



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 2024**

**CONTACTS:** Ray Sarracino, Jackie Parker, Miriam Dotson 239-338-3500

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

*Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum & Aquarium reopens, April calendar full of spring events*

**LEE COUNTY, Florida (U.S.A.)** – The April calendar is packed with fun events including concerts, a garden party at a historic home, a film festival, Earth Day celebrations and much more! For vacation planning to our islands, beaches and neighborhoods, check out the new 2024 Visitor Guide for everything to assist in making vacation memories.

[tinyurl.com/VisitorGuide2024](https://tinyurl.com/VisitorGuide2024)

### **How did this area become a popular tourist destination?**

It began in Tarpon Bay on March 19, 1885, and Southwest Florida was changed forever. A mighty silver-sided tarpon was captured on a rod and reel for the first time on record. Southwest Florida became the epicenter of a new sport that generated interest around the globe. Celebrities and presidents were lured (no pun intended) to the area to catch the silver king. As a result, the area became a major tourist destination.

Anglers still come in search of the silver king of gamefish beginning each April. This year, three tarpon tournaments (catch and release) will take place in May. Check each website for details on participation and sponsorships.

### **12<sup>th</sup> Annual “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament, Sanibel Island**

May 10

[dingdarlingtarpontourney.com](https://dingdarlingtarpontourney.com)

The J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge is the location of the first recorded tarpon caught on rod and reel in 1885. To celebrate the historical moment and Southwest Florida’s history of fishing, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society & Doc Ford’s began the “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament. All of the support raised from sponsors goes directly into the vital work at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

### **South Seas Tarpon Tournament, Captiva Island**

May 17

[southseas.com/tarpon](https://southseas.com/tarpon)

South Seas is hosting its first South Seas Tarpon Tournament, partnering with Folds of Honor. The nonprofit organization provides life-changing scholarships for the spouses and children of America's fallen and disabled military and first responders.

### **World's Richest Tarpon Tournament, Boca Grande**

May 22-23

[bocagrandechamber.com/worlds-richest-tarpon-tournament](http://bocagrandechamber.com/worlds-richest-tarpon-tournament)

Lee County boasts one of the most tarpon-frenzied bodies of water in the world: namely Boca Grande Pass. The area's oldest tarpon tournament, it focuses on conservation, education and sportsmanship, working on projects that teach future generations to protect and love nature.

### **Don't miss this month!**

#### **India Fest 2024 brings taste of South Asia to Southwest Florida**

A vibrant celebration of culture and tradition is set for 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. April 6, at Caloosa Sound Amphitheater in Fort Myers, when India Fest returns. With food and drink vendors, boutique shopping, a fashion show, live dance performances and a DJ on the riverfront stage, the grand finale is a Holi Color Play, a traditional celebration of spring in which attendees throw handfuls of colorful powder on each other. Details and ticket information:

[IAFtMyers.org/India-Fest](http://IAFtMyers.org/India-Fest).

#### **Garden Tea Party at Edison and Ford Winter Estates**

In celebration of Clara Ford's birthday, Edison and Ford Winter Estates will hold a garden tea party from 2-4 p.m. April 11. The tea party will be held in the garden space next to Thomas Edison's caretaker's house. Guests are encouraged to dress for a tea party, with dresses and garden hats.

Historic character, "Clara Ford," will talk about the ongoing restoration of her summer home, Fair Lane in Dearborn, Michigan, while sharing some insights into her life with Henry and how she used her gardens to promote her favorite charities.

Reservations and tickets: [edisonfordwinterestates.org/events/garden-program-pioneering-women-in-horticulture](http://edisonfordwinterestates.org/events/garden-program-pioneering-women-in-horticulture)

#### **"Ding" Darling Day Conservation Carnival returns to Lakes Park**

The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge returns to Lakes Park in Fort Myers for its 35th annual "Ding" Darling Day, April 20. The celebration also observes Earth Day, which officially falls on April 22.

The full day of family activities runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Special free outdoor activities include carnival games, prizes, archery, a dunk tank, a rock-climbing wall, Earth Day crafts, art demonstrations, guided bilingual birding walks, a biking tour, guided mindfulness programs, live music, food and educational interactions with other local conservation organizations.

