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TRAVEL NEWS

To mark National Travel Tourism Week May 5–13, Texas will join the nation’s travel industry on May 8 for Travel Rally Day, as the industry unites to showcase the impact that travel has on local workers, businesses and economies.

The goal of Rally Day—themed “Vote Travel”—is to unite a community’s travel workers and supporters to present the message that travel matters to the nation and to local communities.

Many parks, communities and industry organizations across the state will participate in various ways.

Texas Department of Transportation’s Travel Information Center in Waskom is the host site for this year’s May 8 Travel Rally Trade Show, made up of area and state travel industry partners and leaders.

The day will be packed with entertainment provided by the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame and the Alabama-Coushatta tribe, as well as safety demonstrations and live longhorn exhibits.

Games and activities planned including a fishing rod casting contest, horseshoe tournament, scavenger hunt for school groups, door prizes and drawings.

During Mother’s Day weekend (May 12-13), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department will host a celebration of picnics in parks at Brazos Bend State Park in Needville.

Texas Historical Commission is reopening the Magoffin Home in El Paso on Saturday, May 12. On Sunday, May 13, visits will be free.

Tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry, generating $800 billion in the United States and $57.5 billion in direct travel spending in 2010. The money that visitors spend on goods and services translates into jobs for Texans and excise tax money from the sale of those goods and services for state and local government.

For more information, visit www.votetravel.org.

The Asia Texas Society Board of Directors’ efforts to help the 16-year-old organization thrive are coming to fruition with the opening of the new, Yoshio Taniguchi-designed, Asia Society Texas Center in Houston. A free open house and First Look Festival, featuring music, acrobatics, art exhibitions, storytelling and building tours, are set for April 14–15.

Geared toward helping bridge gaps in understanding among people, leaders and organizations in the United States and Asia, the Center will foster enhanced dialogue, creative expression and new ideas in the areas of arts, culture, policy, business and education.

The $48.4 million facility takes its place in Houston’s vibrant Theater District, joining internationally recognized museums like the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, as well as performing arts organizations and education centers.

For Taniguchi, who is best known for his expansion and renovation of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Asia Society of Texas Center is his first free-standing building in the United States. He incorporated a variety for exterior and interior walls, Basaltina Italian stone floors and Appalachian white oak wood for flooring, and American Cherry wood for paneling. The Fayez Sarofim Grand Hall paneling comes from a single, 100-year-old North American cherry tree.

Along with the Grand Hall that greets visitors, the 39,000-square-foot facility includes the 273-seat Brown Foundation Performing Arts Theater. The theater offers acoustics that place it in contention with Houston’s best mid-sized venues for performances. Other highlights are the Louisa Stude Sarofim Gallery, the adjacent Allen Sculpture Garden and the Edward Rudge Allen III Education Center.

Jeffrey Brown, a writer for Texas Architect Magazine, says, “The dazzling display of what every architect aspires to do is all the more admirable in the restraint Taniguchi has shown here. His gift may well be in the balance of high craft and knowing what to not detail.”
TEXAS TRAVELOG

Visitors to Big Bend National Park contribute to the local economy with direct spending and job creation.

Grand opening weekend entertainment includes a 14-member troupe that demonstrates traditional Japanese fire-fighting techniques via acrobatics, Aboriginal Australian tales laced with sounds of the didgeridoo, Sufi music, and a Mountain Music Project that pairs Nepalese folk musicians and Appalachian bluegrass performers.

The First Look Festival also will include the unveiling of artist Lee Ufan’s Relatum work commissioned especially for the Allen Sculpture Garden. It also marks the first official event coordinated by the Allen Arts Foundation.

The state-of-the-art, open-air BBVA Compass Stadium features 22,000 seats and is designed to host Major League Soccer and international soccer matches as well as additional sporting and concert events. This makes it Major League Soccer’s first soccer-specific stadium in a city’s downtown district.

Its addition makes it a neighbor to other showcase Houston attractions including Minute Maid Park, the Toyota Center, George R. Brown Convention Center and Discovery Green.

