

Varuna, The National Writers' House Presents:

# Blue Mountains Writers' Festival

20–22 October 2023



**VARUNA**  
The National Writers' House

Three mind-opening  
days in the spectacular  
Blue Mountains.

You'll come away inspired.





## The Blue Mountains Writers' Festival is proudly presented by Varuna, the National Writers' House

Based in Katoomba, Varuna is the foremost institution for literature development in Australia. Originally the home of writers Eleanor Dark and Dr Eric Dark, the house and gardens of Varuna were gifted to the Australian public in 1989 by their son, Mick Dark, to be used as a retreat for writers.

Each year, more than 300 writers participate in residencies and professional development programs at Varuna, and many hundreds more readers and writers participate in workshop programs and literary events, including the Blue Mountains Writers' Festival.

Your support of this Festival helps Varuna foster the development of new and important Australian writing.

[www.varuna.com.au/support](http://www.varuna.com.au/support)



## Welcome

To read a book is to say no to the constant churn of information and noise and to surrender to a deep-dive into a world that an author has so carefully created just for us.

The power of books is not new, but perhaps it is a power that readers need to recognise, celebrate and share now more than ever. The decisions we make, the way we live, the value we put on our environment and on a compassionate and just society are more and more important each day.

We have curated a program of some of the finest writers, thinkers and changemakers in Australia and the world – hello, David Suzuki! – and we look forward to spending the Festival weekend with you, immersed in ideas, rich conversations and imaginative fun.

The Festival is held on the beautiful Country of the Dharug and Gundungurra peoples, and we pay respects to elders past and present. We acknowledge and

respect First Nations traditional owners, custodians and elders throughout Australia and recognise their sovereign connections to land, water and culture. We would like to acknowledge the support of the First Nations Australian Writers' Network (FNAWN), sponsoring the festival for the first time this year.

We hope you enjoy the festival.

*Executive Director:* Veechi Stuart

*Artistic Directors:* Amy Sambrooke and Edwina Johnson

*Strategic Initiatives and Artist Management:* Rebecca Goosen

*Children's Program:* Jody Lee

*Festival Venue Management:* Jaala Hallett

*Festival Administration:* Anita Hoving

*Festival Marketing:* Chris Cannell, Clive Jones, Jenna Beck

*Festival Accounts:* Kathy Dobson

*Festival Interns:* Eva Gama, Victoria Sharp

*Festival Chair:* David Hammon

*Festival Volunteers:* Too numerous to list you all, but we couldn't do this without you!



# Stay connected

702AM | Stream on listen

[abc.net.au/sydney](http://abc.net.au/sydney)

# Thank God It's Friday!

— SPECIAL EVENT —



In a special Festival broadcast live from The Carrington in Katoomba, join ABC Radio Sydney's **Richard Glover** for all the fun and unpredictability of TGIF (*Thank God It's Friday!*).

Laugh alongside a star-studded line-up with all the hilarity of the infamous Wheel of Death.

Interviews with **Lee Kofman**, **Michael Robotham** and **Sarah Holland-Batt** will immediately follow TGIF in a special half-hour broadcast.

**Friday 20 October**  
**5:00pm to 6:30pm**



# Writers in the Sky



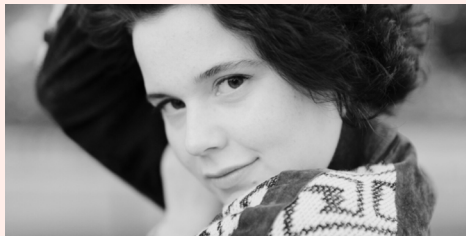
Three magical events suspended high above the signature blue haze of the ancient eucalypts below.

**Tickets** – This event is included in our Festival Gold Pass. Subject to availability, single tickets may be available from 19 September. Tickets include a complimentary drink and light snacks.

