



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

LEE COUNTY, Fla. (U.S.A.) – September on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel brings long sunny days and nights filled with music as Island Hopper Songwriter Fest returns Sept. 17-26 for its seventh year with an impressive lineup of talented singer-songwriters.

In addition to offering plenty of space for social distancing, great year-round weather, shell-drenched beaches, wildlife and the sparkling Gulf of Mexico, the destination offers lots of new experiences for return guests and first-time visitors. For the latest vacation information, visit FortMyers-Sanibel.com

Island Hopper Songwriter Fest Sept. 17-26

Island Hopper Songwriter Fest returns for its seventh year with a lineup of talented singer-songwriters, including Jimmie Allen and Michael Ray.

The free 10-day music festival – except for a few ticketed events – kicks off on Captiva Island, Sept. 17-19, then moves to historic downtown Fort Myers, Sept. 20-23, and wraps up on Fort Myers Beach, Sept. 24-26. The event is the largest songwriter festival in Southwest Florida and offers a unique experience to interact with songwriters at pool parties and beachside venues. This year, more than 60 singer-songwriters from around the country will perform more than 100 shows.

We are doing all that we can to produce a safe experience for Island Hopper songwriters, staff and fans. Most of our events will be held outdoors. We are taking all the precautions necessary, which include asking attendees to follow CDC guidelines at all performances.

Allen, who won this year's Academy of Country Music Award for New Male Artist of the Year, will perform at the highly anticipated pool party at Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina on Sept. 26. The Delaware native made history as the first Black artist to launch a career with two consecutive No. 1 songs on country radio. His hit, "Best Shot," claimed the No. 1 spot for three weeks and his second single, "Make Me Want To," climbed the charts in March 2020. He recently released an album featuring collaborations with Little Big Town, Keith Urban and Mickey Guyton.

Ray, a Florida native, joins Island Hopper Songwriter Fest with three No. 1 songs, including “Kiss You in the Morning,” “Think a Little Less” and “One That Got Away.” He performs at Pinchers at The Marina at Edison Ford in downtown Fort Myers on Sept. 23.

While most of the festival performances are free, a few exclusive ticketed shows are available on the official festival app – Island Hopper Songwriter Fest – which is available for free in the App Store and Google Play.

Island Hopper Songwriter Fest is produced by the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau, iHeartMedia, Cat Country 107.1 and BMI, the largest music rights organization in the U.S. Visit IslandHopperFest.com or access the media tool kit at island-hopper.fortmyers-sanibel.com/press. Follow the festival hashtag #islandhopperfest as well as the event’s Twitter, Instagram and Facebook feeds.

The arts

The Shape of Orchids: An Eternal Love Affair at FGCU

The Florida Gulf Coast University Archives and Special Collections presents *The Shape of Orchids: An Eternal Love Affair* for the fall 2021 exhibition.

The exhibition celebrates the Porecki Collection and highlights rare prints dating back to the early 17th century, a collection of stamps from across the globe and Neil Gaiman’s *Black Orchid* comics donated by Porecki in 2016. The exhibition will feature rare books from the permanent collection, Clyde Butcher photographs, handcrafted botanical wallpapers, local herbarium specimens and a living orchid wall on loan from the Naples Botanical Garden.

The University Archives and Special Collections is located on the third floor of the University Library. The exhibition is open to the public now through Dec. 3, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. <https://library.fgcu.edu/exhibits>

Birds of Southwest Florida Exhibit at Edison and Ford Winter Estates

The *Birds of Southwest Florida* exhibit in the Caretaker’s House at Edison and Ford Winter Estates features multiple panels containing detailed illustrations from John James Audubon, along with quotes from the Edison and Ford families. Antique spy glasses, books on birds, and shell art are also featured. The exhibit is included with admission to the site until mid-January, 2022. The exhibit is a tribute to Mina Edison (Thomas Edison's wife) and her love of birds. www.edisonfordwinterestates.org

DAAS CO-OP Art Gallery

DAAS CO-OP Art Gallery & Gifts in the Butterfly Estates complex showcases works by art educator David Martin during September. Meet the artist during the exhibit’s opening reception from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, Sept. 3, in conjunction with the monthly Fort Myers Art Walk. The exhibition will be on display through Sept. 26.

Martin, who resides in Naples, holds bachelor’s degree in art education from Kendall College of Art and Design. He says his inspiration comes from a place of struggle as a gay male, navigating a heteronormative world. Using watercolor and colored pencils, he creates hyper-realistic work, in hopes to open a dialogue about issues in the LGBTQ+ community. www.daascoop.com

New theater in Fort Myers

Fort Myers Theater, an 81-seat community theater located on San Carlos Blvd. next to Point Ybel Brewing Co. in Fort Myers, plans to stage one new production each month along with youth and junior theater productions. Check site for schedule and details.

