



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

LEE COUNTY, Fla. (U.S.A.) – August on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel brings long sunny days with great shelling and lots of outdoor activities as visitors take long-awaited vacations.

In addition to offering plenty of space for social distancing, great year-round weather, shell-drenched beaches, wildlife and the sparkling Gulf of Mexico, the destination offers lots of new experiences for return guests and first-time visitors. For the latest vacation information, visit FortMyers-Sanibel.com

Save the dates: Island Hopper Songwriter Fest Sept. 17-26

Island Hopper Songwriter Fest returns for its seventh year with an impressive lineup of talented singer-songwriters, including Jimmie Allen and Michael Ray.

The free 10-day music festival – except for a few ticketed events – kicks off on Captiva Island, Sept. 17-19, then moves to historic downtown Fort Myers, Sept. 20-23, and wraps up on Fort Myers Beach, Sept. 24-26. The event is the largest songwriter festival in Southwest Florida and offers a unique experience to interact with songwriters at pool parties and beachside venues. This year, more than 60 singer-songwriters from around the country will perform more than 100 shows.

Allen, who won this year's Academy of Country Music Award for New Male Artist of the Year, will perform at the highly anticipated pool party at Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina on Sept. 26. The Delaware native made history as the first Black artist to launch a career with two consecutive No. 1 songs on country radio. His hit, "Best Shot," claimed the No. 1 spot for three weeks and his second single, "Make Me Want To," climbed the charts in March 2020. He recently released an album featuring collaborations with Little Big Town, Keith Urban and Mickey Guyton.

Ray, a Florida native, joins Island Hopper Songwriter Fest with three No. 1 songs, including "Kiss You in the Morning," "Think a Little Less" and "One That Got Away." He performs at

Pinchers at The Marina at Edison Ford in downtown Fort Myers on Sept. 23. Ray kicks off his summer tour in June with country star Luke Combs.

While most of the festival performances are free, a few exclusive ticketed shows are available on the official festival app – Island Hopper Songwriter Fest – which is available for free in the App Store and Google Play.

Island Hopper Songwriter Fest is produced by the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau, iHeartMedia, Cat Country 107.1 and BMI, the largest music rights organization in the U.S. Visit IslandHopperFest.com or access the media tool kit at island-hopper.fortmyers-sanibel.com/press. Follow the festival hashtag #islandhopperfest as well as the event's Twitter, Instagram and Facebook feeds.

Meanwhile, tune into the live virtual concert series, Songs from the Sofa and Songs from the Sand. At 8 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month, a BMI songwriter performs live from the comfort of their sofa (or from one of our beautiful beaches). Facebook @islandhopperfest; Twitter @islandhopperswf; and The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel YouTube channel.

Happening this month

Build & Brew at the historic Mound House, Fort Myers Beach

The Mound House hosts a Build & Brew! on Aug. 20. The fun evening includes pottery making along with a local craft beer and tasting. Each Build & Brew ticket includes admission to Mound House, one craft beer and tasting, and an hour-long class to learn how to make Native American pottery out of modeling clay, similar to the styles discovered at the Mound House.

Also this month: Untold Stories Guided Tour focuses on the cast of characters who called the Mound House home. To celebrate Friday the 13th, Mound House hosts the Spooky Kayak Tour that evening.

Visitors to the attraction will discover an ancient island life through hands-on experiences atop a 2,000-year-old Calusa Indian shell mound. Visit www.moundhouse.org for schedule and reservations.

Turtle nesting season runs through Oct. 31

The destination is known for its wildlife and turtle nesting season is special to those who live here as well as to the visitors who travel from all over the world to experience it. This ritual is one of nature's miracles. Most common to the area is the loggerhead sea turtle, which lives to be 40-60 years old. These fascinating creatures are big – they weigh 250-400 pounds. Like the visitors, who return year after year to enjoy our beautiful beaches, loggerheads return to the same beach time after time to deposit their eggs.

Be sure to observe a nesting turtle from a distance. Do not shine lights on or around her or she may abandon her effort to nest. Forgo taking photos or using cell phones and stay far away where she cannot see you as she crawls back to the water.