## Outspoken

with spoken word artist **Madison Godfrey**, hosted by **James Valentine**

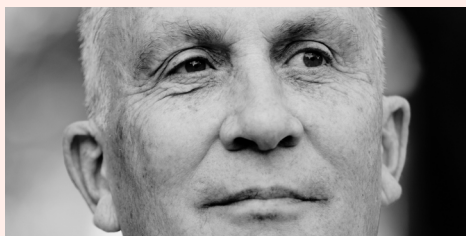
**Saturday 21 October 5:30pm – 6:10pm**



## Reconnecting with Stories

with Worimi storyteller and author **Paul Callaghan**, hosted by **James Valentine**

**Saturday 21 October 6:10pm – 6:50pm**



## The Biggest Risk You Ever Took

with **Nardi Simpson**, **Kgshak Akec** and **David Stavanger**, hosted by **Maeve Marsden**

**Saturday 21 October 6:50pm – 7:30pm**



# The Mick Dark Talk for the Future

with Nardi Simpson

The **Mick Dark Talk for the Future** is an annual keynote address on the environment that honours the legacy of Mick Dark, who in 1989 gifted Varuna, the National Writers' House, to the writers of Australia. Mick was an ardent and committed environmentalist, and this year we are honoured to welcome welcome Yuwaalaraay woman **Nardi Simpson** as keynote speaker.

**Sunday 22 October**  
**4:30pm to 5:30pm**



Blue Mountains  
Conservation  
Society

**Nardi Simpson** is a Yuwaalaraay author, storyteller and performer dedicated to the making and sharing of culture. This keynote address reflects on our past, our present, and how we might all look to the future.

*Presented by Varuna, the National Writers' House and the Blue Mountains Conservation Society.*

# Festival highlights

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## David Suzuki in conversation (via Zoom) with Ashley Hay

Join us to celebrate David's life-long contribution and honour his insistence that the world's elders still have much useful work to do. *David will be appearing via Zoom from Canada.*

**Saturday 21 October 9:30am – 10:30am**

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## Sarah Holland-Batt in conversation with David Leser

Join the winner of the 2023 Stella Prize as she discusses her stunning poetry collection *The Jaguar*.

**Saturday 21 October 11am – 12pm**

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## Queerstories

Featuring guests **Robert Dessaix, Madison Godfrey, Melanie Saward, Ellen van Neerven and Nevo Zisin**, hosted by **Maeve Marsden**.

**Saturday 21 October 1pm – 2:30pm**

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## Holly Ringland in conversation with Michaela Kalowski

Meet bestselling author **Holly Ringland** as she explores themes of joy, courage and transformation

**Saturday 21 October 3pm – 4pm**

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## On Country, First Nations Poetry

Hear **Barrina South, Marissa McDowell** and **Samantha Faulkner** read from *Kuracca*, their stunning collection of poetry and prose. With **Yvette Holt**. Sponsored by FNAWN.

**Saturday 21 October 3pm – 4pm**

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## Miles Franklin Literary Award Winner Shankari Chandran

This year's winner of the Miles Franklin Literary Award, **Shankari Chandran**, talks to **Ashley Hay** about her novel *Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens*.

**Sunday 22 October 11am – 12pm**

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## Craig Foster in conversation with David Marr

Hear from respected broadcaster and Co-Chair of the Australian Republic Movement **Craig Foster**.

**Sunday 22 October 11am – 12pm**

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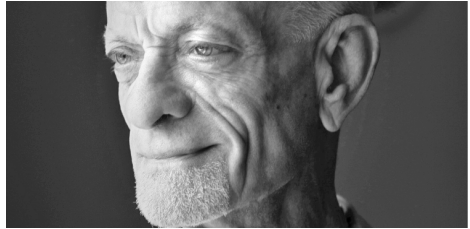
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## Robert Dessaix in conversation with Ailsa Piper

Join one of Australia's most-loved writers, **Robert Dessaix**, as he journeys through a writing life traversing memoir, essays and biography.

**Sunday 22 October 3pm – 4pm**

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## Contemporary Delight in the Age of AI

Join **Zhou Jianing** (China), **Omar Sakr** and **Shaun Prescott** as they address AI, literature and creativity. In conversation with **Roanna Gonsalves**.

**Sunday 22 October 3pm – 4pm**

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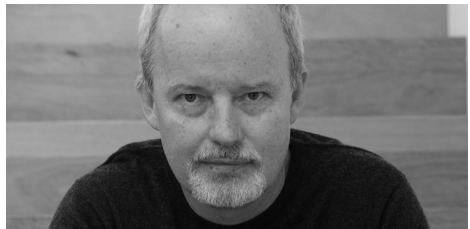
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## Killer Crime with Michael Robotham

One of Australia's most widely read crime writers **Michael Robotham** in conversation with **Michaela Kalowski**.

