

history



ROYAL QUEENSLAND SHOW
140 years
AUGUST 11-20 2017

Who is behind the Show?

The Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland (RNA) is a member based organisation governed by 21 RNA Councillors.

An executive team of seven, including the RNA President, is responsible for overseeing the operations of the association which owns and operates the Brisbane Showgrounds, situated 1.5 kilometres from Brisbane's central business district.

The organisation's charter is to celebrate and champion the essential role agriculture plays in the everyday lives of Queenslanders.

The RNA aims to provide a vibrant destination at the Brisbane Showgrounds with leading educational and event facilities and activities that capture the hearts and minds of all Queenslanders, from the country to the city.

The RNA runs the Royal Queensland Show (Ekka), Queensland's largest event, on behalf of the community for 10 days each year in August.

Staged at its original birthplace, the Brisbane Showgrounds, the Ekka showcases its unique tradition and heritage by bringing the city and country together for a once a year get-together.

More than 400,000 people on average gather to see thousands of exhibits, 10,000 animals, world-class entertainment and taste award-winning food and wine.

Along with this, the organisation runs the Royal Queensland Food and Wine Show—a series of individual competitions unearthing the best produce in Australia.

Outside of the annual Ekka, the Brisbane Showgrounds is an events and lifestyle precinct, home to the state-of-the-art Royal International Convention Centre (Royal ICC), a four and a half star Rydges Hotel and vibrant King Street dining hub.

How it started

The RNA has a rich history stemming back to 1875 when a group of colonists joined together to encourage the development of Queensland's primary industries.

Leading members of the colonial society formed the first RNA Council, under the presidency of Governor Sir William Cairns, with most of the 35 members pastoralists and merchants.

The RNA Council immediately committed themselves to organising the very first exhibition for Brisbane - from calling for tenders for the initial building to meeting with the Premier of Queensland to establish a public holiday on opening day.

The result was the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1876 - the largest event to be held in the state up to that point.

The RNA, along with the exhibition, continued to expand and grow in popularity and in 1921, the association was granted the prefix 'Royal' under warrant from His Majesty King George V. Since then, the shortened name 'Ekka' has replaced 'Exhibition' in the Queensland vernacular.

The early Shows

On August 22, 1876, a crowd of more than 15,000 people made their way by horse, foot or carriage to experience the very first Ekka, at what is now known as the Brisbane Showgrounds.

Some of today's traditions stem back to this first exhibition. Competitions were a cornerstone of the Ekka right from the beginning with 1,700 entries across 650 classes competing for trophies, cash prizes and medals.

Visitors were treated to more than 1,000 exhibits and charged an entry fee of a half-crown, or one shilling if they waited until after the official opening.

The first show depended heavily on the voluntary efforts of RNA Council members, judges and stewards as the RNA did not yet have its own staff, apart from employing nightwatchmen.

Celebrating the colony's achievements, the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1876 was praised as the most significant event in Queensland since its separation from New South Wales.

Since 1876 the Ekka has continued to grow in popularity and size, remaining one of the most anticipated yearly events.

It has been held annually at the Brisbane Showgrounds since its inception except for two instances — in 1919 at the height of the Spanish influenza epidemic and in 1942 during World War II when the grounds were used as a staging depot for troops.*

Strange but true

- A key event at the first show in 1876 was a competition for the best sample of 5 tonne of manure, deodorised and prepared in the most economical form of use*
- The first ever showbag was a bag of coal*
- In the 1920s a flock of 90 sheep were used to maintain the lawns at the Brisbane Showgrounds
- At the first show there was a competition for the fastest walking farm horse*
- Main Arena entertainment continued to expand in 1966 with the Zacchini family presenting a human cannonball act — with the father coordinating, the mother firing and their children propelled across the ring into a net*
- During the Great Depression new entertainment was introduced including goat races that attracted some 100 competitors in a single show*
- There was no Sideshow Alley in 1876, just a lone individual known as the 'lightning calculator,' whose facility with numbers amazed the crowds*

