

PAGE 2

ON THE WEB: The National Geographic Channel launches its three-part series on the Galapagos at 7 tonight. The series on the strange, savage islands that changed the course of history is accompanied by a spectacular multimedia presentation; hear the sounds, see the sights, and learn about the creatures that inspired Darwin's theory of evolution at www.MySanAntonio.com, Keyword: Travel.



THIS WEEK IN TEXAS

BIG BEND AND WEST TEXAS

TODAY

WILDLIFE WEEKEND, EL PASO

The El Paso Zoo hosts this fifth annual event, with sessions on where animals live and ways to preserve animal habitats. Kid-friendly stations will tell the stories of tigers, orangutans, elephants and more. The zoo is also accepting used cell phones and PDAs as part of a habitat-protection drive. Visit www.elpasozoo.org for more information.

THROUGH APRIL 22

PRAIRIE FIRE CERAMICS, ODESSA

An eclectic collection of work by artists living and working in the Midwest will be on display at the Prairie Fire Ceramics Art Gallery Exhibits at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin. Call (432) 552-2290.

HILL COUNTRY

TODAY

ARTISANS FESTIVAL, AUSTIN

The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center explores wildflowers in art at this showcase of more than 20 artists and artisans. It offers fine art, folk art and everything in between. Children's activities are scheduled, too. Call (512) 292-4100.

TODAY

OLD GRUENE MARKET DAYS, GRUENE

There's never a bad weekend to wander the quaint streets of Gruene, but Old Gruene Market Days makes it even more of a shopper's delight. Vendors will offer handcrafted items, Texas foods and more. Visit www.gruene-marketedays.com or call (830) 832-1721.

THROUGH SATURDAY

STAR OF TEXAS FAIR AND RODEO, AUSTIN

The 70th annual fair and rodeo wraps up this week, but there's plenty of time to check out the livestock show, carnival, live music and rodeo action. Travis County Exposition and Heritage Center. Visit www.rodeo-austin.com or call (512) 919-3000.

TODAY, SATURDAY-MARCH 25

BLUEBONNET WALK, CASTROVILLE

Be-bop through the bluebonnets at this Alsatian-flavored town. Enjoy walking trails or a car ride. Shooting Star Museum. Call (210) 274-6909 or (830) 931-3837.

GULF COAST

TUESDAY-FRIDAY

SPRING BREAK ACTIVITIES, EDNA

Special programs for kids of all ages include "Amazing Alligator and Make a Gator," "Fishing With a Ranger and Fish Printing," "Superb Snakes and Make a Snake" and "Beautiful Birds and Making a Bird Feeder." Lake Texana State Park. Call



COURTESY PHOTO

Andalusian dancing horses will be featured at Saturday's Onion Festival in Weslaco.

(361) 782-5718.

THROUGH APRIL 1

"ELITE EXCURSIONS" EXHIBIT, GALVESTON

Ooo-la-la! Learn about the luxury of times past at "Elite Excursions: The Victorian Vacations of a Prosperous Galveston Family." The Brown family of Galveston took elaborate, extensive vacations around the globe during the Victorian era, and many of their treasures are on display in Ashton Villa, the former family home. Call (409) 762-3933.

THROUGH MAY 10

BONES EXHIBIT, HOUSTON

Walk through a model bone, learn how bones work and see items made from bones at "Bones: An Exhibit Inside You." Perfect for the budding orthopedist in the family. Space Center Houston. Visit www.spacecenter.org or call (281) 244-2100.

PANHANDLE PLAINS

TODAY

POW WOW, BIG SPRING

This annual event features gourd dancing, hoop dancing and contest dancing. There are also drum exhibitions and vendors. Dorothy Garrett Coliseum at Howard College. Call (432) 263-3255.

Dancing is in the spotlight at the Big Spring Pow Wow.

COURTESY PHOTO



THROUGH JUNE 10

VIEWS OF TEXAS EXHIBIT, CANYON

Observe the march of civilization across the Lone Star State in "Patterns of Progress: Birds' Eye Views of Texas," which showcases highly detailed aerial views of late-19th-century Texas cities. Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum. Visit www.birdseyeviews.org or call (806) 651-2243.