**Sunday 22 October 4:30pm – 5:30pm**

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# The Festival at a glance – Saturday 21 October

	MARQUEE CULTURAL CENTRE	GRAND DINING ROOM THE CARRINGTON	 
8:45 to 9:15	<b>Welcome to Country</b>		
9:30 to 10:30	<p><b>One Wish at a Time:</b> Richard Glover with Amy Sambrooke</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sponsored by Out of the Blue</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Celebrating David Suzuki (via Zoom):</b> In conversation with Ashley Hay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sponsored by Megalong Restaurant</i></li> </ul>	
11:00 to 12:00	<p><b>All Roads Lead to Baghdad:</b> Richard Fidler with James Valentine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sponsored by Benetatos White</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>2023 Stella Prize Winner Sarah Holland-Batt:</b> In conversation with David Leser</p>	
12:15 to 1:00	<p><b>Climate Clinic (FREE EVENT)</b> with Claire O'Rourke and Chris Darwin</p>		
1:00 to 1:30		<p><b>Queerstories:</b> With Robert Dessaix, Madison Godfrey, Ellen van Neerven, Melanie Saward and Nevo Zisin, hosted by Maeve Marsden</p>	
1:30 to 2:30	<p><b>Reckoning with History:</b> David Marr with Julia Baird</p>		
3:00 to 4:00	<p><b>Giving Ourselves Permission to Create:</b> Holly Ringland with Michaela Kalowski</p>	<p><b>Admissions – Voices in Mental Health:</b> Anna Spargo-Ryan (Zoom), David Stavanger, Kris Kneen with Felicity Plunkett</p>	
4:30 to 5:30	<p><b>On Grace:</b> Julia Baird with Catherine Keenan</p>	<p><b>Provocateur:</b> Clive Hamilton with Richard Glover</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sponsored by Werriberri</i></li> </ul>	



Please note that last-minute cancellations could occur and this program is subject to change

**BALLROOM  
THE CARRINGTON**

**BAROQUE ROOM  
THE CARRINGTON**

Blue Mountains Cultural Centre Amphitheatre

**Loving the Queer Self:** Omar Sakr and Madison Godfrey with Nevo Zisin

**This Is Not a Dystopia:** Tegan Bennett Daylight with Charlotte Wood

**No Longer Silent:** Kgshak Akec and Maryam Master with Catherine Keenan

**Writing Place:** EU Prize Winner for Literature Jan Carson (Ireland) with Emma Hislop (Aotearoa)

**The Writing Zone Cabaret (FREE EVENT):** Laneikka Denne, Kim Pham, Sarah Carroll and Ellen O'Brien

**On Country, First Nations poetry:** Samantha Faulkner, Barrina South and Marissa McDowell with Yvette Holt  
• *Sponsored by FNAWN*

**Freedom and Fiction:** Angela O'Keeffe with Amy Sambrooke

**Sport's Troubled Relationship with Race, Gender and Sexuality:** Ellen van Neerven with Melanie Saward

**Crime as the Perfect Device:** Dinuka McKenzie with Kate Lyons



# The Festival at a glance – Sunday 22 October

	MARQUEE CULTURAL CENTRE	GRAND DINING ROOM THE CARRINGTON 
9:30 to 10:30	<b>Heather Mitchell in conversation with David Leser</b>	<b>On Belief:</b> Charlotte Wood and Nardi Simpson with James Valentine
11:00 to 12:00	<b>Craig Foster in conversation with David Marr</b>	<b>2023 Miles Franklin Prize Winner Shankari Chandran in conversation with Ashley Hay</b>
12:15 to 1:00		
1:00 to 1:30		
1:30 to 2:30	<b>The Kind of Hope We Need:</b> Clive Hamilton, Claire O'Rourke, David King and James Valentine	<b>Charlotte Wood in conversation with Ashley Hay</b>
3:00 to 4:00	<b>Robert Dessaix in conversation with Ailsa Piper</b>	<b>The Dreaming Path:</b> Paul Callaghan with Charmaine Ledden-Lewis
4:30 to 5:30	<b>Killer Crime:</b> Michael Robotham with Michaela Kalowski	<b>The Mick Dark Talk for the Future</b> with Nardi Simpson • <i>Sponsored by Blue Mountains Conservation Society</i> 
5:30 to 6:00		



