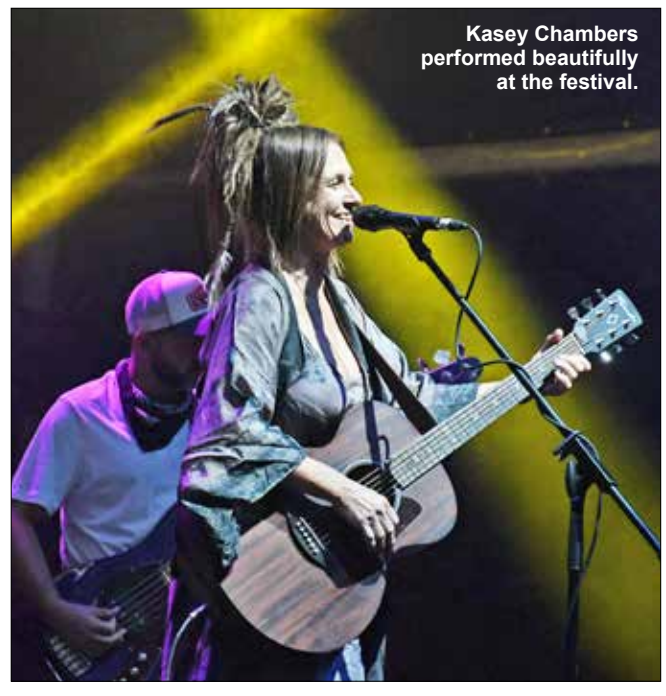
Nicola and Jill had a great weekend.



Leanne Murdoch (in pink) was celebrating her 50th with her friends.



James Johnston was once again a festival-favourite.



Kasey Chambers performed beautifully at the festival.



Melissa and Marisa enjoyed their Sunday afternoon at the festival.



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Departs Mareeba	7.30am	2.00pm
Departs Speewah	7.50am	2.20pm
Departs Kuranda	8.05am	2.40pm
Arrives Cairns	9.00am	3.30pm

Cairns to Atherton Tablelands		
Route 850	Monday to Saturday	
Departs Cairns	10.00am	4.00pm
Departs Smithfield	10.20am	4.20pm
Departs Kuranda	10.40am	4.40pm
Departs Speewah	10.50am	5.00pm
Departs Mareeba	11.20am	5.20pm
Arrives Atherton	11.50am	5.50pm

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Festival brings the energy

By KONNOR FURBER

IT was all blue skies and great vibes at this year's Savannah in the Round, as the biggest festival to date put on an epic four-day show for its attendees.

The highly-anticipated Zac Brown Band and festival-favourite James Johnston drew in over 10,000 people to Mareeba's Kerribee Park on Saturday night, while more than 32,000 people came in-and-out of the gates over the weekend.

Fans packed into the rodeo arena like sardines to secure a good spot ahead of the headliners gigs. Johnston has cemented his name in recent years as an Aussie country star and has played at every Savannah in the Round since its beginning.

He has grown to love the support and enthusiasm he gets from the crowd and told them it was his favourite festival to play at.

While Johnston was lighting up the stage, the international headliners said they were "absolutely excited" for their performance.

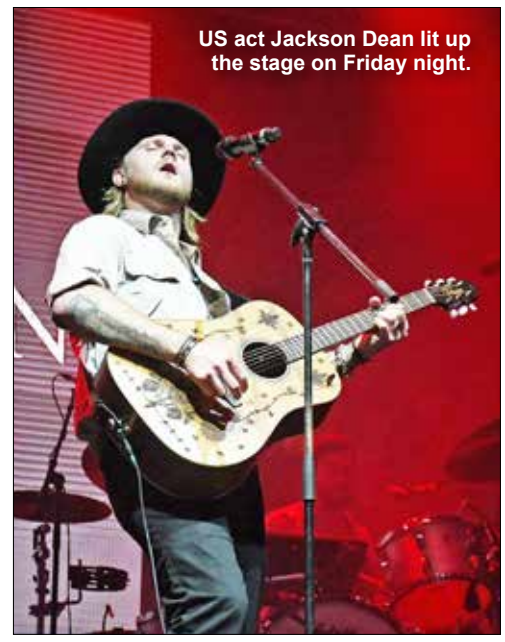
"We're from the country in Georgia, and we're country people, so when country people come together to celebrate, it's always exciting," lead man Zac Brown said.