<https://ftmyerstheatre.com>

Natural Southwest Florida

Roving experience with Gopher Tortoises of Koreshan State Park

10-11:30 a.m., Oct. 12

An Advanced Florida Master Naturalist will share information on gopher tortoises. Discover fascinating facts about this ancient species. They are fun to watch, but we must never lose sight of the fact that they are endangered. Discussions will touch on behaviors, anatomy and fun facts. Visitors can hold and see the shells of specimens that lived within Koreshan State Park. Talk is free with park entry fee: \$5 per vehicle with 2-8 occupants, \$4 per single-occupant vehicle, and \$2 for pedestrians and bicyclists. Masks suggested but not required.

Beginning Cell Phone Photography Session

10-11:30 a.m., Oct. 19

Join an Advanced Florida Master Naturalist for a beginning photography tour of the architecture within the Koreshan historical settlement. Bring your cell phone and learn the basics of photography, cell phone photo tricks and the best places to snap that perfect photo. Session will begin in front of the Art Hall. Reservations required and can be made by calling the ranger station at 239-992-0311. Tour is free with park entry fee: \$5 per vehicle with 2-8 occupants, \$4 per single-occupant vehicle, and \$2 for pedestrians and bicyclists. Masks suggested but not required.

Roving Experience on Beginning Butterflies at Koreshan State Park

10-11:30 a.m., Oct. 26

An Advanced Florida Master Naturalist will share information on butterflies of Koreshan State Park and Southwest Florida. Topics will touch on differences between moths and butterflies, butterfly development, plants that support butterflies, netting techniques, and more. Talk is free with park entry fee: \$5 per vehicle with 2-8 occupants, \$4 per single-occupant vehicle, and \$2 for pedestrians and bicyclists. Masks suggested but not required.

Beginning Photography Session at Koreshan State Park

10-11:30 a.m., Nov. 2

Join an Advanced Florida Master Naturalist for a beginning photography session within the Koreshan State Park. Bring your camera and learn the basics of photography, the best places to snap that perfect photo, discover unusual plants, buildings and critters that make up the many interesting aspects of Koreshan State Park. Session will begin in front of the Art Hall. Reservations required and can be made by calling the ranger station at 239-992-0311. Tour is free with park entry fee: \$5 per vehicle with 2-8 occupants, \$4 per single-occupant vehicle, and \$2 for pedestrians and bicyclists. Masks suggested but not required.

www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/koreshan-state-park

Turtle nesting season runs through Oct. 31

The destination is known for its wildlife and turtle nesting season is special to those who live here as well as to the visitors who travel from all over the world to experience it. This ritual is one of nature's miracles. Most common to the area is the loggerhead sea turtle, which lives to be 40-60 years old. These fascinating creatures are big – they weigh 250-400 pounds. Like the visitors, who return year after year to enjoy our beautiful beaches, loggerheads return to the same beach time after time to deposit their eggs.

Be sure to observe a nesting turtle from a distance. Do not shine lights on or around her or she may abandon her effort to nest. Forgo taking photos or using cell phones and stay far away where she cannot see you as she crawls back to the water.

Lee County has a Sea Turtle Conservation Code. For more information, contact the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation at sccf.org/our-work/sea-turtles or Turtle Time, Inc. at turtletime.org

Welcome and Discovery Center at Lovers Key State Park

The new **Welcome and Discovery Center at Lovers Key State Park** is located on the banks of an inland waterway with a design that pays homage to this beautiful backdrop. The \$5.7 million structure starts by educating its visitors outdoors, where the pillars of the elevated building imitate mangroves and a 400-gallon touch tank welcomes hands and curiosity. The information desk takes its cues from Old Florida fish shacks and the gift shop includes books, jewelry and art. www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/lovers-key-state-park

Visitors come to Lovers Key to enjoy its shell-strewn beach that stretches 2.5 miles, with three different beach accesses along calm, clear waters. Bikers enjoy more than 5 miles of multi-use trails through maritime hammock and off-the-beaten paths where you may encounter butterflies, marsh rabbits, gopher tortoises and alligators in a freshwater pond.