Please note that last-minute cancellations could occur and this program is subject to change

## BALLROOM THE CARRINGTON

**The Writer Laid Bare:** Lee Kofman in conversation with Roanna Gonsalves

**Bodies, Fatness and Power:** Kris Kneen in conversation with Maeve Marsden

**Walking the Last of Western Sydney's Woodlands (FREE EVENT):** Peter Ridgeway with Bianca Nogrady

**Borderland and Burn:** Graham Akhurst and Melanie Saward with Yvette Holt  
• *Sponsored by FNAWN*

**Contemporary Delight in the Age of AI:** Zhou Jianing, Omar Sakr and Shaun Prescott with Roanna Gonsalves

## BAROQUE ROOM THE CARRINGTON

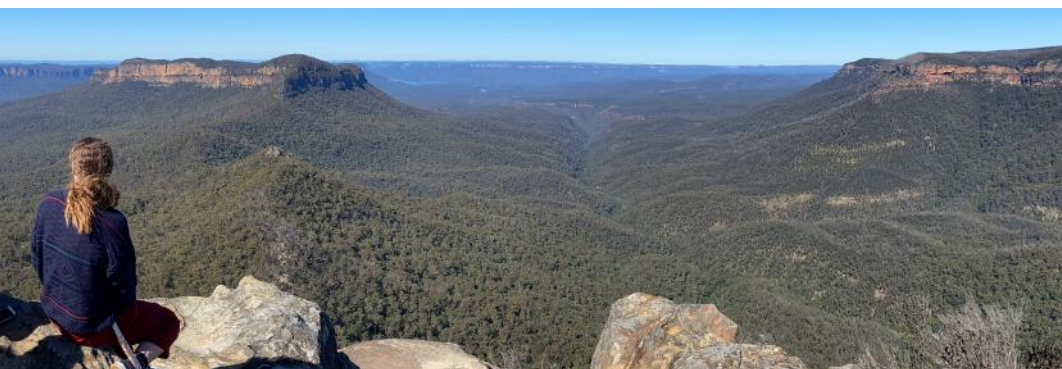
**Life, Love and Bonkers Families:** Catherine Therese with Michaela Kalowski

**The Art of the Novel:** Shaun Prescott, Max Easton and Briohny Doyle with George Haddad

**A Line in the Sand (FREE EVENT):** Red Room Poetry showcase featuring Ali Whitelock, Barrina South, Ellen van Neerven, Felicity Plunkett, Kim Cheng Boey, Madison Godfrey, Mark Tredinnick and Toby Fitch

**Between Page and Screen:** Cole Haddon with Guy Edmonds

**Blue Mountains Poetry Circle (open mic)** hosted by Mark O'Flynn featuring Willo Drummond



# Kids' & Youth Program Saturday 21 October



**BLUE  
MOUNTAINS  
LIBRARY**

*The children's program will be held on Saturday 21 October at Katoomba Library*

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9:45 to 10:45

**Where is the Gruffalo?**

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10:45 to 11:30

**Reading at the Fire Truck**

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11:30 to 12:15

**Create Your Own Adventure, with Pearly and Pig**

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12:30 to 1:15

**We Could Be Something**

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1:30 to 2:30

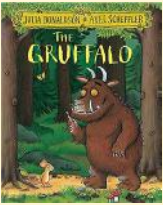
**The Power of Storytelling**

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3:00 to 4:00

**The Success of Failure: A Workshop**

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**Find the Gruffalo.** Is he in the library or behind the bookshelf? Has he gone looking for a small snack of mouse? See if you can catch Gruffalo for a storytime adventure.

*Recommended 0+* **FREE EVENT**

**Storytime with the RFS at the Fire Truck.** Join the firies for stories and fire truck fun.

*Recommended 0+* **FREE EVENT**



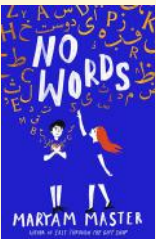
Join storyteller **Sue Whiting** as your children spin the Wheel of Adventure, draw a story map and discover the key to becoming a top-secret adventurer. Activities and excitement galore.