[dingdarlingday.org](http://dingdarlingday.org)

#### **Happenings at Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve in Fort Myers**

Learn how to make plants a part of your life on April 24 at a Friends of Six Mile Cypress Slough Speaker Series event from 5 to 6 p.m. Dr. Joyce Fassbender, Ph.D., will talk about the essential

role of pollinators in supporting agriculture, maintaining plant diversity, and sustaining overall ecosystem health. A half-hour meet-and-greet begins at 4:30 p.m. Reservations are required. Don't miss the free daily walks and the April 22 Full Moon Walk, along with many other activities at the Slough. [sloughpreserve.org](http://sloughpreserve.org)

### **Also happening this month**

#### **Concert in the Park, Cape Coral**

April 4

Four Freedoms Park

[capeconcerts.com](http://capeconcerts.com)

#### **Clyde and Niki Butcher photography presentation**

April 4

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

[clydebutcher.com](http://clydebutcher.com)

#### **Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum & Aquarium lecture series, Sanibel Island**

April 11 at Sanibel Community House

[ShellMuseum.org/in-person-lectures](http://ShellMuseum.org/in-person-lectures)

#### **Culture Fest, Cape Coral**

April 27

Cultural Park

[capeculturefest.com](http://capeculturefest.com)

### **Accommodations news**

#### **South Seas, Captiva Island**

Visit [southseas.com](http://southseas.com) for reservations. Resort amenities that are open include Sunset Beach, Yacht Harbour Marina, trolley service and Bayview pool complex with more scheduled for spring and fall openings.

#### **Fins Up! Beach Club opens at Margaritaville Beach Resort, Fort Myers Beach**

Resort guests and day pass holders enjoy the amenities of this action-packed aquatic playground situated on the Gulf of Mexico and Matanzas Bay.

[margaritavilleresorts.com/margaritaville-beach-resort-fort-myers-beach](http://margaritavilleresorts.com/margaritaville-beach-resort-fort-myers-beach)

#### **Sanibel Moorings Resort, Sanibel Island**

The Sanibel Island resort has reopened half of its one- two- and three-bedroom condo suites on the Gulf of Mexico. Each unit includes a living room, dining area, full kitchen and a large, private screened lanai. [sanibelmoorings.com](http://sanibelmoorings.com)

#### **DoubleTree by Hilton Fort Myers at Bell Tower shops in Fort Myers**

The 224-room hotel opened with major renovations to the hotel's lobby, 6,196 square feet of meeting space. Shoeless Joe's Sports Cafe and deck are being completed. The hotel features refreshed guest rooms, fitness center and heated outdoor tropical pool.

[hilton.com/en/hotels/fmybtdt-doubletree-fort-myers-at-bell-tower-shops](http://hilton.com/en/hotels/fmybtdt-doubletree-fort-myers-at-bell-tower-shops)

### **Attractions news**

#### **Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum & Aquarium reopens**

The museum has reopened its Living Gallery of Aquariums with a mix of mollusks, corals, fish, and other marine life species that were featured pre-hurricane. And there is also much that is new for visitors to enjoy. The surrounding exhibits have been significantly expanded to dive deeper into the biology and behavior of mollusks, the dynamics of their ecosystems, and challenges and successes of their conservation. Species of marine life on exhibit include two-spot octopus, flamingo tongue, disco clam, giant clam, queen conch and others. Select other species, such as the giant pacific octopus, will be added in the near future. [shellmuseum.org](http://shellmuseum.org)

#### **“Ding” Darling” is #3 in USA Today Reader’s Choice**

J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island came in third in the top 10 in USA Today’s Reader’s Choice Award for Best National Wildlife Refuge.

[10best.usatoday.com/awards/travel/best-national-wildlife-refuge-2024](http://10best.usatoday.com/awards/travel/best-national-wildlife-refuge-2024)

#### **Calusa Blueway Challenge**

Take the Calusa Blueway Challenge and celebrate 20 years of the Great Calusa Blueway Paddling Trail by checking in at locations along the trail for a chance to win prizes. Earn points as you paddle and check in at attractions, restaurants, parks and nature spots along the trail. Paddle on your own, experience a guided tour, shop at a local business or grab a bite to eat as you explore the 200-mile marked trail that meanders through the back-bay estuaries, rivers, and shorelines of Fort Myers Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods. Complete a certain number of check-ins on the pass to be entered to win a Body Glove iSUP Performer 11’ or a two-night stay at Tarpon Lodge. Details and sign up: [visitfortmyers.com/CalusaBluewayChallenge](http://visitfortmyers.com/CalusaBluewayChallenge)

#### **Sun Saver Passport: Dine, Play, Shop, Sip**

This popular, digital savings pass provides instant access to a variety of deals and experiences from area attractions, restaurants and more across four categories: Dine, Play, Shop and Sip. Sign up is simple and free. Passports are instantly delivered to phones via text and email. And there is an option for users to save the pass on their home screen for one-tap access. Sign up now to start saving. [visitfortmyers.com/sun-saver-passport](http://visitfortmyers.com/sun-saver-passport)

#### **Cape Coral Quest 2.0: Win prizes and explore**

Start exploring with the latest pass to earn discounts and rewards in Cape Coral. Known for its unique shopping opportunities, restaurants, and more than 400 miles of canal waterways, the area is full of vibrant culture. Each participating location has a four-digit code somewhere on the property. Answer 20 riddles to be entered to win the grand prize: a two-night stay at The Westin Cape Coral at Marina Village with daily breakfast. Enter all 30 codes and you’ll earn a 2024 Sunsplash Season Pass! Get your pass, check out details and tips at [visitfortmyers.com/cape-coral-quest](http://visitfortmyers.com/cape-coral-quest) and start participating on any mobile device.

