

Here's the scoop on cooling off from the inside out

By Karen Feldman

Slather on the sunscreen, wear your hat and shades, but chances are a subtropical summer still will get under your skin intent on melting your soul.

Here on the Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel we have a weapon that can chill you out and in – rich, decadent ice creams, gelatos, custards and sorbets in all your favorite flavors and several more you've probably never even considered. Ultra-blue Smurf perhaps? Bonita gator tracks? Sticky fingers?

Whatever your choice, it's available at a number of locally owned and operated shops that take pride in crafting their own version of this heavenly frozen confection or purchasing it from an artisanal producer, ensuring a first-rate product with intense flavors and, of course, a mouth-feel that's sure to dial down your internal thermostat in a heartbeat.

Here are a dozen of our favorite local purveyors of well-chilled nirvana available by the scoop:

Artisan Gelato – Chocolatier and pastry chef Norman Love got his culinary start serving ice cream so it isn't surprising that he offers luscious artisanal Italian gelato made in his gelateria just off Daniels Parkway. It's also available at his chocolate salons at Miromar Outlets in Estero and McGregor Boulevard in Fort Myers. Flavors change as it's made daily but might include salted caramel, hazelnut, waffle cone and chocolate. (normanloveconfections.com)

Daddy Dee's – Since 1971, this little North Fort Myers shop has been scooping up frozen comfort and delighting train fans with its little train that runs overhead. Besides cones, bowls and sundaes, floats and malted are available, too. It's an old-fashioned shop – no website, either – with a friendly staff and a glass case you can peer into to choose your flavors. Not sure? Free tastes are gladly offered. The chocolates here are the most intense I've ever had. Some of its signature flavors are moose tracks, butterscotch bomb, German chocolate cake, toasted coconut and Smurf. (See Daddy Dee's on Facebook)

The French Press – In Cape Harbour in western Cape Coral you'll find this little outpost of fabulous French pastries, smoothies and artisanal gelatos made with organic fruit. Consider a gelato bun, consisting of a Hawaiian bun stuffed with gelato. Yum! (thefrenchpressfl.com)

Joey's Custard – Run by a mom and her veteran son, this little shop has a loyal following for its friendly service and great custards, yogurts, sorbets and floats. Some rave-worthy flavors include salted caramel praline, cookies and cream, butter pecan and raspberry truffle. (joeyscustard.com)

Love Boat – The appropriately named ice cream parlor began serving its chilled confections in the mid-1960s and has grown to three locations – two in south Fort Myers, one on Sanibel. Among its many intriguing flavors are banana cream pie, chocolate brownie swirl, malted Whoppers and fudge and strawberry shortcake. (loveboaticecream.com)

Pinocchio's – For 37 years, Pinocchio's has offered fresh, homemade gelatos and ice creams in imaginative flavors and generous portions on Sanibel Island. The current owners serve 37 flavors daily from their repertoire of 130 varieties, including green tea, Kandy Korn, mint Oreo, Nilla Gorilla and orange pineapple. All come topped with an Animal Cracker. Why? Because they do. (pinocchiosicecream.com)

Royal Scoop – The owners of Royal Scoop have a sound philosophy: "Life is short. Eat dessert first." To that end, they offer a wealth of ice creams, frozen yogurts and sorbets in tempting flavors such as sticky fingers, Bonita gator tracks, peppermint stick, rum raisin, espresso chip and kahlua fudge. There's the original shop in Bonita Springs and another on Fort Myers Beach. (royalscoop.com)

Scoops on First – Walking around downtown Fort Myers can work up a sweat. Scoops on First is happy to help you chill out with 40 flavors of ice cream and 8 types of gelato. Consider coconut pineapple, red velvet or salted caramel peanut ice cream or espresso gelato. And that's just the beginning. (Scoops on First on Facebook)

Sospiri – This modest storefront in Estero's Coconut Point (right across from Divieto restaurant) serves authentic Italian gelato made by the Italian-born proprietor, along with a variety of fresh baked goods. Try a cup or cone of freshly

made gelato or experiment with an Italian shake, espresso smoothie or bomboloni. (mysospiri.com)

Sweet Melissa's – Not only does Sweet Melissa's in Bonita Springs offer 30 types of homemade ice cream and sorbet, it also serves up Key lime pie (classic, strawberry, blueberry or raspberry) by the slice, by the pie or dipped in chocolate on a stick. Ice cream in flavors such as birthday cake, red velvet and dirty turtle come on cones, in bowls, floats, malteds and milkshakes. (bonitabeachsweets.wixsite.com/sweetmelissa)

2 Scoops and Sprinkles – A colorful and fun spot in south Fort Myers to pick up a cone filled with Milky Way, carrot cake, chocolate cake or some seasonal variety of creamy ice cream. Once you've ordered, settle in on a comfy couch, play a game or watch a little TV while the kids work off some steam. (2 Scoops and Sprinkles on Facebook)