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**NEWS RELEASE**

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE April 2018 CONTACTS: Francesca Donlan 239-338-3500

**"Gifts from the Sea"**

**Shell seekers find treasures to take home**

**from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel**

*"Patience, patience, patience, is what the sea teaches. Patience and faith. One should lie empty, open, choiceless as a beach – waiting for a gift from the sea."*

~ Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *"Gift from the Sea"*

**LEE COUNTY, FL** – When Anne Morrow Lindbergh visited Captiva Island and penned her famous book, ***“Gift from the Sea,”*** in 1955, she wrote*: “The beach was covered with beautiful shells and I could not let one go by unnoticed. I couldn’t even walk head up looking out to sea, for fear of missing something precious at my feet.”*

It's much that way today as avid collectors come from all over the world to comb The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in Southwest Florida to take advantage of the abundant treasures from the sea. A passion for shelling will soon turn into obsession as the success of a vacation is often judged by the number and quality of shells collected!

Shelling is free. It requires only a mesh bag or a pocket and basic knowledge of how to do the “Sanibel Stoop.” And when visitors get their finds home, they become a reminder of beautiful beach vacation memories.

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# Area beaches are some of the best for shelling

 With names such as angel wings, baby's ear, kitten's paw, alphabet cone, paper fig and worm shells, to name a few, shelling is taken seriously here. This area is home to 50 miles of sandy-white beaches that shelter some of the best shelling in the United States. Visitors and residents alike search the beaches for treasures. Some even set out with flashlights before sunrise to find the best specimens washed ashore.

 The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel yields some 400 species of multi-colored seashells, from the commonplace scallop and clam to the exotic tulips, olives, fragile paper fig shells and the rarest of them all, the brown speckled junonia. Considered a “once in a lifetime” find, stumbling across a junonia may get your photo in the local Sanibel newspaper.

 The ideal geography of the area has everything to do with its bounty of shells. Shells from the Gulf of Mexico eventually roll up the slightly sloping undersea shelf. The gentle waves keep a majority of shells intact.

# Where are the best shelling locations?

#  Sanibel Island has been named the best shelling beach in the U. S. and for good reason. Even the land’s configuration encourages shelling with its boomerang or shrimp shape that

# slows down the shells and brings them onto the beach in one piece. While many islands face northwest, Sanibel runs in a more east-west direction, a distinct advantage and is exposed to winter fronts from the northwest. Often, seashells left behind by sea creatures hide just beneath the surface of the sand where the surf breaks. Many empty shells never make it over this point

# and can be collected by wading or snorkeling along the surf line or sifting through the bounty of shells deposited by waves. By closely monitoring the feeding habits of shorebirds, one can locate many of the Gulf’s treasures.

Shelling is actively pursued all along the Southwest Florida coastline. **Lovers Key State Park** is easily accessible and shells are plentiful. Shelling is especially good in less populated areas, like **Cayo Costa** and **Big Hickory** islands. Both of these are accessible only by private boat or charter. For details on area beaches visit [www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/discover/on-water/beaches/](http://www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/discover/on-water/beaches/)

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**Note:** To access some of the more isolated locations, many visitors seek the help of a shelling guide or charter captains. Captain Brian Holloway offers visitors the experience of experiencing the nature of the area with a private eco tour. A certified Florida Master Naturalist, he is also a U.S. Coast Guard licensed captain. Check out his popular shelling tours [here](http://www.captainbrianonthewater.com).

### When is the best time for shelling?

#  Avid shell-seekers say that anytime is a good time for shelling, as one never knows what will wash ashore. The thrill of the search is part of the allure. Peak shelling season in the Fort

# Myers/Sanibel area is generally considered to be May through September. Typical winter cold fronts also produce great shelling on the southwest side of many barrier islands because of changing tides and strong currents.

**Shelling tips**

 Shell early morning. Or any time you can get to the beach is a good time!

