



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Sanibel Lighthouse glows again, beaches reopen and spring training's in full swing

LEE COUNTY, Florida (U.S.A.) – As the Fort Myers area continues to recover from the impact of Hurricane Ian, 68.4% of the area's guest rooms have opened with more to come in the weeks and months ahead. This milestone of 9,801 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.

Sanibel Lighthouse shines on

The world-famous Sanibel Lighthouse was celebrated in a relighting ceremony on Feb. 28, five months to the day after Hurricane Ian nearly toppled the iconic structure. The iron lighthouse rises 98 feet above the Gulf of Mexico coastline. The historic landmark has been guiding people to our community since 1884 and it will again help welcome visitors to our shores. [Click here to watch the Sanibel Lighthouse relighting ceremony.](#)

Beaches are open!

Gasparilla Island beaches, Tarpon Bay Beach and Blind Pass Beach on Sanibel Island are open. Gulfside City Park and Bowman's Beach, both on Sanibel, plan to open this month.

In addition, Lee County plans a phased reopening of its beach parks beginning this month. Visitors are urged to use caution as debris continues to wash onshore and may be obscured by sand. Beach shoes should be worn at all times. Some amenities such as restroom facilities, piers and walkovers have not been repaired or replaced at this time. With those cautions in mind, the tentative opening plans for beaches and beach parks are:

Early March

- Dog Beach
- Boca Grande beach accesses

Mid-March

- Alison Hagerup Beach Park, Captiva Island
- San Carlos Bay/Bunche Beach Preserve, south Fort Myers
- Bonita Beach Accesses 1, 4, 5, 6 and 9

Mid-April

- Lynne Hall Memorial Park, Fort Myers Beach
- Bonita Beach Park

May

- Bowditch Point Park, Fort Myers Beach
- Bonita Beach accesses 2,3, 7, 8 and 10, also known as Little Hickory Island Park
- Crescent Beach Family Park, Fort Myers Beach

For details: leegov.com/parks/beaches

Airport News

Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) was named No. 1 of the 10 best airports in the U.S. by Travel Lens, an online travel publication. Fifty of the busiest U.S. airports were ranked by wait time, passenger satisfaction and Google review ratings. flylcpa.com

New air service at RSW:

Breeze Airways: Hartford (BDL) and Providence (PVD) begin this summer. The RSW-BDL flights will operate twice weekly on Wednesday and Saturday starting May 17; and the RSW-PVD service will start July 13 and operate three times a week on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.

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

American Airlines: Austin (AUS), daily.

Avelo Airlines: Raleigh-Durham (RDU) weekly; Wilmington (ILG), weekly.

Attractions and entertainment

Whether it's your first game or you're a seasoned fan, there's nothing like being outside enjoying beautiful weather and feeling the excitement of watching our home teams, the Boston Red Sox and the Minnesota Twins. Spring training runs through March 28. For details and tickets:

Spring training 2023

Boston Red Sox

Through March 28

JetBlue Park, Fort Myers

mlb.com/redsox/tickets/spring-training

Minnesota Twins

Through March 27

Lee County Sports Complex/Hammond Stadium, Fort Myers

mlb.com/twins/tickets/spring-training

More baseball

Vintage "Base Ball" tournament on March 26

Edison and Ford Winter Estates will host its annual Vintage “Base Ball” Tournament at historic Terry Park in Fort Myers on March 26. The teams play several consecutive games throughout the day in a small tournament format. The gates open at 9:30 a.m. with the first game starting at 10 a.m. Admission is \$5 for adults. Kids 18 and under will be admitted free.

Vintage base ball (baseball in the 1860s, was spelled with two words) is played by 1860s rules, which include using wooden bats, no gloves and lemon peel baseballs. Players wear vintage uniforms and the umpires call the shots the way they did during the time period. Terry Park was once the hub of baseball’s spring training and Thomas Edison was a frequent visitor.

For spectators wanting to learn more about the history of spring training and the baseball legends that played in Fort Myers, Edison Ford program manager Holly Shaffer will give a presentation on March 24 and March 25 at 11 a.m. The presentation is included with general admission to Edison and Ford Winter Estates. edisonford.org

Cape Coral Quest: win prizes and explore

The City of Cape Coral and Fort Myers - Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods have teamed up to launch the new Cape Coral Quest app for a fun way to explore the area and a chance to win prizes through Nov. 30. Follow the directions at visitfortmyers.com/cape-coral-quest to collect a Cape Coral Quest Pass to participate on any mobile device.