Lee County has a Sea Turtle Conservation Code. For more information, contact the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation at sccf.org/our-work/sea-turtles or Turtle Time, Inc. at turtletime.org

Welcome and Discovery Center at Lovers Key State Park

Just in time for summer fun, the new Welcome and Discovery Center has opened at Lovers Key State Park. The center is located on the banks of an inland waterway with a design that pays homage to this beautiful backdrop. The \$5.7 million structure starts by educating its visitors outdoors, where the pillars of the elevated building imitate mangroves and a 400-gallon touch tank welcomes hands and curiosity. The information desk takes its cues from Old Florida fish shacks and the gift shop includes books, jewelry and art.

www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/lovers-key-state-park

Visitors come to Lovers Key to enjoy its shell-strewn beach that stretches 2.5 miles, with three different beach accesses along calm, clear waters. Bikers enjoy more than 5 miles of multi-use trails through maritime hammock and off-the-beaten paths where you may encounter butterflies, marsh rabbits, gopher tortoises and alligators in a freshwater pond.

Southern Living magazine named Lovers Key one of Florida's most romantic destinations. In the early 1900s the island was accessible only by boat. Legend says that only lovers made the effort to get to this romantic island, thus the name Lovers Key.

www.southernliving.com/travel/florida/most-romantic-destinations-fl

Coming attractions

Murals commemorate McCollum Hall's colorful past

As Dunbar's historic McCollum Hall heads toward preservation, local artists have been working to commemorate the building's colorful past with vibrant outdoor murals depicting its days hosting big-name performers of the "Chitlin Circuit" back in the 1940s and 1950s. Besides recalling performances by Black musical greats, such as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, the murals pay homage to Dunbar community traditions, including the Easter Sunday parade and heated sidewalk checker matches. The Fort Myers Mural Society oversees the project, which engages a number of local artists as the 12-mural series nears completion. Check details at www.fortmyersmuralociety.com

To learn more about **Dunbar Cultural Landmarks**, download the **Florida Stories** app (free) and follow the route to learn about historic places in the Dunbar community. The tour follows the route to narrated cultural stops. <https://floridastories.oncell.com/en/fort-myers-dunbar-community-207854.html>

Wonder Gardens plans Otter Grotto

Wonder Gardens in Bonita Springs is launching the Robert & Deborah Blain Otter Grotto. The \$250,000 otter exhibit will feature a clear acrylic tunnel and a play-cave for children to explore, while otters play and swim around guests. Clear viewing domes will allow children and adults to interact with the otters through the cave-walls. The cave will be wheelchair accessible. Current plans call for an October opening.

Wonder Gardens, opened in 1936 as an Old Florida roadside attraction on Old 41 and was a popular stop for travelers making their way from Tampa to Miami. Now, 85 years later, it welcomes about 75,000 visitors annually. www.wondergardens.org

Topgolf to add Fort Myers location

Topgolf plans to bring its technology-enabled entertainment experience to FortMyers in late 2021. The seventh venue to be located in Florida, the complex will include 70 climate-controlled hitting bays, full-service restaurant and bars, 200 HDTV's, rooftop terrace, private event space and meeting rooms. www.topgolf.com/us/fort-myers

Have fun and save with Fort Myers Sun Saver Passport

Sunshine is just one of many reasons to visit Southwest Florida. Use your mobile phone to access exclusive deals and savings on experiences and find yourself exploring everything under the sun here.

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel has launched a free mobile savings passport. Users have access to exclusive deals on attractions, restaurants and experiences throughout the destination.

To participate:

- Sign up at <https://explore.fortmyers-sanibel.com>
- The passport will be delivered to your mobile phone via text
- Redeem it on your mobile phone at participating businesses
- Visit the website for a complete list of attractions, restaurants and experiences.