Southern Living magazine named Lovers Key one of Florida's most romantic destinations. In the early 1900s the island was accessible only by boat. Legend says that only lovers made the effort to get to this romantic island, thus the name Lovers Key.

www.southernliving.com/travel/florida/most-romantic-destinations-fl

Coming attractions

Murals commemorate McCollum Hall's colorful past

As Dunbar's historic **McCollum Hall** heads toward preservation, local artists have been working to commemorate the building's colorful past with vibrant outdoor murals depicting its days hosting big-name performers of the "Chitlin' Circuit" back in the 1940s and 1950s. Besides recalling performances by Black musical greats, such as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, the murals pay homage to Dunbar community traditions, including the Easter Sunday parade and heated sidewalk checker matches. The Fort Myers Mural Society oversees the project, which engages a number of local artists as the 12-mural series nears completion. Check details at www.fortmyersmuralsociety.com

To learn more about Dunbar Cultural Landmarks, download the free Florida Stories app and follow the route to learn about historic places in the Dunbar community. The tour follows the route to narrated cultural stops. <https://floridastories.oncell.com/en/fort-myers-dunbar-community-207854.html>

Wonder Gardens plans Otter Grotto

Wonder Gardens in Bonita Springs is launching the Robert & Deborah Blain Otter Grotto. The \$250,000 otter exhibit will feature a clear acrylic tunnel and a play-cave for children to explore, while otters play and swim around guests. Clear viewing domes will allow children and adults to interact with the otters through the cave-walls. The cave will be wheelchair accessible. Current plans call for an October opening.

Wonder Gardens, opened in 1936 as an Old Florida roadside attraction on Old 41 and was a popular stop for travelers making their way from Tampa to Miami. Now, 85 years later, it welcomes about 75,000 visitors annually. www.wondergardens.org

Topgolf to add Fort Myers location

Topgolf plans to bring its technology-enabled entertainment experience to Fort Myers in late 2021. The seventh venue to be located in Florida, the complex will include 70 climate-controlled hitting bays, full-service restaurant and bars, 200 HDTV's, rooftop terrace, private event space and meeting rooms. www.topgolf.com/us/fort-myers

Have fun and save with Fort Myers Sun Saver Passport

Sunshine is just one of many reasons to visit Southwest Florida. Use your mobile phone to access exclusive deals and savings on experiences and find yourself exploring everything under the sun here.

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel has launched a free mobile savings passport. Users have access to exclusive deals on attractions, restaurants and experiences throughout the destination.

To participate:

- Sign up at <https://explore.fortmyers-sanibel.com>
- The passport will be delivered to your mobile phone via text
- Redeem it on your mobile phone at participating businesses
- Visit the website for a complete list of attractions, restaurants and experiences.

Dining news

Chartreuse Craft and Cocktail Lounge has opened in the Bonita Springs Historic District. The lounge offers classic and craft cocktails and a variety of desserts with a 1930s, Old Florida, swanky vibe. www.chartreuselounge.com

Also in Bonita Springs, **Cru Wine Club** has opened its intimate, 650-square-foot wine tasting room, which features seating inside and outside, may be booked for a maximum of 12 guests to learn about California wines and discover new varieties to buy for enjoyment at home. Light bites and wine tastings will be featured during the day and chef-prepared small plates with host-led wine pairings will be featured during happy hour. The room will also be available for small private events. www.cruwineclub.com

Coming soon to downtown Bonita Springs...

Ceremony Brewing is completing final renovations in preparation for an early fall opening. The brewery will make and sell its own beers as well as supplies and equipment for home brewers. The tap room plans to also serve drinks from other area brewers, offering patrons a variety. Local restaurants will supply food. www.facebook.com/CeremonyBrewing

The Bohemian plans to open shortly as the owners of the popular Downtown Coffee and Wine Company are branching into the restaurant scene with a new, upscale and intimate restaurant with a menu filled with eclectic cuisine. Patrons will be able to watch chefs at work in the restaurant's unique layout that includes seating for 44 inside and 33 on an outdoor deck. www.thebohemianbonita.com

Accommodations

Margaritaville Beach Resort is being built at the base of the Matanzas Pass Bridge on Fort Myers Beach. The plan is to build the 254-room resort with restaurants and entertainment by summer 2023. www.margaritavilleresorts.com/margaritaville-beach-resort-fort-myers-beach

Airport news

New air service at Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW)

Air Transat: Montreal (YUL), weekly, seasonal service starts Dec. 16

Avelo Airlines: New Haven, Connecticut (HVN), weekly, year-round service starts Nov. 11

Eurowings Discover: Frankfurt, Germany (FRA), weekly, year-round service starts March 28, 2022

New flights at RSW

Air Canada: Toronto (YYZ), weekly, resumed Aug. 1

Alaska Airlines: Los Angeles (LAX), daily, resumes Nov. 19; Seattle (SEA), daily, resumes Nov. 19

Frontier Airlines: Orlando (MCO), daily, starts Nov. 1

Spirit Airlines: Louisville (SDF), weekly, starts Nov. 17; Manchester, N.H. (MHT), weekly, starts Nov. 17; St. Louis (STL), daily, starts Nov. 17

