



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 2023

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What's New from Fort Myers - Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods

Spring training begins, Valentine's Day fun, Burrowing Owl Festival

LEE COUNTY, Florida (U.S.A.) – As the Fort Myers area continues to recover from the impact of Hurricane Ian, 67.3% of the county's guest rooms have opened with more to come in the weeks and months ahead. This milestone of 9,651 rooms opening throughout Lee County is another step in the right direction.

For information about the accommodations and attractions that are currently open, please visit visitfortmyers.com/open. As information is rapidly changing and there may be limited availability, hours and amenities, please check with the individual businesses on their status.

Valentine's Day fun

Show some love in February

There are so many ways to celebrate Valentine's Day this year:

- Take a hike in a beautiful park.
- Treat yourself (and someone else) to a meal at your favorite local restaurant.
- Purchase a piece of art or jewelry from a local artist.
- Support your favorite brewery or distillery.
- Give a gift certificate to a local theater or entertainment event.

Check out a few of the many ways to show your love and have some fun this year:

The art of finding love in the stars

For some pre-Valentine vibes, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Feb. 10, head to the Alliance for the Arts in Fort Myers. Learn the fundamentals of birth charts and the basics of compatibility readings. This is a fun Valentine or "Gal"entine date, so grab your significant other or a group of friends. Adult refreshments will be served to those 21 and over. \$65 per person for non-members. Reservations at artinlee.org/event/the-art-of-finding-love-in-the-stars-ages-18

Flights & Feelings: A dessert and beer pairing

Coastal Dayz Brewery in Fort Myers celebrates from 3 p.m.-9 p.m. Feb. 14, with bite-sized desserts paired with beers and topped off with a violin performance by J-Law Soul. Cost: \$15 per person. coastaldayzbrewery.com

Valentine's Day Cocktail Chemistry Class

Edison and Ford Winter Estates partners with Captiva Spirits to offer guests a special Valentine's Day Cocktail Chemistry Class at 5-7:30 p.m. in the River Pavilion on the Caloosahatchee River. Learn how to make cocktails while enjoying appetizers, chocolate, music and a sunset view. The cocktails will include locally produced Captiva Spirits vodka and botanicals sourced from the Edison and Ford gardens. Each participant will make two cocktails during the class and will receive a welcome cocktail, appetizers from Personal Touch Catering and a box of Norman Love chocolates. Tickets are \$90 per person for non-members. Advance registration is required by Feb. 7 at EdisonFord.org

Have an adventure in paradise

Join a Valentine's Day Sunset Dolphin Cruise with Adventures in Paradise that departs at 5:15 p.m. Cruise San Carlos Bay and listen to tropical music as you enjoy sunset views. Cost \$59 per person. Reservations required. adventureinparadiseinc.com/cruises/holiday-cruises/valentines-day-cruise

Chocolates with a Love connection

Once again, Norman Love has created an irresistible collection of hand-crafted chocolates. The limited edition includes 10 heart-shaped dark, white and milk chocolates, including Mimosa, Lemon Bar, Vanilla Rum, Manjari, Raspberry Rose, Coconut Cream Pie, Pinot Noir, Coffee Caramel, Red Hot and Caramelia. normanloveconfections.com

Post-Valentine's Day fun

If you miss Valentine's Day, join a Wine & Paint Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 15, at Sidney and Berne Davis Art Center in downtown Fort Myers. Every third Wednesday, the class is led by the area's most talented painters and offers budding painters a chance to gather with friends to create their own masterpieces. Tickets for the class are \$45 and include a canvas, all materials and two glasses of wine. sbdac.com/wine-paint-5

Attractions and entertainment

A BIG birthday in Fort Myers

Speaking of celebrations, a big one is coming up at 10 a.m. Feb. 10. The public is invited to celebrate Thomas Edison's 176th birthday at **Edison and Ford Winter Estates**. The annual tradition includes students from the Edison Park Creative and Expressive Arts School. And cake will be served for visitors attending the free party. The celebration continues at the **Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade** in downtown Fort Myers at 7 p.m. Feb. 18. edisonfestival.org