Dining news

Wine Spectator has presented nine of its 2021 Restaurant Awards to the following area restaurants:

Best of Award of Excellence: Angelina's Ristorante in Bonita Springs and The Gasparilla Inn Main Dining Room, Boca Grande

Award of Excellence: A Table Apart, Bonita Springs; Charley's Boathouse Grille & Wine Bar, Fort Myers Beach; Sunshine Seafood Café & Wine Bar, Captiva Island; Terra Nostra Ristorante, Fort Myers; Twisted Vine Bistro, Fort Myers; The Pink Elephant, Boca Grande; The Temptation Restaurant, Boca Grande. www.winespectator.com

Chartreuse Craft and Cocktail Lounge has opened in the Bonita Springs Historic District. The lounge offers classic and craft cocktails and a variety of desserts with a 1930s, Old Florida, swanky vibe. www.chartreuselounge.com

Also in Bonita Springs, **Cru Wine Club** has opened its intimate, 650-square-foot wine tasting room, which features seating inside and outside, may be booked for a maximum of 12 guests to learn about California wines and discover new varieties to buy for enjoyment at home. Light bites and wine tastings will be featured during the day and chef-prepared small plates with host-led wine pairings will be featured during happy hour. The room will also be available for small private events. www.cruwineclub.com

Coming soon to downtown Bonita Springs...

Ceremony Brewing is completing final renovations in preparation for a late summer opening.

The brewery will make and sell its own beers as well as supplies and equipment for home brewers. The tap room plans to also serve drinks from other area brewers, offering patrons a variety. Local restaurants will supply food. www.facebook.com/CeremonyBrewing

The Bohemian plans a summer opening as the owners of the popular Downtown Coffee and Wine Company are branching into the restaurant scene with a new, upscale and intimate restaurant with a menu filled with eclectic cuisine. Patrons will be able to watch chefs at work in the restaurant's unique layout that includes seating for 44 inside and 33 on an outdoor deck. www.thebohemianbonita.com

Accommodations

Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa, Bonita Springs, plans to debut new guestrooms this fall. The updated rooms will feature a sophisticated tropical feel with new wood flooring, modern bed frames, and upscale furnishing and décor. Featuring light green and vibrant ocean blues, the rooms will provide bright and airy accommodations representative of the resort's waterfront location in Southwest Florida. The guestroom updates complement the resort's public space and meeting space renovation which was completed in 2020.

hyattregencycoconutpoint.com

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village has completed a \$15 million renovation. The comprehensive, guestroom-focused transformation debuts almost a full year ahead of schedule, a silver lining resulting from the nationwide hotel closures that impacted 2020.

Highlights of the renovation include 15 new guestrooms increasing the resort's total room count to 308 rooms; design inspired by the beauty of Southwest Florida with dedication to the use of local materials; a new guest program, Fridge Fills, in-room ingredient baskets for ready-made meals to enjoy from the comfort of the newly renovated suites. www.westincapecoral.com

Recent openings

Home2 Suites by Hilton Fort Myers Airport, conveniently located off Interstate 75 and near Southwest Florida International Airport, has opened with 102 rooms. The hotel is pet friendly and offers digital key, free WiFi, free breakfast, free parking, fitness center and pool.

www.hilton.com/en/hotels/fmyhtht-home2-suites-fort-myers-airport

Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott Cape Coral/North Fort Myers has opened with 109 rooms. The hotel is conveniently located to downtown Cape Coral and Fort Myers. Amenities include free high-speed internet, free breakfast, fitness center and pool.

www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/rswfm-fairfield-inn-and-suites-cape-coral-north-fort-myers

Coming in 2023 on Fort Myers Beach

Construction is underway for Margaritaville Beach Resort at the base of the Matanzas Bridge on Fort Myers Beach. Plans call for the 254-room property to open in 2023 with 254 rooms and suites restaurants and entertainment.

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

News from Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW)

Allegiant plans nonstop routes to Punta Gorda Airport (PGD) from Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport (MSP) beginning Oct. 8. Springfield-Branson National Airport (SGF) service begins Nov. 19. www.allegiant.com

Toronto (YUL) to RSW service with **Air Canada** returns daily flights starting Oct. 2 and the seasonal flight from Montreal to RSW returns from Nov. 2 through April 2022.

United Airlines will begin offering daily nonstop flights to San Francisco International Airport (SFO) and Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) on Dec. 16 and will continue through May 5, 2022.