*Recommended 7+* **FREE EVENT**



Meet **Will Kostakis**, one of Australia's leading YA writers, and get to know his new book, *We Could Be Something*. An emotional rollercoaster about two young men, this part coming-out story, part falling-in-love story and part falling-apart story explores family and how love binds families together.

*Recommended 14+* **FREE EVENT**



Meet **Maryam Master**, author and playwright. Maryam was born in Iran and arrived in Australia as a refugee at the age of nine. Join Maryam to hear her discuss her career as a writer and her compassionate and hopeful book, *No Words*.

*Recommended 7+* **FREE EVENT**



Join **Nevo Zisin** for this empowering workshop that tackles the need for perfection and shows you how to embrace the beauty and importance of making mistakes.

*Recommended 14+* **Tickets \$12**

# The Festival Workshops

<i>Description</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Venue</i>
<b>One-on-One Writer Conversations with Carol Major</b>	Friday and Sunday	Various	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
<b>One-on-One Writer Conversations with Lee Kofman</b>	Saturday	Various	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
<b>One-on-One Writer Conversations with Ashley Hay</b>	Saturday	Various	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
<b>Weaving Memoir with Kris Kneen</b>	Saturday	9:30am – 12:30pm	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
<b>The Short Story Starter Kit with Jan Carson</b>	Saturday	9:30am – 12:30pm	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
<b>How to Build a Poem with Omar Sakr</b>	Saturday	1pm – 4pm	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
<b>10 Things About Publishing Agreements with Katherine Giles, Arts Law Centre</b>	Saturday	1:30pm – 2:30pm	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
<b>Balancing Defamation Risk and Expression with Katherine Giles, Arts Law Centre</b>	Saturday	3pm – 4pm	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
<b>The Success of Failure with Nevo Zisin (suitable for ages 14 – 25)</b>	Saturday	3pm – 4pm	Blue Mountains Library Katoomba
<b>The Rules of Writing Rom-Com with Melanie Saward</b>	Sunday	9:30am – 12:30pm	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
<b>Healing Through Narrative with Betsy Cornwell</b>	Sunday	10am – 12pm	Blue Mountains Library Katoomba
<b>Developing Your Writer's Voice with Lee Kofman</b>	Sunday	1pm – 4pm	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
<b>Yanmawi murugu Dharug language workshop</b>	Sunday	1:00pm – 2:00pm and 2:30pm – 3:30pm	Blue Mountains Cultural Centre



# Welcome to Country

*Saturday 21 October,  
8:45am – 9:15am, Blue  
Mountains Cultural Centre  
Amphitheatre*

## Yanmawi murugu – Dharug language workshop



In this workshop you will be presented with the Dharug language consonant and vowel sounds, simple words, and greetings and their connection to Country.

This workshop provides a place for all ages to listen and speak – and walk away with a deeper understanding of the need to revitalise Aboriginal languages.

These welcoming sessions are led by **Rick Torning**.

**Sunday 22 October 1:00pm to 2:00pm,  
and 2:30pm to 3:30pm**



# WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



## Writing and Society Research Centre

### MA in Literature and Creative Writing

The Writing and Society Research Centre offers a nationally leading **Master of Arts in Literature and Creative Writing** taught by eminent authors, critics and editors.

The MA is a challenging, rigorous and industry-focused degree that combines critical research and creative work. Students are guided by publishing writers to produce works of literary scholarship or creative writing across a diverse range of styles including fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, literary criticism, screenwriting and scriptwriting.

Our Centre is unique in Australia in the way it combines scholarship, authorship, publishing expertise and community engagement. Celebrated writers, scholars and editors working

in the Centre include Alexis Wright, Felicity Castagna, George Haddad, Luke Carman, Kate Fagan, Mette Jakobsen, James Jiang, Anthony Uhlmann and Tegan Bennett Daylight.

The Centre houses the highly decorated literary press **Giramondo Publishing** and Australia's pre-eminent literary review site, the *Sydney Review of Books*. Doctoral programs of study in Literature and Creative Writing are also available. We are ranked above world standing in the study of literature and creative arts practice.