ECHO Global Food and Farm Festival, North Fort Myers

March 7-11, enjoy tours, workshops and experiences for the whole family at the annual global food and farm festival. Check schedule and details.

echonet.org/events/global-food-and-farm-festival

Sounds of the Sand features local entertainers and bands

Enjoy the music of the islands and support Sanibel Island’s J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge at Bell Tower in Fort Myers on March 25. The free event is open to the public from 1-7 p.m. and will feature popular Sanibel and Captiva musician Danny Morgan and other local bands and entertainers. “Ding” Darling will set up stations with nature games for families and information about the refuge and its recovery and how to donate to DDWS to support refuge conservation work, including post-hurricane habitat restoration, wildlife protection and environmental education. dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/read-more3

Book a bay

Chips Sports Pub and Topgolf Swing Suite is a great addition to Luminary Hotel & Co. and downtown Fort Myers. And if you’re not a golfer, interactive simulators offer a variety of entertainment. Take a swing at virtual games including Zombie Dodgeball, hockey, baseball, football and carnival games. Go from smashing a 7-iron to striking out a batter with a fastball in a matter of minutes. Check it out at chipsfortmyers.com

Visit Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum on Sanibel Island

The Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum on Sanibel Island has reopened to visitors for a unique, limited-time experience of shells, natural history and perspectives of the recent events of Hurricane Ian. Check for hours and details at shellmuseum.org/post-hurricane-experience

Offshore Sailing School returns to Captiva Island

Offshore Sailing School has teamed up with 'Tween Waters Island Resort & Spa on Captiva Island and is offering its popular sailing courses. offshoresailing.com

Billy's Rentals reopens on Sanibel Island

Bikes are once again available for rental (pickup or delivery) or sale along with repair services. Check out details at sanibelbike.com

Restaurant and brewery news

Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurant brings its high-end winery concept to Fort Myers this spring. chwinery.com

Yucatan shrimp and mojitos are back on Sanibel Island!

Doc Fords on Sanibel Island has reopened with daily service. docfords.com/sanibel-island.

Work is underway at the Fort Myers Beach location with tentative plans for a spring opening, docfordsfortmyersbeach.com. Also, sister restaurant – Dixie Fish Co. – has reopened its original Florida fishhouse, overlooking Matanzas Harbor at Fort Myers Beach, dixiefishfmb.com.

Junkanoo returns as Junkanoo Below Deck

The popular Fort Myers Beach hotspot has opened in a new location at Snook Bight Marina as Junkanoo Below Deck. junkanoobeachfmb.com

La Ola Surfside Restaurant plans to relocate its Fort Myers Beach vibe, dining and entertainment to Bell Tower Shops in Fort Myers. Serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, the restaurant plans to serve its popular Times Square menu. laolafortmyersbeach.com

It joins other businesses that were displaced because of Hurricane Ian and have also located to Bell Tower Shops, including Synergy Sportswear, Bubbly Latitude, Adventure in Paradise, Macintosh Books and Paper, Butterfly Beach, Sanibel Candle Company and Congress Jewelers.

Cheesecake Factory coming to Estero

Work is underway for the Cheesecake Factory at Coconut Point in Estero. Plans call for the 9,000-square-foot restaurant to open later this year. cheesecakefactory.com

Insomnia Cookies opens in Fort Myers

It happens. You wake up and crave chocolate. A chocolate cookie or a brownie. Now there is a cure. You can take out. And they will also deliver. **Insomnia Cookies** just opened in the University Shopping Village near FGCU. Ice cream, cookies, brownies, brookies and more. Warm cookies are served until 1 a.m. daily and until 3 a.m. Thursday through Saturday. insomniacookies.com

Sun Harvest Citrus in Fort Myers is now carrying three select craft beers: Two local favorites, Gateway Blonde and High 5 from Fort Myers Brewing and for key lime lovers, Keybilly Island Ale from Brew Hub. sunharvestcitrus.com

Forbes names Fort Myers top Florida City for Craft beer lovers

As the article says, “Craft brewing has seen a massive rise in popularity over the past few decades, and few states exemplify this trend as well as Florida. From the Georgia border down to the outskirts of the Everglades, there’s a wealth of vibrant cities that have mastered the art of brewing, slinging up refreshing pilsners and mouthwatering IPAs for seasoned beer. If you’re planning a trip to the Sunshine State anytime soon, don’t miss out on these incredible beer-filled destinations.”