The **Lufthansa Group** plans weekly nonstop flights between RSW and Frankfurt (FRA) in March 2022. Flights will be operated by **Eurowings Discover** three times a week.

Spirit Airlines plans nonstop flights between RSW and Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport (SDF) and St. Louis Lambert International Airport (STL) beginning Nov. 17. There will be daily service between RSW and STL and four times weekly service between RSW and SDF.

Alaska Airlines will resume its nonstop service between RSW and Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA) on Nov. 19. Both flights will operate daily.

Give our Shellcast podcast a listen

The latest episode of **Shellcast** visits Dog Beach in Bonita Springs in Episode 10: Good Dog Beach. The podcast that we like to say is a beach break for your ears, includes an interview with Chris Williams, supervisor for Bonita Beach Park, Lee County Parks & Recreation. Williams talks about what visitors can experience at the inlet beach south of Lovers Key State Park and shares how to make the visit a fun one for dogs and pet owners alike. Dog Beach is named one of VacationPetFriendly.com's favorite Florida dog beaches.

Shellcast is available at fortmyers-sanibel.com/shellcast and wherever fine podcasts are downloaded. Instagram: [@shellcastthepodcast](https://www.instagram.com/shellcastthepodcast).

Festivals and annual events

Roar Offshore, Fort Myers Beach

Oct. 7-9, 2021

www.roaroffshore.com

35rd Annual Oktoberfest, Cape Coral

Oct. 22-24, 29-31, 2021

www.capecoraloktoberfest.com

33rd Annual J.N. "Ding" Darling Day, Lakes Park, Fort Myers

Oct. 10, 2021

www.dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/ding-darling-days

Lee County Alliance of the Arts 4th Annual Arts on Tap, Fort Myers

Nov. 12-13, 2021

www.artinlee.org/ontap

The Laboratory Theater of Florida

Gulf Shore Shakespeare Festival

Nov. 12-14, 2021

www.laboratorytheaterflorida.com

CROW Taste of the Island, Sanibel Island

November 2022

www.crowclinic.org

Gift from the Sea Community Celebration, Captiva Island

Dec. 5, 2021

46th Annual Holiday Nights at the Edison and Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers

Nov. 26-Jan. 2, 2022

www.edisonfordwinterestates.org

River District Holidays, downtown Fort Myers

Nov. 20-Dec. 31, 2021

www.myriverdistrict.com

Annual Port Boca Grande Lighthouse and Museum Lighting, Boca Grande

December 2021

www.barrierislandparkssociety.org

37th Annual Cape Coral Festival of the Arts, Cape Coral

Jan. 8-9, 2022

www.capecoralfestival.com

ArtFest Fort Myers, downtown historic district

Feb. 4-6, 2022

www.artfestfortmyers.com

Annual Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers

February 2022

www.edisonfestival.org

Spring training 2022

Boston Red Sox Spring training

February-March 2022

JetBlue Park, Fort Myers

www.mlb.com/redsox/spring-training

Minnesota Twins spring training
February-March 2022
CenturyLink Sports Complex, Fort Myers
www.mlb.com/twins/spring-training

85th Annual Sanibel Shell Festival, Sanibel Island
March 3-5, 2022
www.sanibelcommunityhouse.net/p/84/shell-festival

Annual Sanibel Shell Show, Sanibel Island
March 3, 2022
www.sanibelshellclub.com

23rd Annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival, Fort Myers
March 5, 2022
www.readfest.org

ECHO Global Food and Farm Festival, North Fort Myers
March 10-12, 2022
www.echonet.org/events/global-food-and-farm-festival

64th Annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival, Fort Myers Beach
March 12, 2022
www.fortmyersbeach.org/events/fort-myers-beach-shrimp-festival

12th Annual Fort Myers Film Festival
May 18-22, 2022
www.fortmyersfilmfestival.com

10th Annual “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament, Sanibel Island
May 13, 2022
www.dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/tarpon-tournament-1

24th Annual MangoMania Tropical Fruit Festival, Pine Island
July 2022
<http://mangomaniafl.net/>

Editor’s note: The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in Southwest Florida includes Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer Islands, North Fort Myers and Lehigh Acres. For media assistance, visit www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/media-central