In short, the **Writing and Society Research Centre** is one of the best places nationally either to become a writer or to think in a critical and scholarly way about writing.

For more information contact: [writing@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:writing@westernsydney.edu.au)

# Festival Fringe Events

## Katoomba Street Art Walk

The Street Art Walk is a dynamic, community-driven cultural treasure of the Blue Mountains. Check it out at **Beverly Place, Katoomba**, and also explore the street art in laneways throughout the town centre.



## sensorial

**Blue Mountains Cultural Centre**  
**16 Sep – 12 Nov**

An immersive exhibition that embraces all the senses, moves beyond sight and engages through touch and play.

*sensorial* has been created for and by the neurodivergent community. The exhibition aims to be an inclusive space for those who are often overwhelmed by bright lights and loud noises, or those who experience the world through touch and find looking unsatisfying. All are welcome.

## MOUNT VIC FLICKS

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4787 1577 • Harley Ave, Mt Victoria NSW

## Venues

The majority of events will be held in Katoomba at **The Carrington Hotel** at 15-47 Katoomba Street or in the Marquee, perched on the deck of the **Blue Mountains Cultural Centre\***, 30 Parke Street.

**The Baroque Room** is part of The Carrington complex and is accessed from the circular driveway below the main hotel. The Carrington Hotel, Blue Mountains Cultural Centre and Blue Mountains Library are a short walk from one another.

All events in the kids and youth program will be held at **Blue Mountains Library**, 30 Parke Street, Katoomba.

**Writers in the Sky** will be held at **Scenic World**, on the corner of Violet Street and Cliff Drive, Katoomba.

*\*Please note that the Civic Centre venue that was a festival stage last year is under renovation, so venues are different this year.*



# Accessibility

The Blue Mountains Writers' Festival strives to make every event as accessible as possible. To find more information about access for each venue, please go to the Venues menu on the Festival website. Registered/accredited assistance animals are welcome at all Festival events and venues. The Blue Mountains Writers' Festival is a member of the Companion Card scheme.

If you have access requirements, please contact us at [hello@bluemountainwritersfestival.com.au](mailto:hello@bluemountainwritersfestival.com.au) and let us know how we can help you.

## Auslan

We will have Auslan interpreters at our Queerstories event on Saturday 21 October and The Mick Dark Talk for the Future on Sunday 22 October. Please let us know if you require a reserved seat with the best sight-lines.

## T-loop

The Grand Dining Room stage will have a selected number of seats with a T-loop assistive listening system available. Please let us know if you require a reserved seat in this section.

## Livestream

Can't make the festival in person? Why not enjoy a taste of the festival in the comfort of your own home! Five Saturday sessions from the Grand Dining Room Stage will be livestreamed so you don't need to miss out on the festival fun. Livestream tickets go on sale on 19 September.

## Closed captions on livestream sessions

Closed captions will be available on all livestream sessions.



# Festival Map



# Festival Ticketing

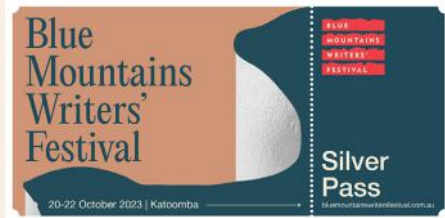
Book now at: [www.bluemountainswritersfestival.com.au/tickets](http://www.bluemountainswritersfestival.com.au/tickets)



## Gold Pass

Friday, Saturday and Sunday

**Adult \$269 or \$245 concession**



## Silver Pass

Saturday and Sunday

**Adult \$199 or \$184 concession**



## Bronze Pass

Saturday or Sunday

**Adult \$115 or \$105 concession**



## Locals Bronze Pass

Sunday only

**Adult \$100 or \$90 concession**



**Single event tickets and Livestream tickets on sale. Ticket prices vary.**

**Workshops \$12 – \$95**

## Bronze Sponsors





Media Partner



## Festival Partnerships & Funding Bodies



## Event Partners and Gold Sponsors



MEGALONG

## Silver Sponsors



[www.bluemountainwritersfestival.com.au](http://www.bluemountainwritersfestival.com.au)