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Season of enchantment

There's no need to fly hundreds of miles to the US to take in the autumnal delights of a New England fall when Mother Nature and Perthshire are doing a grand job here, writes Susan Welsh

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AUTUMN is making her arrival known by turning the woodlands and forests across Scotland delicious shades of amber, gold and red.

It's a wonderful time to explore the great outdoors and enjoy the stunning autumnal foliage.

Children, especially, have fun trying to dodge falling leaves, gathering pine cones and kicking their way through piles of colourful crackly leaves.

Perthshire, which is known as Big Tree Country, is looking particularly magnificent and has several magical events lined up to help celebrate the season, including the incredibly popular and mesmerising Enchanted Forest sound and light show.

It takes place at Faskally Wood, near Pitlochry, from tomorrow until Sunday, November 1.

Now in its eighth year, the choreographed display of multicoloured lights and music never fails to dazzle the thousands of visitors who make their way through the ancient woodlands on specially constructed paved walkways.

The theme this year is Scottish Myths and Legends and the challenge of lighting an entire forest and transforming it has fallen

to Blast Design, the first Tayside-based company to be appointed to produce the show.

It has been one of the company's more challenging projects, but one which it is delighted to be part of, as managing director John Kettles explained: "We believe we can help take the event to the next level by incorporating fireworks and other special effects, including innovative water screens, which have never been seen before at the event."

Stephen Bolland, chairman of the steering group for the Enchanted Forest 2009, said: "This year's theme is fantastic for families, couples and history buffs.

"The Enchanted Forest is fundamentally about helping people engage with the outdoors in a way they've never experienced before.

"The Scottish Myths and Legends theme will make it an even more engaging experience and it is a great opportunity to learn about our country's history in an interactive and fun outdoor environment.

"Blast Design has demonstrated an extremely creative and entertaining approach to the event which we believe will help it continue to grow from strength to strength."

Apart from the introduction of fireworks, there's another change been made to proceedings, one which will put a smile on everyone's face.

After listening to customer feedback, this year's event will include provision for shelter, hot food on the site and heated toilets.

Mr Bolland said: "Customer comfort is critical and The Enchanted Forest offers people an opportunity to experience the outdoors at night and in glorious colour.

"However, we are also aware that keeping them warm and dry is a key concern.

"As a team, we came up with some great ideas, some of them impractical, however we have settled on a combination of marquees, providing shelter from rain and wind, warming food, such as Scotch broth and haggis burgers – and heated loos.

"When you are running an event as successful as The Enchanted Forest, you are acutely aware that it is sometimes the small changes that make a difference to customers and we hope our attention to detail on ensuring they are comfortable will help."

Some of the measures being taken, however, are of a more serious nature, with 30% more budget than last year being poured into the show and a departure from a single main show on the loch to a series of "mini" sound and light shows situated at different parts of the forest.

Mr Bolland said: "We want to deliver an innovative and memorable show and an enjoyable night out for our customers. The revamped format, we believe, will be a winner with customers new and old."

Around 20,000 visitors are expected to attend the event and some dates are already fully booked. Entry is by pre-purchased ticket only; these are not available at the entrances to Faskally Wood and must be booked in advance. For further information visit the website www.enchantedforest.org.uk, or call 0844 8886688.

Bookings can be made in person at the Pitlochry Tourist Information Centre, on Atholl Road, Pitlochry.

Running alongside the Enchanted Forest, visitors can also enjoy the Pitlochry Autumn Festival, which takes place this weekend and again on October 24 and 31. It includes street performances, late-night storytelling sessions and several Halloween-themed activities. Further details can be found on the website, www.pitlochryautumnfestival.co.uk

Finally, the fifth annual Perthshire Amber Festival takes place from Friday, October 30, until Sunday, November 8.

Events are held in and around some of Perthshire's finest venues, including Pitlochry Festival Theatre, Dunkeld Castle, Perth Concert Hall, The Scottish Crannog Centre and the 16th-century Castle Menzies.

The Amber Festival was established by renowned singer and songwriter Dougie MacLean in 2005 after he was asked to write a song about his beloved Perthshire.

Highlights this year include shows with the Dougie MacLean Band, the Sorren MacLean Band, Eddi Reader, Irish-American singer Heidi Talbot, open mic sessions and the event's closing night – The Caledonia Concert.

Further information on www.pitlochryautumnfestival.co.uk

WOODLAND LODGES

Atholl Estates is preparing to welcome visitors to Blair Castle Caravan Park once more as tourists arrive to enjoy the fabulous Highland Perthshire scenery.

This year has seen the introduction of new accommodation, five Scandinavian-style woodland lodges in the historic grounds of Blair Castle.

The lodges are situated in their own tranquil wooded area, but remain conveniently close to the amenities of Blair Castle Caravan Park.

The two and three-bedroom lodges are built to a very high specification, with double-glazing, increased insulation and central heating to make them attractive holiday accommodation all year round.

Each lodge also has its own decking area complete with outdoor furniture so you can enjoy the local wildlife, including red squirrels and roe deer, at close hand.

To inquire or make a booking, call 01796 481263 or visit www.blaircastlecaravanpark.co.uk for more information.



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