The stadium also will host Texas Southern University football, concerts and boxing matches, among other events.

For more information, call (713) 276-5000 or visit www.HoustonDynamo.com.

NEW National Park Service report shows that 366,269 visitors in 2010 spent $16,121,003 in Big Bend National Park and in communities near the park. That spending supported 241 jobs in the local area. In addition, overnight stays in Big Bend National Park totalled 175,574 for 2010.

“The people and the business owners in communities near national parks have always known their economic value,” says Bill Wellman, park superintendent. “Big Bend National Park is clean, green fuel for the engine that drives our local economy.”

Most of the spending jobs are related to lodging, food and beverage service (52 percent); followed by retail (29 percent); entertainment/amenities (12 percent); gas and local transportation (7 percent); and groceries (2 percent).

The figures are based on $12 billion of direct spending by 28 million visitors in 334 national parks and nearby communities. And are included in an annual, peer-reviewed visitor-spending analysis conducted by Dr. Daniel Synes of McCombs State University for the National Park Service.

Across the U.S., local visitor spending added a total of $31 billion to the national economy and supported more than 258,000 jobs, an increase of $689 million and 11,500 jobs from 2009.

TEXAS Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus is gearing up for its 40th annual convention Aug. 14-17 in Killeen.

The nation’s largest state organization of CVBs and chambers of commerce—expecting more than 300 attendees from Texas and Oklahoma—will feature educational sessions and an exclusive trade show for industry partners.

For more information, call (361) 749-0467 or visit www.tacvb.org.

EARLY SPRING rains have helped Texas bluebonnets and other native plants grow, as well as boosted their blooms and the germination of developing summer wildflowers. Among the locations to see good stands of the state flower are: White Oak Bayou from Loop 610 to Interstate 10 in Houston; along U.S. 290 near S. Lamar Blvd. and along Highway 1 in Austin; under the Montgomery Street Bridge of Interstate 30 in Fort Worth; and in the median of Highway 281 in north San Antonio.

Stiff greenthread is also blooming in north San Antonio along Encino and Evans roads. And thick stands of California poppy can be seen from trails at the El Paso Museum of Archaeology; stands of Drummond phlox and patches of Texas bluebonnets surround highways 181 and 123 between Beeville and Seguin; white...
prickly poppy, prairie acacia and stands of bladderpod species are visible along Miners Road between Eagle Pass and Laredo.

At the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, clusters of hundreds of Texas bluebonnets decorate the Savanna Meadow, and California poppy and large buttercup are among the current blooming options from the hundreds of native wildflowers on site.

“All this rain has helped create a very lush Wildflower Center that will continue into future months,” says Damon Waitt, who is the senior botanist and senior director at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. He notes that, each day, something new comes into flower at the center.

Unfortunately, bluebonnets and other Texas wildflowers are harder to spot along roadways when they are mixed in with stands of invasive species such as bastard cabbage with its highlighter-yellow blooms.

Our garden staff works hard to keep invasive plants in check so visitors can enjoy an invasives-free Texas wildflower experience,” Waitt says.

To determine whether a plant in your yard is an invasive one, visit www.texasinvasives.org/invasives_database. Developing wildflowers at the center can be viewed at www.wildflower.org/bbcam.

To learn more about wildflowers and potted native plants, visit www.wildflower.org/suppliers.

Devil’s Rope Museum in McLean showcases the history of barbed wire and fencing tools.
HemisFair, the first officially designated international exposition in the southwestern United States, opened in San Antonio, running through October. It attracted 6.3 million visitors in its celebration of the cultural heritage shared by San Antonio and Latin American nations. More than thirty nations participated with pavilions or exhibits. After the event, San Antonio's landscape was forever changed with the remaining structures including the Institute of Texan Cultures, the Convention Center and Arena, and the 622-foot Tower of the Americas.

**Texas Trivia**

On April 6, 1998, a fair for this half of the year was launched in what city?