### **Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) news**

#### **New air service at RSW**

**Frontier Airlines** Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW)-weekly, starting April 22

San Juan, PR (SJU)-weekly, starting June 2

**JetBlue Airways** Worcester (ORH)-weekly, seasonal

**Spirit Airlines** San Juan, PR (SJU)-weekly, year-round

**Breeze Airways** Manchester, NH (MHT)-weekly, starting Oct. 2

For more information, visit [flyrsw.com](http://flyrsw.com)

### **Restaurants/entertainment news**

Southern Living has named iconic **Mucky Duck** on Captiva Island one of 18 of the best beach bars in the south. A visitor and local favorite that dates back to the 1970s, the British-inspired pub is known for its sunset views, beach location, food and drinks.

[southernliving.com/beach-bars](http://southernliving.com/beach-bars)

The owners of Island Cow and Mad Hatter restaurants on Sanibel Island have opened the **Magic Bus Ice Cream and Caffeine** at 362 Periwinkle Way, in the plaza formerly occupied by Lighthouse Café and Sanibel Ice Cream. Longtime island restaurateurs Brian and Elke Podlasek and Max and Bridget Kolshak teamed up after the Podlasek's Island Cow restaurant was destroyed by fire and the Kolshak's Mad Hatter was lost to Hurricane Ian. The Magic Bus features vintage VW-inspired decor with indoor and outdoor seating offering an old-fashioned ice cream shop with 24 flavors, a candy store feel, plus modern coffee beverages, refresher drinks and baked goods. [themagicbussanibel.com](http://themagicbussanibel.com)

**Venturino's Comedy Club** has opened in the Embassy Suites by Hilton in Estero. Check schedule and tickets at [venturinoscomedyclub.com](http://venturinoscomedyclub.com)

### **In the news**

Forbes.com featured the area in its 4 Must-Visit Places to Visit to Celebrate Earth Day.

[forbes.com/sites/sandramacgregor/2024/03/15/manatees-and-more-4-must-visit-destinations-to-celebrate-earth-day](http://forbes.com/sites/sandramacgregor/2024/03/15/manatees-and-more-4-must-visit-destinations-to-celebrate-earth-day)

### **Reader's Digest loves our beaches**

15 best Florida beaches in the publication included Bowman's Beach on Sanibel Island, Boca Grande on Gasparilla Island, Turner Beach on Captiva Island and Lovers Key. [rd.com/list/best-florida-beaches](http://rd.com/list/best-florida-beaches)

### **Annual festivals and events**

#### **Concert in the Park, Cape Coral**

April 4

Four Freedoms Park

[capeconcerts.com](http://capeconcerts.com)

#### **Clyde and Niki Butcher photography presentation**

April 4

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

[clydebutcher.com](http://clydebutcher.com)

#### **Florida Lighthouse Day**

April 6

Port Boca Grande Lighthouse & Museum and Gasparilla Island Lighthouse

[bocagrandehappenings.org/events/its-florida-lighthouse-day](http://bocagrandehappenings.org/events/its-florida-lighthouse-day)

**4<sup>th</sup> annual Rock the Ages Music Festival**

April 6-7

Alliance for the Arts, Fort Myers

[rockthearches.com](http://rockthearches.com)

**Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum & Aquarium lecture series, Sanibel Island**

April 11 at Sanibel Community House

[ShellMuseum.org/in-person-lectures](http://ShellMuseum.org/in-person-lectures)

**9<sup>th</sup> annual Bonita Springs Film Festival**

April 18

Prado Stadium

[bonitaspringsfilmfestival.org](http://bonitaspringsfilmfestival.org)

**35<sup>th</sup> Annual “Ding” Darling Day Conservation Carnival, Fort Myers**

April 20

Lakes Park

[dingdarlingday.com](http://dingdarlingday.com)

**Wonder Gardens Earth Day Celebration, Bonita Springs**

April 20

[wondergardens.org/earth-day-celebration](http://wondergardens.org/earth-day-celebration)

**Culture Fest, Cape Coral**

April 27

Cultural Park

[capeculturefest.com](http://capeculturefest.com)

**12<sup>th</sup> Annual “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament, Sanibel Island**

May 10

[dingdarlingtarpontourney.com](http://dingdarlingtarpontourney.com)

**South Seas Tarpon Tournament, Captiva Island**

May 17

[southseas.com/tarpon](http://southseas.com/tarpon)

