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Blueway or Bust: Mark calendar now for premier paddling festival
Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in Southwest Florida welcome enthusiasts for fall event

Fort Myers, FL, (USA), June 24, 2010 – The nation’s premier canoeing and kayaking destination will sizzle with activity Oct. 29 through Nov. 7 during the fifth-annual Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival along the Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in Florida.

The festival’s two weekends offer hands-on nature experiences along with kayaking and canoeing, including speakers and instruction, eco-activities for children and adults, races, a fishing tournament, geocaching, green events and paddlers’ get-togethers.

Newly featured this year is a daylong event at Lovers Key State Park, a destination beach park with paddlecraft launches featured on the Travel Channel’s “Top 10 Florida Beaches.” It sits along the Calusa Blueway Paddling Trail, a 190-mile marked-and-meandering saltwater trail on Southwest Florida’s coast. The day’s events highlight Stand-up Paddleboarding, coastal kayaking classes and demonstrations, canoeing, paddling gear for purchase, guided off-road cycling, birdwatching, educational wading trips and living history programs. Most of the day’s events are free with park admission.

The Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival recently was recognized in the Southeast Tourism Society’s Top 20 Events of 2010.

“The Calusa Blueways Paddling Festival is a get-away like none other. The local community has put together an amazing list of paddling events over two perfect weekends,” said Jim Marsh, publisher of Canoe & Kayak magazine. “There is an extraordinary amount of effort, coordination and resources thrown behind this. They actually roll out the red carpet for the kayakers! It’s a one of a kind experience we will be endorsing to our readership.” The festival also is recognized and supported by Sea Kayaker magazine and the Florida Paddling Trails Association.

It’s easy to find a place to stay for the festival. Hotels offer special packages to travelers with paddlecraft, including ready-at-sunrise box lunches and access to ice machines and hoses. Tent campers and RVers can book waterfront sites with kayak launches, and they can paddle the Calusa Blueway to the festivities and social hours. Most event sites also are reachable by bicycle or trolley.

The festival targets passionate and complete longtime paddlers as well as eco-activity focused families and newcomers to canoeing and kayaking. This is not just a kayak symposium -- children will find hands-on marine activities and paddlers’ spouses can try Calusa Indian crafts, take guided beach walks and enjoy live music and waterfront happy-hour events with raffle prizes.

For those who are passionate, though, the paddling opportunities abound, from on-water instruction and demo paddlecraft / accessories to sunrise paddling fitness outings and lengthy kayak tours led by both Florida-based paddling clubs and some of the two dozen outfitters along the Calusa Blueway.

The annual Calusa Blueway Kayak Fishing Tournament is expected to draw anglers from throughout the Southeastern U.S. competing for cash and prizes. The Calusa Blueway Photo Contest also has been revitalized for amateur photographers to show off their best shots.

Festival-goers can choose from two weekends to attend: Oct. 29-Nov. 1 and Nov. 4-7. Most activities are free or involve a nominal donation to the Calusa Blueway or an instructional fee. Social hours and live music are planned each weekend and are open to everyone.

Festival details are available at www.CalusaBluewayPaddlingFestival.com, including entry forms for canoe and kayak races, a catch-and-release fishing tournament and photo contest. Listings of other activities, hotel and campground packages and guided trips also are included on the site.

For discounted accommodations and packages, go to <http://leecountysportshousing.org> and click on "Events." Or call the accommodations hotline at (888) 529-6588.

For trail information, check out www.CalusaBlueway.com. Maps are available or can be mailed to you. Online interactive maps, suggested routes, outfitter and put-in locations, wildlife tips and a social media site are included at the website.

For destination information, visit www.FortMyers-Sanibel.com.

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Calendar listing: Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival: Oct. 29-Nov. 7, 2010, along the Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. Details online at www.CalusaBluewayPaddlingFestival.com. Dates, times, phone numbers, costs, etc. are posted; website is routinely updated.

Editor's note: *Images are available upon request. At this time, event organizers do not anticipate the Deepwater Horizon oil spill incident to affect festival plans. For current conditions, visit <http://www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/oil-spill>. The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel include: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs & Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer islands, North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres.*