#  Walk the shell line, just where the highest waves stop as they wash up onto the sand. This

is where groups of shells arrive and are reshuffled by ongoing wave action. Another good spot is found at the slight drop in the surf line, just where gentle waves break before rolling onto the beach. While this area is accessible only when weather permits, it usually holds the most and finest specimens.

 Be patient! No one area is consistent and no collection worth viewing was ever found on one outing. Yet there is something innately appealing about shelling that keeps most people coming back time after time, year after year. Morning, evening or midday, shell seekers throughout the islands and mainland coasts of The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel assume the famous “Sanibel Stoop” or “Captiva Crouch,” position to gather gifts from the sea.

**Don't miss!**

Before heading out on a quest for the perfect junonia shell, many shellers visit the ***Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum on Sanibel Island***, which is in its 20th year of mounting exhibits and educating the public about mollusks and the hard exoskeletons they leave behind.

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With ties to the Smithsonian Institution, it is home to shells of Southwest Florida and huge and rare specimens from around the world. The museum has the largest collection of shells in North America, including the intricate Sailor’s Valentines. A comprehensive Web-based system allows malacologists (zoologists who specialize in mollusks) the world over to access the museum's collection online. A learning lab offers a hands-on area for children and a gift shop filled with unique objects to take home.

Learn more about shells with an hour-long **daily beach walk** beginning at 9 a.m. with a marine biologist at the **Island Inn** on **Sanibel Island**. For reservations and details, visit [www.shellmuseum.org](http://www.shellmuseum.org) or call 239-395-2233.

For craft supplies and to purchase the shells that you did not find on the beach, **She Sells Sea Shells** has two locations on Sanibel Island. These family-owned and operated shops since

1976, have their own line of shell craft ornaments, animals, novelties, and flowers. All of these unique creations are made locally from sea shells and sea life. Visit [www.sanibelshellcrafts.com](http://www.sanibelshellcrafts.com) or 239-472-8080. And don't miss a visit to **Sanibel Seashell Industries** with two shops filled

with local and worldwide specimens, gifts, artwork and all of the supplies needed to create your own shell displays. Visit [www.seashells.com](http://www.seashells.com).

Shellers will want to visit the ***Shell Factory & Nature Park******in North Fort Myers.*** A southwest Florida institution, it is billed as the “world’s largest collection of rare shells, corals, sponges and fossils from the seven seas.” Part museum, part gift shop, part nature park, it is a great addition to a shelling vacation. Visit [www.shellfactory.com](http://www.shellfactory.com/) or call 239-995-2141.

The **82nd** **Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show** takes place on **Sanibel Island** in March 2019, at the Sanibel Community House. Shelling enthusiasts gather each year for the shell fair that draws visitors from around the globe.  One of the most unique events in the country, it began on a porch with just a few islanders and has evolved into today's fair that includes

demonstrations, shell displays, crafts, prizes, food and entertainment. Visit [www.sanibelcommunityhouse.net](http://www.sanibelcommunityhouse.net) or call 239-472-2155.

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**Arriving back home with your shells**

 So you have found great shells on your vacation and managed to get them all home in one piece. What now? The ways of incorporating your shells into your home are endless.

Rambo's favorite: "Arrange your collection in bowls and display them around your home. Next to your computer is a favorite of mine. Put them where you can see them and enjoy the memories from your trip."

For more tips and photos visit The Beaches of [Fort Myers & Sanibel Pinterest](http://pinterest.com/ftmyerssanibel/she-shells-seashells/) board.

# Help preserve this natural resource

Lee County treasures this natural visitor attraction. Shell activists work to preserve this natural resource and protect live shells from being over-harvested and endangered. All live shelling throughout the Fort Myers and Sanibel area is banned. However, collecting of

uninhabited shells, ones where the animals or mollusks are already dead or gone from the shell, is unlimited and encouraged.

 For more information on shelling and planning a vacation to The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel, visit [www.fortmyer-sanibel.com](http://www.fortmyerssanibel.com/).

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**Editor’s Note:** *The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida includes: 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. For media assistance on the destination, please visit* [www.fortmyerssanibel.com/media](http://www.fortmyerssanibel.com/media)*.*