

# SOMETHING SPECIAL IN MY BACKYARD

Meet the inspirational Aussies putting the feel-good factor back into the community

WORDS KELLY IRVING



## LIFE IS SWEET

When Melburnians Vanessa Kwiatkowski and Mat Lumalasi got some backyard bees, they realised they had a higher purpose.

“Rooftop beekeeping has been going on for years in European cities, so I thought, let’s make it happen here,” Kwiatkowski says of Rooftop Honey, “an almost crazy idea” that won a AU\$1,000 grant from the Awesome Foundation last year.

It has a list of 20 (but a waitlist of over 80) businesses, restaurants and individuals that provide roof space in exchange for honey (“honey sharing”). Some spots include La Luna Bistro, Carlton and Roller Door Organic Café. “Site-to-site makes a huge difference in the taste, smell and colour of the honey,” says Lumalasi. “It’s exciting, because each restaurant gets their own unique flavour of honey flavour depending on what trees are around and they use it in their food.”

Lumalasi, a part-time swarm collector, rescues the bees, re-homes them and keeps them free from disease. It aids the survival of the honey bee, which is at risk in most parts of the world. “It’s been great meeting wonderful people, but it’s also good to see others’ interest in our future.”

**“It’s unique because each restaurant gets their own unique flavour of honey”**

## A DREAM COME TRUE

“Aboriginal culture is a very special thing,” says Tony O’Connor of Kookaburra Tours and Charters, who was born and bred in Townsville, Far North Queensland.

“We’re talking about the oldest surviving culture on earth,” he says. He started the Dreamtime Journey Tour in 2004 to help sustain the Indigenous community. Each tour is a unique experience that explores five cultural groups over two or four days, with a local representative from each explaining their heritage.

“People think that Aboriginal culture is the same across the country, but that’s like saying everyone in Europe is the same.”

A one-man show with a group of drivers, O’Connor has won numerous tourism awards. His unique itinerary includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous accommodations, like the Mungalla Station homestead, Noorla Heritage Resort, and Hidden Valley Cabins, Australia’s first carbon-neutral resort (100% solar powered), and one of the best spots to see a platypus. “You’ll learn about bush tucker and medicine, play the didgeridoo or throw the boomerang.”

O’Connor aims to get more Indigenous faces into tourism and hospitality, so as to “learn from one other”.



**“We’re talking about the oldest surviving culture on earth”**



## PICTURE PERFECT

Award-winning filmmaker Allanah Zitersman fell in love with Dungog in the Hunter Valley.

“This place represents everything that is Australian,” says Zitersman, festival director of the Dungog Film Festival. The lovely town has the oldest continuously running cinema, the James Theatre, and sits at the foothills of the World Heritage Barrington Tops National Park. “There have been some terrific festivals in regional towns overseas, like Sundance and Cannes, so why not here?”

The four-day, four-year-old event is the world’s biggest festivals of Aussie films, and has gained huge community support. It helps facilitate film industry connections, and previous attendees include Bruce Beresford and Pia Miranda. “Getting attention in a market saturated with American films and big budgets is tough. Here, the VIPs aren’t in some room where you can’t access them; they’re on the street talking to you.” With world premieres, gala events, skill development classes, parties and parades, Zitersman says: “Come, let go and have a ball!”



**DRINK IT UP**

**Sustainability practitioner Dan Atkins catches up with like-minded people at a philanthropic event he pioneered with three friends called Sustainability Drinks Australia.**

“We thought it would be a fun way to connect people together, and bring sustainability to the mainstream: a diverse range of people with a variety of expertise and passions.”

The first free monthly event started in Melbourne in 2007 with 10 people. It now also runs in Adelaide, Sydney and Darwin with 150 people attending each time.

To ensure that people mingle with the right intentions, company names are omitted from name badges. Instead, it's a warm environment where people network, catch up on news, win door prizes and listen to inspirational speakers.

Presenters have included Marcus Godinho, CEO of FareShare, an organisation that rescues food from landfill and turns it into nutritious meals for the homeless, and Sean Willmore, a Victorian park ranger and director of The Thin Green Line, a foundation supporting families of rangers killed during conservation.

“There are so many humble leaders out there. We're giving them the chance to share their exciting story,” Atkins says. “I've been blown away by the passion and the enthusiasm of everyone.”

**FEEL-GOOD FOOD**

**Hannah Colman and Jess Moran became friends while working in a restaurant at a community organisation in Melbourne. Here, they met young migrants, international students and refugees who couldn't get jobs because they had no experience, so Colman and Moran knitted up an idea to help them.**

In August last year, they launched Scarf, a hospitality-training organisation offering anyone facing barriers to employment “a pretty intense sense of what it's like to work in a real restaurant”.

Every Monday night during the 10-week program, trainees get hands-on experience serving actual customers in a high-quality establishment, like New York Tomato in Richmond, and Bistro Flor in Carlton North. “They come to your table, pour your wine, take your order and talk you through the menu,” Colman says. “It's a dining experience with a difference.”

Guided by hospitality professionals who volunteer as mentors, trainees get invaluable connections and confidence.

Last year, five out of six trainees got employed. “One of them was Sam, who had been trying to find work for a year. He was so fantastic he got a job at Libby Reid Catering (one of Melbourne's best catering companies), so now he's earning more than all of us!” ★



**“There are so many humble leaders out there... I've been blown away by the passion of everyone”**

**TAKE ME THERE**

**ROOFTOP HONEY**

Contact them for a honey sample, or grab one from:

**The Alto Hotel**  
636 Bourke St, Melbourne  
**Trunk Bar and Diner**  
275 Exhibition St, Melbourne

**Roller Door Organic Café**  
13 Stawell St, West Melbourne  
**Ladro**

224 Gertrude St, Fitzroy and 162 Greville St, Prahran

**La Luna Bistro**  
320 Rathdowne St, Carlton North  
**Sosta Cucina**

12 Errol St, North Melbourne  
rooftophoney.com.au

**DREAMTIME JOURNEY TOURS**

Next tours: 9 May, 6-9 June, 11-14 July  
Tours run monthly from AU\$955 per person  
kookaburrtours.com.au

**DUNOGG FILM FESTIVAL**

26-29 May 2011  
Ticket packages range from a AU\$55 Jumbuck Day Pass to the AU\$390 Drover VIP Pass  
dungogfilmfestival.org

**SUSTAINABILITY DRINKS**

Melbourne 1st Wednesday of the month  
Adelaide 3rd Wednesday of every second month  
Sydney 2nd Wednesday of the month  
Darwin 1st Thursday of the month  
sustainabilitydrinks.com

**SCARF MONDAY NIGHT DINNERS**

A two-course set menu (with choice), coffee and petits fours is AU\$35  
Autumn Scarf 7 Mar-9 May  
Winter Scarf 6 Jun-8 Aug  
Spring Scarf 5 Sep-7 Nov  
Summer Scarf 5 Dec-20 Feb 2012  
scarfcommunity.org