Spring training 2023

Tickets are on sale for spring training, beginning on Feb. 24 when the Boston Red Sox play the Northeastern Huskies at JetBlue Park. On Feb. 25, the Minnesota Twins play their

opening game with the Tampa Rays at Lee County Sports Complex/Hammond Stadium, Fort Myers

Boston Red Sox

Feb. 24-March 28

JetBlue Park, Fort Myers

mlb.com/redsox/tickets/spring-training

Minnesota Twins

Feb. 25-March 27

Lee County Sports Complex/Hammond Stadium, Fort Myers

mlb.com/twins/tickets/spring-training

21st annual Burrowing Owl Festival, Cape Coral

A fun-filled day for the whole family, the Burrowing Owl Festival takes place in Cape Coral's Rotary Park from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Feb. 25. The wildlife and environmental expo includes tours, crafts and shows. Visitors will also have an opportunity to symbolically adopt a burrowing owl.

ccfricndsofwildlife.org/burrowing-owl-festival-2

Learn about Florida habitats and wildlife

Take a guided walk at 9 a.m. Feb. 7, at Hickey Creek Mitigation Park in Fort Myers and learn about the park that consists of a variety of habitats including palmetto-oak scrub, pine flatwoods, and seasonal wetlands. Views of scenic Hickey Creek can be enjoyed from the trail and overlook areas. The ecosystem presently supports the threatened Florida Scrub-Jay and gopher tortoises. Free with parking. leegov.com/parks/parks/hickeycreek

Take a harbor history tour on Pine Island Sound

Explore the history of Pine Island Sound with Randell Research Center on Pine Island. The facility has partnered with Captiva Cruises for a boat tour that explores the architecture and history of the area. Tours are currently scheduled for noon-2 p.m. Feb. 8 and March 1. Call Captiva Cruises for details and reservations at 239-472-5300. captivacruises.com

Murals depict history of downtown Fort Myers

The River Basin Mural Project is currently underway as 53 murals by 36 artists are being installed in downtown Fort Myers. Coordinated by the Fort Myers Mural Society, the new project tells the story of the area and its relationship with the Fort Myers riverfront.

As completion of the installation draws near, Otocast will have podcast episodes accompanying each mural. Visitors will walk from each mural and listen to the audible history each mural portrays, including the history of a Caloosa warrior, the Coca-Cola bottling plant and Thomas Edison's steamboat. fortmyersmuralsociety.com

Water activities

Kayak on the Imperial River, Bonita Springs

Experience the Imperial River with departures from Riverside Park in Bonita Springs. Canoes, kayaks and standup paddleboards are all available to enjoy this portion of the Great Calusa Blueway. cgtkayaks.com

Have an Adventure in Paradise

Explore and discover dolphin, manatee and osprey and more with Adventures in Paradise. Take a sunset and wildlife cruise. Have a sea life encounter. Or a shelling and dolphin cruise. Visit adventureinparadiseinc.com for schedule and departure locations.

Captiva Cruises

Welcoming new and returning guests with a limited cruise schedule, Captiva Cruises offers cruises that explore the area's history, beautiful water, incredible sunsets and unique wildlife. Depart from McCarthy's Marina on Captiva Island for a wildlife sunset cruise or visit Cabbage Key and experience old Florida. These two cruises are also available from The Innlet docks on Boca Grande. Check website for schedule, captivacruises.com

Explore with Estero River Outfitters

Have an adventure and explore the historic Estero River. Canoes, paddleboards and kayaks are available for a day of fun on the river. Fish, tour with a guide or go at your pace in this scenic part of the area. esteroriveroutfitters.com

Have a cheeseburger in paradise

Dine in the restaurant at Cabbage Key and you will see that previous visitors have taped hundreds of dollar bills to every surface. And you will, too! Dine on burgers, fresh seafood and Key lime pie. You can only get here by private boat, a tour, or water taxi. See website for details, cabbagekey.com