1876 The first Exhibition

- The Intercolonial Exhibition of 1876 was held at Bowen Park with an estimated 15,000-17,000 people attending out of Brisbane's population at the time of just 20,600
- 5,000 people charged the turnstiles – chaos ensued until the mounted troopers were called to drive back the crowd
- Visitors to the first show were treated to more than 1,000 exhibits
- The show received 1,700 competition entries in more than 650 classes*
- Entry tickets were large and square for major patrons, circular for subscribers, blue for judges and red for stewards*
- Staff included a nightwatchman, 40 stewards and more than 30 judges*
- Entry to the grounds in the morning was a half-crown or visitors could wait until after the official opening when the cost of a ticket fell to one shilling*
- Competitors were usually charged two shillings and sixpence per entry*
- The largest prize up for grabs was 25 guineas*
- The show closed at midnight on Monday 28 August, following a controversial decision to open on the Sunday*
- Only three breeds of cattle were displayed at the first show— Durham, Hereford and Devon*
- The show featured just two alpacas*

1877 First Ekka ride

- Introduction of the first ride in Sideshow Alley—a merry-go-round*
- The total value of prizes and medals was between £500 and £600*

1879 Introduction of Queensland's newest technologies

- Ekka patrons were amazed by telephones, microphones, electric lights and even an electric thief detector

1889 Sheepdog trials held for the first time

1891 District Exhibitions

- The first district exhibits contest was held – nine regions competed for a prize pool of £175*

1894 first fireworks

- The first fireworks display occurred in the Main Arena, beginning another show tradition*

1909 Jubilee Show

- The 12 day show was the largest agricultural show in Australia that year with more than 7,000 competition entries*

1919 Ekka cancelled due to influenza epidemic

1920 Edward, Prince of Wales visits the Ekka

1926 Show traditions

- The Queensland Country Women's Association made its first appearance at the Ekka
- The first night time ring program was held following the introduction of electric lighting*

1942 World War II

- The show was cancelled as the grounds were used as a staging depot during World War II

1950 Ekka food traditions

- The now symbolic Ekka fairy floss, butter board sandwiches, strawberry sundaes and dagwood dogs were introduced*

1954 Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip visit the Ekka

1964 Animal Nursery at the Ekka introduced

1969 First Skymaster Ferris Wheel at Ekka

- Once the 4,000 lights were switched on, everyone knew the show was about to open*

1988 Expo 88

- Ekka achieved its highest attendance with an estimated 800,000 people flooding through the gates*

2000 Sideshow Alley and Woodchop Arena

- The Inner City Bypass was constructed, and Sideshow Alley and the Woodchop Arena were redeveloped

2011 One of the most successful Ekkas in history: Grammy award winners closed the Show

- ◆ Grammy Award-winners Wolfmother closed Ekka's concert series in front of a capacity crowd

2012 Australian first

- In an Australian first, Ekka fans were able to customise their own fireworks on the show's free interactive fireworks iPhone app

- 2012 Australian of the Year and Academy Award-winning actor and producer Geoffrey Rush attended the opening day of the Ekka
- A cricket match involving cricketing greats Adam Gilchrist, Glenn McGrath, Ian Healy, Andy Bichel and Jimmy Maher, took place on the final day of the Ekka

2013 Ekka wins international awards

- The Royal Queensland Show took home the prestigious Best in Show title, along with 13 other awards, at the 2013 International Association of Fairs & Expositions Awards (IAFE Awards)
- Over 54,521 Ekka Facebook friends – a growth of 75% from 2012

2014 Million dollar night show

- Australian-first million dollar night show EkkaNITES wows the crowd each night of show
- Queensland beats New South Wales in the 2014 Ekka Rodeo
- The Ekka runs over two full weekends for the first time in the show's history
- British stars from the 'Inbetweeners' and Miss World Australia, Courtney Thorpe, visit Ekka

2015 The year of the flying pigs

- The Racing and Diving Pigs wow the crowds at Ekka, as they fly through the sky and dive into a pool of water
- Seven-year-old Mater Vandeleur who captivated the audience with his pig training tricks made international news with his special Channel 7 news report
- Never before seen fireworks light up the Main Arena

2016 The return of The Old Museum

- After 119 years, The Old Museum came back home to Ekka, housing the Flower and Garden Exhibition and Quilts Across Queensland
- A new two day pass and dedicated 2 for 1 ride and food days are introduced, signaling major historic hip pocket savings
- The world-class night show EkkaNITES showcases incredible female talent, including American FMX superstar Vicki Golden
- The breathtaking EkkaNITES fireworks finale features a 20 metre high pyrotechnic tower never before seen in Australia, shooting fireworks from 49 positions

2017 Ekka's 140th Anniversary