Sun Country: Duluth, Minn. (DLH), weekly, starts Dec. 17; Green Bay, Wis. (GRB), weekly, starts Dec. 16; Milwaukee (MKE), weekly, starts, Dec. 15; Rochester, Minn. (RST), weekly starts Feb. 3, 2022

United Airlines: Los Angeles (LAX), daily, starts Dec. 16; San Francisco (SFO), daily, starts Dec. 16

WestJet: Toronto (YYZ), weekly, resumes Sept. 12

News from Punta Gorda Airport (PGD)

Allegiant plans nonstop routes to Punta Gorda Airport (PGD) from Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport (MSP) beginning Oct. 8. Springfield-Branson National Airport (SGF) service begins Nov. 19. www.allegiant.com

Give our Shellcast podcast a listen

The latest episode of **Shellcast** heads to Sanibel Island's Blind Pass Beach for a lesson in fly fishing with Norm Zeigler. In Episode 11, "Fly fishing with Norm Zeigler and his Schminnow," Zeigler talks about why Blind Pass Beach is one of the best places in Southwest Florida for fly fishing.

Zeigler is an outdoor writer, author of several books and owner of Norm Zeigler's Fly Shop. He also created the Schminnow, a fly – the name combines shrimp and minnow – known to catch more than 70 kinds of fresh and salt water fish.

Subscribe to Shellcast on Apple Podcasts, Pandora, Spotify, iHeart Podcast Network, Google Podcasts and wherever fine podcasts are downloaded. Episodes are also available at fortmyers-sanibel.com/shellcast.

Festivals and annual events

Fort Myers Beach International Film Festival

Sept. 14-19

www.fmbfilmfest.com

Roar Offshore, Fort Myers Beach

Oct. 7-9

www.roaroffshore.com

35th Annual Oktoberfest, Cape Coral

Oct. 22-24, 29-31

www.capecoraloktoberfest.com

33rd Annual J.N. "Ding" Darling Day, Lakes Park, Fort Myers

Oct. 10

www.dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/ding-darling-days

Lee County Alliance of the Arts 4th Annual Arts on Tap, Fort Myers

Nov. 12-13

www.artinlee.org/ontap

The Laboratory Theater of Florida, Gulf Shore Shakespeare Festival

Nov. 12-14,

www.laboratorytheaterflorida.com

CROW Taste of the Island, Sanibel Island

November 2022

www.crowclinic.org

River District Holidays, downtown Fort Myers

Nov. 20-Dec. 31

www.myriverdistrict.com

46th Annual Holiday Nights at the Edison and Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers
Nov. 26-Jan. 2, 2022
www.edisonfordwinterestates.org

Luminary 2021, Sanibel and Captiva islands
Dec. 3 on Sanibel Island and Dec. 4 on Captiva Island
www.sanibel-captiva.org

Gift from the Sea Community Celebration, Captiva Island
Dec. 5, 2021

Annual Port Boca Grande Lighthouse and Museum Lighting, Boca Grande
December 2021
www.barrierislandparkssociety.org

37th Annual Cape Coral Festival of the Arts, Cape Coral
Jan. 8-9, 2022
www.capecoralfestival.com

ArtFest Fort Myers, downtown River District
Feb. 4-6, 2022
www.artfestfortmyers.com

Annual Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers
Feb. 19, 2022
www.edisonfestival.org

Spring training 2022
Boston Red Sox Spring training
February/March 2022
JetBlue Park, Fort Myers
www.mlb.com/redsox/spring-training

Minnesota Twins spring training
February /March 2022
CenturyLink Sports Complex, Fort Myers
www.mlb.com/twins/spring-training

Annual Sanibel Shell Show, Sanibel Island
March 3, 2022
www.sanibelshellclub.com

85th Annual Sanibel Shell Festival, Sanibel Island
March 3-5, 2022
www.sanibelcommunityhouse.net/p/84/shell-festival

23rd Annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival, Fort Myers
March 5, 2022
www.readfest.org

ECHO Global Food and Farm Festival, North Fort Myers
March 10-12, 2022
www.echonet.org/events/global-food-and-farm-festival

64th Annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival, Fort Myers Beach
March 12, 2022
www.fortmyersbeach.org/events/fort-myers-beach-shrimp-festival

12th Annual Fort Myers Film Festival
May 18-22, 2022
www.fortmyersfilmfestival.com

10th Annual “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament, Sanibel Island
May 13, 2022
www.dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/tarpon-tournament-1

24th Annual MangoMania Tropical Fruit Festival, Pine Island
July 2022
<http://mangomaniafl.net/>

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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 and Lehigh Acres. For media assistance, visit www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/media-central