



23rd National
BALLOONING
Championships
NORTHAM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE

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Less than 2 weeks 'til 20 hot air balloons fill Northam's skies



Pilots and support crew from around Australia are beginning to descend on Northam in preparation for the National Ballooning Championships, which commence on Saturday 6 May.

Ballooning fever will be in full flight during Championships week, starting with the Shire of Northam Elevate Festival on 6 May – a hot air balloon-themed community event.

The Balloon Glow is always a highlight of the event - a spectacular display of balloons tethered to the ground, inflated and fired up after dark (weather permitting) . There'll also be live music, food stalls, family entertainment as well as a chance to meet the hot air balloon pilots.

Aviation and photography enthusiasts can catch the competition flights at sunrise and again in the late afternoons (weather permitting) from a number of vantage points as pilots coast over the Avon Valley. Official practice days are 6 and 7 May and competition days are 8 to 13 May.

Pilots ranging in age from 22 to 80 will test their skills for the chance to secure a spot in the World Championships.

Matthew Scaife, 43, from Newcastle is a triple Australian Ballooning Champion, winning in 2014, and two Northam-hosted events in 2015 and 2017. With 24 years of flying under his belt, Matt is a contender for this year's title. He explained the allure of ballooning:

"I love the unique opportunity to be in a balloon on your own, enjoying the peaceful surrounds while undertaking competitive tasks against other pilots, against the natural elements.

"I'm very much looking forward to being back in the air over Northam. The topography of the countryside makes for very interesting flying. The town has friendly locals, that are mostly balloon friendly. I've won the last two events staged in Northam, so am hoping to make it 3 times!"

26-year-old Victorian pilot Paterson Saunders is hoping for some redemption back in Northam.

“After coming third at the last National Championships in Mudgee I qualified for the National team to compete at the World Championships. Disappointingly, I ended up losing my place in the team over a qualifying technicality. But it actually allowed my brother to qualify and do really well.”

Paterson’s brother Ed and sister Scarlett will also be competing in Northam.

“We all have dramatically different traits and flying styles which could be entertaining to watch, but we fly together quite often in a professional environment so I’m hoping that we can utilise each other’s strengths and perform well together... as long as I beat them both!” he said.

Pilots will test their skills at varying winds and altitudes, competing twice per day at dawn and late afternoon (weather permitting).

The National Ballooning Championships is free to attend, and with the course spanning 30 x 40km, there will be plenty of vantage points for visitors to see the 21 balloons gliding over the Avon Valley’s rolling hills.

The week will also include a History of Ballooning display and a Star Gazing event where visitors will learn Aboriginal cultural stories of the night sky in a telescopic travel back in time.

The National Ballooning Championships are organised by Northam Ballooning Events and supported by Tourism WA and The Shire of Northam along with a number of local businesses and residents.

For more event information visit www.northamballooningevents.com and to check the weather conditions for the competition balloon flights visit the event’s Facebook page.

For the Balloon Glow at Elevate Festival, visit www.northam.wa.gov.au. For free tickets to the free Elevate Festival visit Eventbrite and search for “Elevate Festival”.

For accommodation information email tourist@northam.wa.gov.au.

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