

## **Special Events in Rural Communities: Examining the Impacts. A Case Study of the 1996 Alexandra Blossom Festival.**

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### **Abstract**

Special events and event tourism are becoming integral parts of destination marketing as the wide range of benefits they can offer host communities become more widely recognised. Although a growing body of literature exists on the economic impact of large scale events such as the Olympic Games and America's Cup regattas on large urban centres, little is known of the way events such as local festivals impact upon small rural communities. This study examines the Alexandra Blossom Festival held each year in September. It focusses on the 1996 event, and investigates the psychological and economic impacts that this festival has on communities in the local vicinity. Primary data were collected by way of two surveys, one administered to local residents and a second to visitors. A total of 440 questionnaires were randomly administered to households in the Alexandra/Clyde community with 371 (85%) completed and returned, while 274 questionnaires were distributed to visitors staying in paid accommodation with 131 (48%) returned. This study presents resident attitudes and opinions regarding the Alexandra Blossom Festival, the flow of residents and visitors in and out of the area due to the festival, visitor origins, and the direct economic impact of visitors staying in paid accommodation during the 1996 event. Results show that Alexandra's annual Blossom Festival impacts the community both economically and psychologically in a number of generally positive ways. The study concludes that special events, if managed and planned correctly, can be of great economic and social importance to small rural communities and recommends that strategic planning be undertaken to maximise the potential benefits offered by such events. Clearly, if scale and context are taken into account, small events of this nature can be as significant as mega events are to urban centres.