



International
Centre for
Radio
Astronomy
Research



ASTROFEST

CASE STUDY

ASTROFEST

Every year, more than 4000 West Australians flock to ICRAR’s annual celebration of all things astronomy and space—Perth Astrofest. Regional Astrofests supported by ICRAR in Mt Magnet and around the State bring communities together and attract tourists to the regions, and the Astrofest model has been emulated in Sydney and Melbourne.

On a warm Saturday night in March each year, more than 40 telescopes dot Curtin University’s Edinburgh Oval. Each points at a wonder of the Universe - the Orion Nebula, the Jewel Box, Jupiter and many more - and thousands of people line up for a closer look at the heavens. Nearby there are science shows, guided tours of the night sky, talks and an astrophotography exhibition. Excitement and smiles abound on the faces of young families, students and grandparents alike.

This is Astrofest, ICRAR’s educational and vibrant celebration of astronomy and space. The event connects local communities through the night sky and engages young people in

both Perth and regional WA through STEM. Astrofest is coordinated and led by ICRAR each year on behalf of Astronomy WA - a collective of Western Australian astronomy outreach and education organisations.

“Thousands of people line up for a closer look at the heavens.”

Approaching its tenth year, Astrofest has become a staple in Perth’s astronomical calendar, and entertains visitors from the youngest of kids through to seasoned astronomy veterans. It attracts people from almost the entire Perth metropolitan area, as well as some



Cover Children attending the Mt Magnet Astro Rocks Fest in 2017. Credit: Kim Steele, ICRAR.



from other parts of the country. Some of the largest privately owned telescopes in Australia come out to join the event, giving viewers a taste of the Universe and its sights. The telescopes are operated by their owners, giving Astrofest attendees the opportunity to learn about the different kinds of telescopes available.

Astrofest also has a huge range of indoor and outdoor activities including:

- An astrophotography competition and exhibition showcasing amazing WA talent
- Laser guided tours of the night sky
- Make your own Lego SKA antenna
- Guest astronomy speakers from ICRAR, CAASTRO and CSIRO
- Hands-on activities and giveaways for young and young-at-heart
- Exhibitor stalls from almost every astronomy organisation in WA

After the Perth event, the stunning astrophotography exhibition travels the State throughout the year, showing in Geraldton, at the WA Museum, York and other venues in Perth, further spreading the impact of Astrofest.

ICRAR also works with partners to bring the wonder of the night sky to towns and communities throughout WA. The Perth event has spawned an annual Mt Magnet Astrofest, with locals and tourists coming together to share the amazing dark skies above the town. The entire community makes a weekend of it, celebrating their region's strengths with a three-day 'Astro Rocks Fest', featuring the Astrofest on Saturday night. The weekend's activities bring people to town from around the region, and as far afield as Perth and the South West.

Astronomy-themed art is shown at the local Indigenous art gallery and the region's history is celebrated with a full schedule of events. ICRAR coordinates the Astrofest evening with help from colleagues at the Gravity Discovery Centre Observatory, Astronomy Education Services and the Astronomy Group of WA. The event is a night of educational fun for all ages, with up to 15 telescopes on the oval, Scitech's inflatable planetaria and 'comet' launches from the Fireballs in the Sky team.

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ICRAR has also supported a regional Astrofest in Ridgefield, and Mini Astrofests have been held in Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Pinjarra, Mandurah and Dandaragan with help from Perth Astrofest seed grants. The model is so successful it has even inspired similar events on the East Coast. ICRAR provided advice and support to the inaugural Melbourne Astronomy and Light Festival when it began at Scienceworks and the Melbourne Planetarium in 2015, and the CAASTRO Sydney Astrofest in 2016.

Astrofest reaches people who might not otherwise engage with astronomy, with almost 60 per cent of attendees to the Perth event having no background in science. Feedback shows visitors find Astrofest interesting, fun, informative, educational, exciting and inspiring. The event has a marked effect on the community's future engagement and participation in science, with 84 per cent of feedback respondents saying Astrofest made them want to find out more about astronomy in the future and 75 per cent saying that they intend to visit an observatory in the 12 months after attending the event.

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