PINEY WOODS

THROUGH APRIL 1

AZALEA AND SPRING FLOWER TRAIL, TYLER

The Hill Country gets the best bluebonnets, but East Texas boasts miles of azaleas, dogwood trees and other spring blossoms. The 47th annual Tyler festival starts this weekend and runs through the rest of the month. This week's activities include a home tour, a Civil War re-enactment and a 10K run. Visit www.tylerazaleatrail.com or call (800) 235-5712.

SATURDAY

AZALEA TRAILS EVENTS, NACOGDOCHES

Feast your eyes on Nacogdoches' three azalea trails, which showcase the brilliant blooms at their finest. Then take your pick of events: "A Bloomin' Volkswagen Show," with wild vintage Volkswagens; a class on the art of floral design; or sitting for professional portraits in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. Azalea Trails runs through March 31. For information, visit www.nacogdochesazaleas.com or call (888) 653-3788.

SATURDAY-MARCH 25

FOUR WINDS RENAISSANCE FAIRE, WHITEHOUSE

Traditional Renaissance Fair, including

full-contact jousting, live combat chess match, belly dancing, music, petting zoo, games, more than 80 crafters, court dancing, food, blacksmithing, Masque Ball and more. Texas 110, 13 miles south of Tyler. Visit www.fourwindsfaire.com or call (903) 839-5271.

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

THURSDAY-MARCH 25

HISTORICAL SHOOTISTS' SOCIETY, GUNSMOKE

No word on whether Miss Kitty will be there, but you can visit the Old West in this small town just outside of Columbus. The Texas Historical Shootists' Society puts on a shooting and riding show against the backdrop of an old-fashioned Western town. Visit www.thss.org or call (979) 732-8385.

THROUGH APRIL 29

MATISSE EXHIBIT, DALLAS

The Dallas Museum of Art hosts the "Matisse: Painter as Sculptor" exhibit, which offers an intriguing inside look at the great artist's work in sculpture. Visit www.dm-art.org or call (214) 922-1200.

THROUGH MAY 27

BALENCIAGA EXHIBIT, DALLAS

No heels required for attendance at "Balenciaga & His Legacy: Haute Couture From the Texas Fashion Collection" at the Meadows Museum. But if you wanted to get a little dressed up to honor one of the masters of modern fashion, that would be OK, too. The exhibit showcases more than 70 of his sartorial creations, as well as work of notable designers he mentored. Visit www.meadowsmuseumdallas.org or call (214) 768-2516.

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

THURSDAY-SATURDAY

COUNTY FAIR, THREE RIVERS

Watch the livestock show, brave the rides at the carnival or tempt your palate at the cabrito cook-off at the Live Oak County Fair. Other attractions include vendors and an arts-and-crafts competition. The Fair Parade is scheduled for Friday. Live Oak County Fairgrounds. Call (361) 786-3254 or (361) 786-4330.

SATURDAY

ONION FESTIVAL, WESLACO

If you're brave, enter the onion-eating contest at the Rio Grande Valley Onion Festival. If you're not willing to risk that kind of indigestion, you can still enjoy a barbecue cook-off, kids' events, arts and crafts, Andalusian dancing horses and more.

City Park. Visit www.weslaco.com/onionfestival.asp or call (888) 968-2102.

UPCOMING

MARCH 30-APRIL 1

GULF COAST: SANDFEST, PORT ARANSAS

Sand sculptors from around the world turn out for Sandfest every year, putting their imaginations to the test in over-the-top sand creations. Visit www.texasandfest.com or call (361) 749-2500.

MARCH 31

HILL COUNTRY: SPRING MARKET DAY, COMFORT

Shop your heart out at the annual Spring Market Day, which offers food, seasonal decorations, rustic goods, antiques, accessories and more. Enjoy live music from regional entertainers while you shop, or bring a blanket and catch some rays while listening to the sounds of Gospel Fest. Comfort Park and downtown. Visit www.comfortchamberofcommerce.com or call (830) 995-3131.

APRIL 13-15

BIG BEND AND WEST TEXAS: PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP, BIG BEND

Shutterbugs can shoot their fill of the wild beauty of the Big Bend region at this twice-annual workshop led by professional Jim Carr. Advance registration required. For information, send an e-mail to jpcic@sbcglobal.net or call (432) 229-3416.

