
Elvis Express: fans rock n' roll their way to outback festival

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Elvis Presley may have "left the building" four decades ago, but his spirit was alive and well at Sydney's main station Thursday, as hundreds of fans boarded trains to an outback festival celebrating their idol.

Dressed in colourful sequined jumpsuits, blue suede shoes and having used copious amounts of hairspray, lookalikes sang and danced to hits belted out by tribute artists.

The party atmosphere was a fitting tribute to the cultural and musical legacy of "The King", whose appeal has spanned decades and generations, and reached far beyond his American roots.

The revellers at Central station were boarding the "Elvis Express" and "Blue Suede Express", two trains put on to take them to the small outback town of Parkes, 300 kilometres (190 miles) west of Sydney.

"He was just a gorgeous guy and I just loved all the music and his love songs," said Lynette Mar, who was set to board the 1950s-era diesel "Blue Suede Express" to celebrate her 60th birthday with friends in Parkes.

"It's just great dance music."

Each year, Parkes -- whose radio telescope played a pivotal role in bringing Neil Armstrong's 1969 moon landing to the world -- transforms into a haven for Elvis enthusiasts when it hosts a five-day tribute festival.

First held in 1993 to coincide with the singer's January 8 birthday, the Elvis Festival has placed the mining town on the tourist map and earned it the moniker "Elvis Capital of Australia".

Regular attendee Jenny Dollin -- who wore a plastic cap shaped like Elvis' pompadour hairstyle, a white tunic top and bell-bottoms -- said she loved the energy and excitement of the festival.

"I go to Parkes because it's so much fun. We have a lovely time, I love the Elvises," Dollin told AFP.

Over 25,000 visitors are expected to descend on Parkes to take part in the festivities, more than twice the population of the town.

"The people at Parkes are so friendly," Dollin said. "Everyone on the train is very friendly and it's just a really good time."
