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WORLD'S ONLY MISTLETOE FESTIVAL HERALDS A MORE TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS

Mistletoe tea and mistletoe buns are amongst the many delights on offer at this year's Mistletoe Festival, debunking the myth that the British variety is a highly toxic plant.

Being held on Saturday December 6th in Tenbury Wells, the Worcestershire town at the heart of the UK mistletoe trade, the Festival's aim is to put British mistletoe firmly back on the map. In recent times, much of the mistletoe on sale in this country has been imported from France.

The Festival, sponsored by Malvern Hills District Council, is being held to celebrate National Mistletoe Day and takes place in the middle of Tenbury's famous mistletoe auction season which has attracted buyers from across Europe for centuries.

A celebrity mistletoe auction will be just one of the Festival highlights with Ben Sidwell, the popular presenter from BBC Midlands Today, acting as auctioneer alongside professional mistletoe auctioneer Nick Champion.

The auction takes place at 12.30 in Tenbury's community centre and will feature unique mistletoe 'wraps' including those blessed by the local Druids, donations from celebrity gardens and traditional wraps from Tenbury's Easton Court Estate.

A host of other events will take place over the Festival weekend including:

- * Friday 5th December - Mistletoe Ball featuring the debut performance of the Mistletoe Rap by up-and-coming Worcestershire rap star, Daniel Tocchini

- crowning of the Mistletoe Queen and Holly Prince - roles traditionally given to the head girl and boy of the local high school
- * credit crunch Christmas workshops - festive decorations for your home using foliage that can be found for free
- * traditional lantern parade through the streets of Tenbury featuring 500 children and their handmade lanterns ending at the church for a blessing by the three women vicars

Other attractions include traditional street entertainment, craft markets, a County Market, old-fashioned games and refreshments galore including the chance to try mistletoe tea and mistletoe buns.

Commenting on the Mistletoe Festival and auctions, Jonathan Briggs, leading mistletoe expert, said:

"Mistletoe is part of our oldest yuletide tradition stretching back to the pre-Christian era of winter solstice celebrations. The kissing custom is a very British variant of the peace, good luck and fertility mistletoe customs seen elsewhere in Europe."

"The best kissing mistletoe comes, of course, from Tenbury Wells, the mistletoe capital of England. The annual Festival and Auctions are in the heart of mistletoe-growing country and, alongside new initiatives for sustainable mistletoe management, will help ensure these traditions continue for many years to come."

To find out more about the Mistletoe Festival, why not visit www.tenbury-mistletoe-festival.co.uk.

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For further information, imagery or to arrange interviews, please call Sara Stewart on 07789 374174.