Fans went wild when the band came out and kicked off with some of their classics like *Toes* and *Knee Deep*. A fast-paced rendition of *The Devil Went Down To Georgia* got everybody's boots stomping as the band's fiddle player wowed the crowd.



The Zac Brown Band delivered nothing short of a spectacular performance during their headlining performance.

PHOTO: Tanya Snelling.



US act Jackson Dean lit up the stage on Friday night.



The band really made the festival their own and shared stories like how they're song *Free* was inspired by a hike up a mountain in Byron Bay years ago, where "the sun touches you before it touches anything else", which Brown told the audience was "pretty cool".

The rest of their performance took everyone on a journey, from their beachy, care-free songs to their more heartfelt ballads like *Colder Weather* and *Sweet Annie*, before finishing with a cover of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and their classic hits *Chicken Fried* and *Homegrown*.

The band said they love Australia and it was great to see that their audience was growing. Brown even told the crowd they'd be back again.

"I love trying to get in front of people that have never seen our band before, because our band's one of those ones that you can't really understand until you see it," Brown said.

"So, we love getting to prove ourselves and coming over here just feels like a whole continent to come conquer, it's awesome."

Another member added: "This has been our best trip so far, for sure. In the past we did Blues Fest and a lot of other festivals, but this is the first time that we have got to do some of our own headlining shows.

"We can see it building and just to see our crowds getting bigger in Australia, it's a lot of fun for us."

The festival kicked off on Thursday for all the campers, but it was the Great Northern Bullriding Series that really knocked things into gear, attracting five thousand spectators.

The energy flowed into Friday as many enjoyed a full day of seeing their favourite musicians in action, with Wade Forster, Lane Pittman, Kasey Chambers, international act Jackson Dean, and James Reyne rocking the main stage that evening.

The final day of the festival was just as popular, with many attendees still there to see the much-loved Chocolate Starfish, and main stage acts like the Roadtrippers, Amy Sheppard, Casey Barnes, The Black Sorrows, and Rose Tattoo.

Festival director James Dein was thrilled with the success of this year's festival and thoroughly enjoyed the Zac Brown Band.

"You can't get the smiles off our faces. It's run really smoothly. Zac Brown Band was globally, international first class, what a show," he said.

"We had a lot of new people here, new campers who haven't been here before. The artists have been amazing, everything's gone pretty well."

Mr Dein said there were only bigger and better things to come, as they were only halfway through their 10-year vision.

"It has grown from an idea. We looked at the region first, at what north Queensland had, and frankly, what it could do with, and I think all our research has been vindicated," he said.

"It's a lovely venue here. We'd love to develop some more camping, but we just want to focus on the artists. We want to get the best possible artists we can.

"But working with our tourism partners, we're doing things different than any other music festival in the country. We're developing inbound tourism opportunities – music-driven tourism.

"There's a lot of interest in country music, and the backdrop of where this festival is located is the kicker, it's set on a stunning backdrop."

He also thanked everyone who attended and is looking forward to next year's festival already.

"I just want to thank everyone who came along. It takes the whole team and the whole community to make these things work," he said.

"I know we've had a lot of locals this year from Mareeba and the Atherton Tablelands, and that's not lost on us, we really appreciate that support.

"And for our visitors who are still in the region and staying longer, stay an extra day or two, head down the coast and enjoy yourselves – it's a great part of the world."

■ **See more photos Page 18**



