

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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News release:

- **Calendar listing below**
- **Photos available**

Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival offers eco-fun and inexpensive adventure

Fort Myers, FL, Aug. 7, 2012 — The Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival, an eco-paddling event on Southwest Florida's Gulf Coast, is a perfect way to blend two things on everyone's minds today – how to take an environmentally friendly vacation that doesn't break the budget.

The festival is designed for novice and experienced paddlers alike. It spans four days with events Nov. 1-4 in Fort Myers-Sanibel Island and Matlacha-Pine Island at sites along the Great Calusa Blueway Paddling Trail, recognized as one of the best U.S. kayaking destinations by *Canoe & Kayak* magazine. The user-friendly trail helps people experience the natural magic of the area's scenic waterways, with leggy mangrove forests, more than 300 species of birds and sugar-sand beaches.

Forget The Discovery Channel. Come paddle yourself, one-on-one with nature in paradise without the passport — or the expense. The festival and trail are within driving distance of many of the Sunshine State's metropolitan areas, making it realistic for travelers to arrive on one tank of gas. Midwesterners and East Coast outdoors enthusiasts trek to the event each year, too.

Fort Myers-Sanibel area hotels, motels and campgrounds have joined in to offer exclusive packages for Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival participants.

One hotel, for example, has its own micro-site devoted to festival attendees with special event room rates in efficiency units as low as \$79. Weekly rates also are available. Visit <http://cwp.marriott.com/rswrs/calusablueway/> to check out the Residence Inn by Marriott Fort Myers-Sanibel, which offers amenities for paddlers such as breakfast and access to a freshwater hose and ice for day-trippers.

The campground nearest the festival — San Carlos RV Resort — has tent sites, RV spaces and efficiency units set aside for the festival; its grounds have two kayak launches onto the Calusa Blueway. Visit www.sancarlosrv.com.

Also, check out rates with Sanibel Island and Pine Island lodging establishments. All are featured on the festival's accommodation page at www.calusabluewaypaddlingfestival.com.

For travelers interested in leaving the least carbon footprint, there also are an increasing number of Florida Certified Green Lodging accommodations. Visit www.fortmyers-sanibel.com for more lodging options.

"The Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival is now the premier ecotourism festival here in Southwest Florida," says John Kiseda, executive director of the Florida Society for Ethical Ecotourism. "It's all about responsible travel to natural areas that preserve the environment and improve the well being of local people."

The Southeast Tourism Society has named the Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival to its Top 20 events list for three consecutive years. Festival events include activities that will help attendees achieve an eco-vacation experience with tips to bring home.

The festival features clinics and demonstrations, speakers' program, hospitality events and chances to win two kayaks and other prizes. There also are moderately priced nature and cultural tours, waterway cleanups, a family-friendly race for canoes, kayaks and Stand-Up Paddleboards, and a catch-and-release kayak-fishing tournament. Canoe & Kayak magazine hosts an evening film festival. A nature photography contest rounds out the offerings, as does a children's activity tent.

A four-day, all-inclusive \$75 pass provides admission to daytime and evening events plus extra items and lagniappes while also raising money for the non-profit Clinic for Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW). Daily admission and daily evening event tickets are also available. A \$5 raffle ticket from CROW's special festival ticketing microsite, www.crowclinic.org/calusa_blueway/index.php, also can be purchased.

Raffle ticket and admission fees benefit CROW and the Calusa Blueway. The raffle grand prize is an Ascente touring kayak valued at more than \$3,000 donated by O-Sea-D Aquatic Adventures. Anglers have a chance to win a Hobie kayak from Estero River Outfitters if they nab the grand prize in the Nov. 3 Calusa Blueway Fishing Tournament. A Thursday, Nov. 1, evening reception sponsored by Fort Myers Toyota kicks off the festival weekend.

Complete details can be found at www.calusabluewaypaddlingfestival.com. It's all about enjoying the 190-mile marked paddling trail and attending a one-of-a-kind eco event. Trail details can be found at www.CalusaBlueway.com.

"Americans everywhere are becoming more environmentally conscious while also watching their household spending, so this festival is a win-win experience," says Betsy Clayton, waterways coordinator for Lee County Parks & Recreation.

CALENDAR LISTING

Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival

Dates: Thursday, Nov. 1, through Sunday, Nov. 4, 2012

Location: Fort Myers-Sanibel Island, FL, area.

Main events sites:

- Causeway Island Park, 19950 Sanibel Causeway Road, Sanibel, FL 33957
- Residence Inn by Marriott Fort Myers-Sanibel, 20371 Summerlin Road, Fort Myers, FL 33908
- Matlacha Park, 4577 Pine Island Road NW, Matlacha, FL 33993

Description: Paddling equipment demos, speakers, on-water demonstrations, three evening paddler's socials with refreshments, children's activities, photo contest, fishing tournament, film festival, family fun race, bluegrass music, hearty local restaurant fare and more.

Website: www.CalusaBluewayPaddlingFestival.com; Facebook: Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival; Twitter: calusapaddle;

Admission: Daytime ticket, \$10; single evening event, \$15; four-day inclusive pass with lagniappes, \$75. Free trolley service; free parking.

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NOTE: *High-resolution photography from along the trail and last year's festival are available upon request. Contact Betsy Clayton at (239) 533-7474 or bclayton@leegov.com. Additional media-related information is available in the online pressroom, as is the festival's colorful, Calusa Indian-inspired logo.*

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