MAY 25-26

HILL COUNTRY: CRAWFISH FESTIVAL, FREDERICKSBURG

Dance to zydeco and jazz while slurping down crawfish and a smorgasbord of other Cajun and German-Texan treats. Children's activities also available, as well as art and craft booths. Market Square. Visit www.tex-fest.com or call (830) 997-8515.

Rock-climbing was a hit at last year's Onion Festival.



COURTESY PHOTO

Settle in for a weekend of Americana and roots music

BY RONA DISTENFELD
SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

DRIFTWOOD — There are many rites of spring in the Texas Hill Country, but for music fans the most anticipated is the annual return of the Old Settler's Music Festival. Founded two decades ago, it has grown to be one of the top five Americana/Roots Music festivals in the United States.

This year, from April 19-22, the festival will once again make its home at the Salt Lick Pavilion in Driftwood, with camping across the road at Camp Ben McCulloch. This beautiful, tree-shaded venue with its flowing creek may be one of the nicest festival settings in the country, helping to create the relaxed, friendly feeling that makes it so different from other major festivals, including the Austin City Limits Music Festival. You spend your time here having fun and hearing great music, not standing in lines for food or bathrooms, or walking endlessly between too many stages.

"We're proud of the fact that we've been able to maintain a family-friendly atmosphere, providing our fans with big-name talent without sacrificing the small festival charm," says past festival president Randy Collier.

Mike Labinski of Austin sums up what you hear from everyone you talk to: "This is my favorite



RONA DISTENFELD/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

There's room for everyone to kick back and enjoy the music under a clear, Texas spring sky.

➤ MYSA.COM

Keyword: Travel

For festival logistics

festival to come to. It's just so laid back, and the music is always incredible." Labinski, who works for a state agency, spent a day wandering the 2006 festival dressed as Tigger the Tiger, to the delight of the many children present.

More than bluegrass

Old Settler's is known as a bluegrass festival, but doesn't

limit itself to that traditional genre. This year's lineup includes Sam Bush, Joan Osborne, Honky Tonk Homeslice (featuring Bill Nershi of String Cheese Incident), Grupo Fanstasma, Slaid Cleaves, Ruthie Foster, Jim Lauderdale, Peter Rowan, Iris DeMent and dozens of other artists.

The music starts Thursday night over in the campground pavilion with a show just for the campers. This will be the only opportunity to see some of the acts, including Cleaves. The fes-

tival's main stages get going across the street on Friday afternoon as the grounds fill with people relaxing on blankets, lawn chairs and even the occasional hammock as they enjoy the music until midnight. Saturday it starts all over again.

Before, during and after the official stage acts, you'll find music in the campgrounds, too. Campers come from all over the country, but even locals who could easily drive home opt to pitch a tent or hook up an RV so they can play music with old and new



A little fan enjoys the music and a good hug from mom.

friends, or wander the campground as listeners until the wee hours.

This is my favorite part of the festival. In past years I've heard new music, played with dozens of strangers, and even had a chance to play an Irish tune with the fiddle player from Railroad Earth, one of the headline bands that year. It's not uncommon to run into the musicians you saw on stage here. Even they find the campground scene more fun and inviting than many of the other festivals they play at. It's no wonder people come from all over the United States, and even Canada, year after year.

Eat, shop, chill

You won't go hungry while you're at the festival. The organizers make a point of finding

food providers who offer a variety of healthy choices instead of the typical turkey legs and fried everything you find at most festivals. Beer, soft drinks and water are available at two Watering Holes staffed by some of the 200-plus volunteers who help this nonprofit benefit Camp Fire USA and the Capital Area Food Bank.

Many festival fans take advantage of the creek as they listen to the music. You can wade in the water, lounge on the boulders, or just stretch out on the patio-like stone bank under the trees.

It's also fun to check out the vendors offering straw hats, cotton clothing, handmade soaps, jewelry and more. Many have become festival fixtures and are greeted as old friends.