The article mentions our Coastal Dayz Brewery, Fort Myers Brewing Company and Port Ybel Brewing Company. forbes.com/sites/jaredranahan/2023/01/27/floridas-top-five-cities-for-craft-beer-lovers

New breweries coming soon and get your ale trail passport

Two new breweries plan to open: **Swamp Cat Brewing Company**, is revitalizing a church in the Hough historic neighborhood in Fort Myers. Plans include an outdoor beer garden.

swampcatbrewing.com

Chubby Mermaid Brewing in Bonita Springs plans a May opening.

chubbymermaidbrewing.com

Southwest Florida Ale Trail’s Volume VII passport is now available. Get your guide to 18 breweries located in Lee, Hendry and Collier counties. The program is simple: Buy a passport, visit a brewery, enjoy a beer and earn rewards, swflaletrail.com

Water activities

Tarpon Bay Explorers on Captiva Island has opened with limited hours of operation and offerings. Kayak trail tours through Commodore Creek are offered and kayaks and paddleboards are available for rent. The gift shop is open. Check tarponbayexplorers.com for tours, hours and days of operation.

Tropic Star Cruises of Pine Island is back on the water and transporting passengers from Safe Harbor Pineland to the Boca Grande Lighthouse, Gasparilla Island and Cabbage Key. Perfect destinations for a day outing and lunch.

tropicstaradventures.com

Accommodations

Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina, Fort Myers Beach reopens

Pink Shell has reopened and is currently booking stays beginning March 11. Wedding inquiries are being accepted for January 2024 and beyond. Jack’s Restaurant is open and serves a daily lunch buffet. Visit pinkshell.com/resort-updates for a complete list of current services, amenities and resort updates.

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](https://www.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

In the news

HGTV named Boca Grande as one of 21 of the best gulf coast beaches. The mention includes Gasparilla Inn & Club, Port Boca Grande Lighthouse & Museum, Cayo Costa State Park, North Captiva Island, Cabbage Key, Captain Brian on the Water-Sanibel/Captiva Tours and Captiva Cruises. [hgtv.com/lifestyle/travel/best-gulf-coast-beaches-pictures](https://www.hgtv.com/lifestyle/travel/best-gulf-coast-beaches-pictures)

Keep in touch: latest Shellcast. This one is for the birds!

What's the difference between bird watching and being a birder? Quite a lot, according to ardent birder Dr. Jose Padilla-Lopez. Spend some time with him at Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve in Fort Myers and you'll learn more than a few things about the birds to be seen along the boardwalk. Jose breaks down birding with his easy-to-understand, five-point plan:

1. Why birding is good for you
2. What you need to start birding
3. Birding hotspots in Lee County
4. A few of the best birds to be found in Lee County
5. How to meet other local birders and learn from them

Listen at [VisitFortMyers.com/shellcast](https://www.visitfortmyers.com/shellcast) or wherever you get your podcasts.

Annual festivals and events

Spring training 2023

Boston Red Sox

Through March 28

Opening game with Northeastern Huskies

JetBlue Park, Fort Myers

[mlb.com/redsox/tickets/spring-training](https://www.mlb.com/redsox/tickets/spring-training)

Minnesota Twins

Through March 27

Opening game with Tampa Bay Rays

Lee County Sports Complex/Hammond Stadium, Fort Myers

[mlb.com/twins/tickets/spring-training](https://www.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

ArtFest Fort Myers, Downtown River District
Feb. 2-4
artfestfortmyers.com

21st annual Burrowing Owl Festival, Cape Coral
February TBD
Rotary Park
ccfriendsofwildlife.org/burrowing-owl-festival-2

Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers

February TBD

edisonfestival.org

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***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*