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Start the day with a vacation-worthy breakfast

Under ordinary circumstances, mornings can be brutal. Feeding the pets, getting yourself and the kids ready for work and school can rob you of the time and inclination to linger over a good breakfast. But when you're on vacation, it becomes a deliciously decadent start to a fun-filled day.

And why not? You're on vacation, right? While the Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel offer a wealth of activities you might be eager to get to, consider that a hearty breakfast will provide the stamina to keep you going from morning 'til night.

Lots of places offer breakfast in these parts but some specializes in it. Here are 14 spots that take the morning meal seriously.

At the northern end of the region, the **Go Go Diner** (gogodiner.com) is in a rather down-at-the-heels shopping center in North Fort Myers. Never mind that. The chef is a Culinary Institute of America grad who whips up seriously good biscuits and sausage gravy, inspired corned beef hash and red velvet pancakes topped with chocolate chips and whipped cream. Oversized omelets, French toast and something called the Rebel Benedict – warm biscuits, ham, fried eggs and sausage gravy – are other options.

House of Omelets (houseofomelets.com) in northern Cape Coral offers a dazzling array of omelets – consider the chicken stir fry, or avocado and bacon, or Polish sausage, sauerkraut, peppers, onions, cheese and sour cream, to name just three – traditional omelets, eggs with a variety of sides, skillet, burritos, biscuits and gravy and, of course, pancakes and waffles.

Gwendolyn's Café (gwendolynscafe.com) in downtown Fort Myers, is run by the indefatigable Gwendolyn Howard-Powell. She makes no secret that she is in recovery from alcoholism and hires others who have been through similar struggles. She also runs a program through which you can buy coffee, soup or full meals that she will distribute later to the hungry. But in addition to the good works, she feeds paying customers well, offering her World Famous Breakfast Burrito (scrambled eggs, bacon or sausage, café potatoes, cheddar cheese, salsa and sour

cream in a whole wheat tortilla), biscuits and sausage gravy, buttermilk pancakes, Belgian waffles, omelets, corned beef hash and blackened shrimp and grits, among other goodies.

Also downtown is **Bennett's Fresh Roast** (bennettsfreshroast.com), where the doughnuts are made fresh every day and the coffee is laser roasted in house. There are all sorts of coffees – cold brew, café latte, espresso, the house Colombian, a French press pot – plus teas and not-from-concentrate orange juice. Before ploughing into that maple and bacon or almond crunch doughnut, try a slightly more virtuous bowl of Bennett's overnight oats (made with cream, yogurt and fruit), regular slow-cooked oatmeal, a breakfast sandwich, or strata (weekends only).

Lobster roll fans should time their visits for lunch, although there's no guarantee there will be any doughnuts left by then.

For 65 years, the **Farmers Market** (farmersmarketrestaurant.com) in Fort Myers has been satisfying a diverse clientele with its homemade biscuits – topped with sausage gravy or not – corn muffins, eggs, French toast and Southern specialties like country fried steak, fried pork chops, mullet and eggs and, of course, grits.

The aptly named **Crave** (cravemenu.com) in south Fort Myers offers breakfast comfort fare until 4 p.m. every day. Feast on omelets, shrimp and grits, salmon or corned beef hash, filet and eggs, French toast with grilled bananas, acclaimed pancakes, Benedicts and more. Wine-based bloody Marys available, too.

East of Fort Myers in the outpost known as Buckingham sits **Buckingham Farms** (buckinghamfarmsonline.com), a working farm with a farm-to-table restaurant that serves breakfast Tuesday through Saturday. Feast on farm fresh eggs with black bean corn relish, bread-pudding-style French toast, hash, avocado and egg biscuit, biscuits and gravy and other farm specialties.

Heavenly Biscuit (on Facebook) on Fort Myers Beach is small and wildly popular, primarily for its biscuits, although it also serves bagels, English muffins, croissants and things to put on them like eggs, cheese, meats, salmon and tuna.

Not far from Heavenly Biscuit is **Mom's** (moms-restaurant-fortmyersbeach.com), where you'll also find biscuits slathered in sausage gravy, eggs, grits, home fries, freshly baked pies, cakes and quiches.

The Over Easy Café (overeasycafesanibel.com) on Sanibel has a mind-boggling breakfast menu with loads of eggs, pancakes, French toast variations, skilletts, omelets, Benedicts, country fried steak, corned beef hash, country biscuits, grits, well, you get the idea. And a bonus: It is dog friendly, with well-behaved canines invited to dine on the outdoor patio with their owners.

The Sanibel Café (sanibelcafe.com) also offers a multitude of breakfast options, including the original Islander – sautéed gator with eggs, hash browns and toast – grilled fish and eggs, ham and eggs, biscuits and gravy, Benedicts, omelets, waffles and French toasts including raisin, almond, and pina colada.

The Island Cow (sanibelislandcow.com) is a popular spot where breakfast starts with homemade muffins and progresses to omelets and frittatas, pancakes and waffles, even steak fajitas and eggs. And, if you're in the moo-d, enjoy a bloody Mary or mimosa.

Restoratives Café (restorativescafe.com) in Estero is a charming little spot run by a pair of brothers who make everything from scratch, including cinnamon rolls, biscuits and sausage gravy and smoothies. Their egg sandwiches can be fashioned to your taste with choice of breast, meat, veggies and cheese.

Poached (breakfastnaples.com) in Bonita Springs is one of a group of restaurants specializing in brunch, with biscuits, benedicts, homemade banana bread, pancakes and waffles. Shrimp scampi omelets, smoked salmon platters, a hash brown casserole and banana oatmeal brulee are among the tempting options here.

Old 41 Restaurant (old41rest.com) has an old-fashioned diner feel and menu that offers malted Belgian waffles, omelets, eggs, biscuits with sausage gravy benedicts, breakfast sandwiches and creamed chipped beef.

After a hearty breakfast, work off those calories with a full day at the beach or the golf course, boasting, fishing, sightseeing or shopping.