

Mr Gay World final in Knysna



There was much excitement at the official launch party of the Globeflight Pink Loerie Mardi Gras and Arts Festival Knysna 2015. The organisers told the crowd that this year's festival, in association With Triarc and Mr Gay SA, was going to be the biggest, best and most exhilarating yet, with several new events on the programme. Little did they know at the time that it was going to be an even greater bash than they could ever have expected.

KNYSNA NEWS - A bomb was dropped this week that one of the world's premier gay events will present its grand finale in Knysna instead of Cape Town, bringing with it delegates from 30 countries.

Initially, contestants in Mr Gay World would have visited Knysna's Pink Loerie for a few days before heading to Cape Town for the gala crowning event in the Cape Town City Hall, but the glamorous conclusion to the international event will now be hosted in Knysna.

While this may be a blow for Cape Town, it is a huge 'coup' for Knysna, not only in terms of the international spotlight that will be shone on the town, but in terms of a cash injection and kudos.

It also adds even more pizzazz and clout to the Globeflight Pink Loerie Mardi Gras and Arts Festival Knysna, in association with Triarc and Mr Gay SA (MRGSA), now in its 15th year. This festival is already one of the biggest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) festivals in Africa.

In what organisers describe as a disappointing development, the City of Cape Town has informed the Mr Gay World 2015 organisers that it will not support the international event. According to the original Mr Gay World programme, contestants would have stayed in Knysna from Wednesday, April 29 and returned to Cape Town on Saturday evening, May 2, but they will now remain in Knysna for the grand finale. The event attracts many visitors from around the globe.

"We now have to sit with Knysna Tourism, and make sure that this partnership will be a success for the Pink Loerie as well as Knysna and Knysna Tourism," said Pink Loerie co-ordinator John O'Neil.

Initially, the Knysna Pink Loerie Festival was started by local businessmen to reinvigorate local economy and to entice tourists to the town during the slow month of May. It was intended as an event that would incorporate the region's gay identity and also celebrate the cultural contribution the gay community made to this region as well as their overcoming a history of oppression, while also contributing to various charities. Following this latest surprise, Knysna will take centre stage in the world arena.

Now in its seventh year, Mr Gay World is the culmination of an annual worldwide search for a diplomat to represent the global gay community. South Africa is the first country to host the event twice. It was successfully hosted in Johannesburg in 2012. South African contestants won Mr Gay World in 2010 and 2011 and came second in 2012. The 2013 winner, New Zealander Chris Olwage, was born and raised in South Africa.

Coenie Kukkuk, Mr Gay World director in Africa and the Middle East and the managing director of Mr Gay World 2015, confirmed that the grand finale will now take place in Knysna on Saturday, May 2 at 20:00. The City of Cape Town's Councillor Garreth Bloor, Mayoral Committee member for Tourism, Events and Economic Development, featured in South Africa's official Mr Gay World bid video presented in Rome in August last year. At the time it appeared that the city's support for the event was absolutely certain and it seemed as if everything was moving full-steam ahead, until this week.

The producers of this year's Mr Gay World, the Globeflight Pink Loerie Mardi Gras and Arts Festival, have submitted the required paperwork and asked the City of Cape Town to assist with certain aspects, including: financial support, a tour of landmarks, a meet-and-greet with Cape Town's executive mayor and "access to anything that would promote Cape Town to the delegates, directors and president of Mr Gay World".

Kukkuk said that the requests were all declined. Organisers confirmed on Wednesday, March 25 that the city indicated that it was unable to help the organisers in facilitating the event or the visit by around 30 international delegates and numerous foreign Mr Gay World officials.

In an earlier sign of an apparent change of heart, representatives of Cape Town Tourism confirmed their attendance of a Mr Gay World media conference on Thursday, March 5 but failed to arrive, without advising the organisers.

Due to the City of Cape Town's lack of support, organisers have now been forced to move the Grand Finale, the highlight of the contest, to Knysna.

Of the recent development with Cape Town, a disappointed Kukkuk stressed that: "Support from the host city government and tourism authorities is crucial for an international event like Mr Gay World. In fact, it is a requirement."

Kukkuk noted that past host cities' officials and tourism authorities have always supported the event and have met with Mr Gay World representatives during their visit.

In most cases, like in Manila and Oslo, officials have handed the keys of the city to the president of Mr Gay World.

He revealed, "Knysna's authorities have shown their support to the producers and the event. Knysna's executive mayor is hosting a special welcoming function for the delegates on the evening of April 29 and we look forward to an outstanding Mr Gay World Grand Finale 2015 in Knysna. The delegates will also march in the annual Pink Loerie parade on Saturday 2 May at 15:00."

Kukkuk went on to comment that Cape Town has lost an opportunity to boost its reputation as a welcoming and gay-friendly tourism destination. "There are visitors and delegates arriving from more than 30 countries. That in itself shows the reach of the event. And each will not only be spending at local businesses, but could become goodwill ambassadors. That cannot be put into monetary terms. Word of mouth is still the best tool to market a destination," he added.

The president of Mr Gay World, Eric Butter of Australia, said from Sydney: "Mr Gay World fully supports the organisers in their decision to hold the grand finale in Knysna. We are very sad that such an amazing and unique city as Cape Town turned us down, but one door closes and another one opens and we are delighted to be coming to such a magical place like Knysna for our grand finale!"

The Mr Gay World Grand Finale will at the Conference and Exhibition Space, on the first floor of the Knysna Mall in Main Street, (above Mugg & Bean).

Tickets are R230 each and R330 for VIPs and may be booked already by mailing your initials and surname and number and type of tickets to grandfinale@pinkloerie.co.za. R10 of every ticket will go to the Pink Loerie charities namely the Mayor's Social Relief Fund, Knysna Animal Welfare & Loeriehof Retirement Home.

Kukkuk says the first few days of the Mr. Gay World™ delegates stay in South Africa will still take place in Cape Town and that planned events prior to their arrival in Knysna will go ahead as per the programme.

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07:00 (GMT+2), Thu, 26 March 2015

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