**World’s Richest Tarpon Tournament, Boca Grande**

May 22-23

[bocagrandechamber.com/worlds-richest-tarpon-tournament](http://bocagrandechamber.com/worlds-richest-tarpon-tournament)

**14<sup>th</sup> Annual Fort Myers Film Festival**

May 22-26

[fortmyersfilmfestival.com](http://fortmyersfilmfestival.com)

**Fringe Fort Myers**

May 30-June 2

[artinlee.org/experience/fringe](http://artinlee.org/experience/fringe)

**National Seashell Day**

June 21

[visitfortmyers.com/national-seashell-day](http://visitfortmyers.com/national-seashell-day)

**Red, White & BOOM! In Cape Coral**

July 4

[capeboom.com](http://capeboom.com)

**MangoMania**

July 13

Our Lady of Miraculous Medal Church, Bokeelia,

[pineislandchamber.org/chamber-events/mangomania](http://pineislandchamber.org/chamber-events/mangomania)

**Island Hopper Songwriter Fest**

Sept. 20-29

[island-hopperfest.visitfortmyers.com](http://island-hopperfest.visitfortmyers.com)

**FITMIX FEST, downtown Fort Myers**

Sept. 27-29

[fitmixfest.com](http://fitmixfest.com)

**J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge “Art in the Wild”**

Oct. 19

[dingartinthewild.com](http://dingartinthewild.com)

**Cape Coral Oktoberfest**

Oct. 18-20 and 25-27

[capecoraloktoberfest.com](http://capecoraloktoberfest.com)

**Sanibel Island Writers Conference**

November TBA

[fgcu.edu/siwc](http://fgcu.edu/siwc)

**Holiday Luminary and kick-off to Sanibel Island 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

Dec. 6-7

Sanibel and Captiva islands

13-month celebration of Sanibel’s 50th anniversary.

[sanibel-captiva.org/50th-anniversary](http://sanibel-captiva.org/50th-anniversary)

**40th Annual Cape Coral Art Festival and Market Place**

January 2025  
[capecoralartfestival.com](http://capecoralartfestival.com)

**Bacon Jam**  
January 2025  
Caloosa Sound Amphitheater, downtown Fort Myers  
[bscevent.com/bacon-jam-fort-myers](http://bscevent.com/bacon-jam-fort-myers)

**34<sup>th</sup> Tour De Cape in Cape Coral**  
January 2025  
Rotary Park  
[tourdecape.net](http://tourdecape.net)

**ArtFest Fort Myers, Downtown River District**  
Feb. 1-2, 2025  
[artfestfortmyers.com](http://artfestfortmyers.com)

**Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers**  
February 2025  
[edisonfestival.org](http://edisonfestival.org)

**23rd Annual Burrowing Owl Festival, Cape Coral**  
Wildlife and Environmental Expo  
February 2025  
Rotary Park  
[ccfriendsofwildlife.org/burrowing-owl-festival-2](http://ccfriendsofwildlife.org/burrowing-owl-festival-2)

**26th Annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival, Fort Myers**  
March 2025  
Fort Myers Regional Library, downtown Fort Myers  
[readfest.org](http://readfest.org)

**89<sup>th</sup> Annual Sanibel Shell Festival, Sanibel Island**  
March 2025  
Community House  
[sanibelcommunityhouse.net/event/87th-annual-sanibel-shell-festival/2024-03-08](http://sanibelcommunityhouse.net/event/87th-annual-sanibel-shell-festival/2024-03-08)

**Sanibel Shell Show, Fort Myers**  
March 2025  
Marriott Sanibel Harbour Resort  
[sanibelshellclub.com/6306-2](http://sanibelshellclub.com/6306-2)

**Fort Myers Beach annual Lion's Club Shrimp Festival**  
March 2025  
[fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com](http://fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com)



**Southwest Florida Ag Expo**  
Feb. 27-March 9, 2025  
Lee County Civic Center Complex  
[swflagexpo.com](http://swflagexpo.com)

**ECHO Global Food and Farm Festival, North Fort Myers**  
March 2025  
[echonet.org/events/global-food-and-farm-festival](http://echonet.org/events/global-food-and-farm-festival)

**Spring training**  
**Boston Red Sox**  
February 2025  
[mlb.com/redsox/schedule/2024-02](http://mlb.com/redsox/schedule/2024-02)  
JetBlue Park, Fort Myers

**Minnesota Twins**  
February 2025  
[mlb.com/twins/schedule/2024-02](http://mlb.com/twins/schedule/2024-02)  
Lee Health Sports Complex/Hammond Stadium, Fort Myers

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***EDITOR'S NOTE:** Fort Myers - Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods includes: 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](http://visitfortmyers.com).*