Accommodations

Fairfield by Marriott opens in Bonita Springs

The new Fairfield by Marriott includes 113 guest rooms and suites, free breakfast and Wi-Fi, a restaurant and meeting space, electric car charging, lounge bar and is pet-friendly. marriott.com/en-us/hotels/rswfb-fairfield-inn-and-suites-bonita-springs

Margaritaville Beach Resort, Fort Myers Beach

Margaritaville Beach Resort, with 254 rooms that include views of the Gulf of Mexico and Matanzas Bay, plans its opening in Fall 2023. In addition, the resort has purchased the Silver Sands Resort and plans to incorporate it into an extension of Margaritaville Beach Resort with balcony suites and retail outlets. Currently in the design stage, opening of this addition is planned for 2025.

margaritavilleresorts.com/margaritaville-beach-resort-fort-myers-beach

South Seas islands Resort, Captiva, plans reopening by September

South Seas Island Resort plans to open the hotel at the Captiva resort, which was heavily damaged by Hurricane Ian, by September. Immediate plans include stabilizing facilities before reopening the hotel and swimming pool. Long-term goals will bring

reconceptualization of the resort's food and beverage operations and golf course, plus the building of the Captiva Club. Plans also include locating resort amenities throughout the 330-acre property. southseas.com

Airport news

New air service at Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW):

Sun Country Airlines: Eau Claire, Wisconsin (EAU), weekly.

American Airlines: Austin (AUS), daily, starts Feb. 3.

Avelo Airlines: Raleigh-Durham (RDU) weekly, starts Feb. 16; Wilmington, Delaware (ILG), weekly, starts Feb. 3

RSW had a record-breaking 2022 with more than 10.3 million passengers. flylcpa.com

Keep in touch: latest Shellcast podcast focuses on manatees

Listen to the latest episode of Shellcast, episode 16: A lazy river for manatees. Manatee Park in Fort Myers gives non-captive, Florida manatees a warm place to stay when the waters of the Gulf of Mexico dip below 68° F (20° C). It's also a fun thing for visitors to do, especially January-March. Interviews include Laura Carr, Lee County Parks and Recreation, and visitors to Manatee Park. Recorded Jan. 16 and 18, 2023. VisitFortMyers.com/shellcast

Annual festivals and events

ArtFest Fort Myers, Downtown River District

Feb. 3-5

artfestfortmyers.com

21st annual Burrowing Owl Festival, Cape Coral

Feb. 25

Rotary Park

ccfriendsofwildlife.org/burrowing-owl-festival-2

Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers

Feb. 18

edisonfestival.org

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Lee County Sports Complex/Hammond Stadium, Fort Myers
mlb.com/twins/tickets/spring-training

24th Annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival, Fort Myers
March 4
readfest.org

ECHO Global Food and Farm Festival, North Fort Myers
March 7-11
echonet.org/events/global-food-and-farm-towardl

34th Annual “Ding” Darling Day Conservation Carnival, Lakes Park
April 22
dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/ding-darling-days

13th Annual Fort Myers Film Festival
May 17-21
fortmyersfilmfestival.com

11th Annual “Ding” Darling and Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament
May 19
dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/tarpon-tournament-1

Captiva Pride Weekend
June 2-4
tween-waters.com/captiva-pride-weekend

National Seashell Day
June 21
visitfortmyers.com/national-seashell-day

Island Hopper Songwriter Fest
Sept. 22-Oct. 1
island-hopperfest.visitfortmyers.com

Sanibel Island Writers Conference
November TBD
fgcu.edu/siwc

39th Annual Cape Coral Festival of the Arts, Cape Coral
January 2024 TBD
capecoralfestival.com

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Fort Myers - Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods include: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Matlacha, Boca Grande & Outer Islands, North Fort Myers, Alva, Buckingham and Lehigh Acres. For more information, go to visitfortmyers.com*