That friendly, welcoming, we're-all-here-to-have-fun attitude may be what longtime fans love most about Old Settler's. One reviewer called Old Settler's "a festival that's found the perfect mix of acts, manageable crowds, April breezes along the banks of Onion Creek and music that dares to wear a happy face."

For more information, visit the Web site at oldsettlersmusic-fest.org.

Rona Distenfeld is an Austin-based freelance writer.

Top Ten: Best budget beds

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

The top hostels in the world, from a hostelworld.com poll of 500,000 hostel users:

1. Jetpak City Hostel, Berlin
2. Hostel of the Sun, Naples, Italy
3. La Chimba, Santiago, Chile
4. Mamas Hostel, Krakow, Poland
5. Wombats City Hostel (The Lounge), Vienna
6. Friendly Fun Franks Backpackers Hostel, Riga, Latvia
7. EastSeven Berlin Hostel, Berlin
8. Argonaut Backpackers, Riga
9. Oasis Backpackers Hostel, Granada, Spain
10. Oki Doki Hostel, Warsaw

Geoquiz: Cajuns are associated with the bayou region of which Southern state? (Answer: Louisiana)

Contact us

Travel editor

Tracy Barnett
tbarnett@express-news.net
(210) 250-3439

This Week in Texas

Jennifer Roof Laster
jlaster@express-news.net
(210) 250-3530

Mail

San Antonio Express-News
ATTN: Travel
P.O. Box 2171
San Antonio, TX 78297-2171

Online

MySA.com Keyword: travel

EXPRESS-NEWS GRAPHIC

Free Ride & \$10 Free Play WinStar Casino Express
www.casinoexpressbus.com • 888-984-7287(9VIPBUS)

Free Ride & Receive \$10 Free Play	Depart Times
San Antonio: Airport Security Parking Lot on Airport Blvd & Parkridge	6:30 AM 6:30 PM
San Antonio: Super Wal-Mart 16503 Nacogdoches & Loop 1604	7:00 AM 7:00 PM

AM runs are 7 days a week, PM runs are Fri & Sat \$10 Free Play for Ladies on Tues and Men on Wed(5-9pm)
(Casino Express reserves the right to alter or cancel without notice.)

HEART OF EUROPE
15-day tour of Holland, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland & France by Image Tours

PERFECT FOR YOUR FIRST TRIP TO EUROPE!

Prices reflect \$200 Savings per couple

\$2040
September 11 & 14 departures

Includes escort, hotels, 22 meals, and transportation in Europe, per person dbl. occupancy. Price w/ air from S. Antonio is \$3140 + air tax. Book by 4/11/07. Call for a free brochure.

ESCAPADE CRUISE & TRAVEL - San Antonio
Ph: 210-341-6363

Got Spring Fever? Try a Vegas Vacation.

BOOK NOW & SAVE!

2 NTS FROM \$299 Stratosphere Casino, Hotel & Tower	2 NTS FROM \$309 Flamingo Las Vegas	2 NTS FROM \$394 Bellagio
--	--	--

PACKAGES INCLUDE: • Roundtrip Air • Hotel Accommodations & Taxes • Rapid Rewards credit on air portion • 24-Hour Traveler Assistance

Southwest Vacations

southwestvacations.com

Prices listed are available at southwestvacations.com or for travel agent bookings at vaxvacationaccess.com/vnw or Sabre® Vacations. Package prices quoted are examples per person based on double occupancy for a two night package with Monday and Tuesday departures valid from 4/2-4/24/07 for all Stratosphere packages and 4/10 & 4/23/07 for all other Las Vegas packages listed from San Antonio. Prices are valid if booked by 3/22/07. Prices may vary when calling 1-800-754-8438. Surcharges apply to weekends, holidays, special events, and convention periods. Rates are subject to change until purchased. Seats are limited and may not be available on some flights that operate during peak travel times and holiday periods. Restrictions apply. Prices do not include airport taxes of up to \$18 roundtrip per person or a Federal September 11th Security Fee of up to \$10 roundtrip per person. Flights available on Southwest-operated published service only. All Rapid Rewards rules and regulations apply. The Mark Travel Corporation is the tour operator for Southwest Airlines Vacations. Photo courtesy of MGM MIRAGE.