



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

An island paddling adventure, 3rd National Seashell Day, new hotels and dining, annual festivals and more!

LEE COUNTY, FL (U.S.A.)– In addition to great, year-round weather, shell-drenched beaches and the sparkling Gulf of Mexico, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida continues to provide new experiences for visitors to Florida's unspoiled island destination. For the latest vacation information, please visit www.FortMyersSanibel.com

Save the date!

Have a paddling adventure on the **Great Calusa Blueway Feb. 10-18, 2018**. Paddle from Estero to Cayo Costa with Paddle Florida, Inc., a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation organized to support canoeing and kayaking in Florida. Multi-day paddling/camping adventures in each of Florida's five water management districts showcase the state's natural beauty and rich cultural heritage while promoting water conservation, wildlife preservation, springs restoration, and waterways protection. Check out the details and registration information at www.paddleflorida.org/me/paddle-florida/the-great-calusa-blueway-5157.html. Learn more about the Great Calusa Blueway at www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/calusablueway

Shelling is such a popular pastime at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel that it has its own special day. The third annual **National Seashell Day** takes place on **June 21, 2018** and shelling enthusiasts now have a reason to *shellebrate* the joy of shelling and pair it with the perfect summer getaway. For details visit www.nationalseashellday.com

The fifth annual **Island Hopper Songwriter Fest** returns **Sept. 21-30, 2018**. The popular event brings music back to the beach with new artists and new events. The free festival will take place over 10 days on Southwest Florida's most beautiful barrier islands and offers a range of star-studded performances.

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Sanibel & Captiva Islands Fort Myers Beach Fort Myers Bonita Springs Estero Cape Coral Pine Island Boca Grande & Outer Islands North Fort Myers Lehigh Acres

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The award-winning festival includes more than 100 live performances, more than 70 songwriters. Southeast Tourism Society has also taken notice. They named the festival one of their "Top 20 Events" for 2017. The fifth annual event will continue to give fans the opportunity to meet the talented artists who write songs for country superstars including Tim McGraw, Miranda Lambert, Jason Aldean and Tricia Yearwood.

Island Hopper is presented by Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau, iHeartMedia, Cat Country 107.1 and BMI, the largest music rights organization in the U.S. For more information visit www.islandhopperfest.com. Follow the festival hashtag #islandhopper on Twitter and other social channels.

Accommodations and meetings

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village in Cape Coral opened its 30,000-square-foot conference center in January 2018. The resort's \$15 million Tarpon Point Ballroom with 12,250 square feet of space will accommodate 1,400 guests. The ballroom has the capacity to divide into six distinct, modern spaces. The facility also includes an expansive new terrace overlooking the Caloosahatchee River estuary.

In addition, 30 two-bedroom suites have been converted to one bedroom suites and traditional guestrooms. The one bedroom suites will appeal to families with two double beds and a studio-sized kitchen. www.westincapecoral.com

The Island Inn on Sanibel Island has undergone a multi-million-dollar refurbishment of the Matthews Lodge. The 12-unit concrete block building, built in 1961, is being transformed from the ground up into 12 gulf-view luxury suites. Amenities include large private-screened balconies, custom tile floors, living and dining rooms, full kitchens with stainless steel appliances, high speed and reliable Wi-Fi, smartphone docking stations, flat-screen TVs and more.

The Island Inn has been welcoming visitors to Sanibel Island since 1895 and is the oldest accommodation on Sanibel Island. Set to open January 2018. www.islandinnsanibel.com

Drury Inn & Suites opened with 180 suites in Fort Myers near Alico Road and I-75 at Gulf Coast Center. It also has almost 3,000 square feet of meeting space. www.druryhotels.com

TownePlace Suites by Marriott Fort Myers/Estero, an extended-stay hotel, opened with 114 units opened at Coconut Point in Estero. Each suite offers a full kitchen and guests enjoy a complimentary breakfast, swim in the pool and use one of the Weber grills to cook dinner. www.marriott.com

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The Luminary Hotel & Co., a new 237-room hotel along the waterfront of downtown Fort Myer, plans to open in early 2019. The 12-story hotel will also include 8,000 square feet of function space and will be connected to the neighboring Harborside Event Center. Luminary Hotel & Co. will feature a signature restaurant, rooftop lounge, culinary theater, indoor and outdoor fitness facility, and spacious pool area on the fourth floor overlooking the Caloosahatchee River, as well as a local diner and retail space at street level.

Highlights include:

The Silver King Ocean Brasserie, the signature restaurant with fresh seafood. **Ella Mae's Diner**, a café nestled on a hotel street-side corner, is a tip of the hat to the late Dr. Ella Piper. She was an early 20th century Fort Myers businesswoman, a philanthropist and an African-American who's the namesake for a center that serves older adults in the community. **The Workshop**, with a Thomas Edison/light bulb themed logo, is the name for a culinary laboratory. This tiered-seat space within the hotel will welcome world-renowned chefs to teach culinary techniques. **Beacon Social Drinkery**, the rooftop bar.

The hotel will be a part of the Autograph Collection® of Marriott International, Inc.

www.mainsailhotels.com

Sundial Beach Resort & Spa on Sanibel Island has added a 12-court pickleball stadium, to its lineup of resort amenities and public offerings. The Plexicushion system courts provide tournament-grade facilities in a pristine, waterfront setting accessible to both resort guests and the public.

Guests of the resort enjoy complimentary court access and equipment loans as part of Sundial's activity package. Lessons, clinics and open play are available under the direction of IPTPA certified resident pro, Ernesto Enriquez-Socas. For groups looking to hone their skills while enjoying an island retreat, the resort offers custom pickleball vacations. For information on pickleball at Sundial, visit www.sundialresort.com/play/tennis-and-pickleball

The **Sanibel Inn** has completed some refreshing with new walkway pavers, bridges and the addition of Dante's Coal Fired Pizza. www.theinnsofsanibel.com

Accolades

Sanibel and Captiva Islands have been named by the Travel Channel to its "22 Best U. S. Islands" list saying "the sister islands of Sanibel and Captiva offer travelers a tranquil, tropical escape year-round. The beautiful, shell-strewn beaches on both islands rank among the top destinations for shelling, and provide the perfect landscape to sit back, relax and watch the sun set. The island's pristine, turquoise blue waters are also great for offshore fishing, snorkeling and scuba diving."

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TripAdvisor has named **Captiva Island** to its "8 Top Honeymoon Gems in the U.S.

Dining

Salty Sam's Waterfront Adventures, Fort Myers Beach has opened a new restaurant, The Original Shrimp Dock Bar & Grill. The former Island Packing Co., one of the original shrimp docks in Fort Myers Beach, has been renovated into a fun, waterfront dining and entertainment destination serving Florida style seafood and shrimp dishes along with specialty cocktails and live music. www.saltysams.com

La Bella Vita, serving iconic Italian dishes with a coastal flavor and fresh ingredients has been recently renovated. Located at the **Sanibel Island Beach Resort**.
www.sanibelbeachresort.com

Society, a new modern American restaurant, is now open at Bell Tower Shops in Fort Myers, introducing innovative, chef-inspired cuisine and craft cocktails made with the finest, freshest ingredients.

With strong culinary roots, Society features the award-winning talents of Executive Chef Todd Erickson, a champion of the hit Food Network show, Beat Bobby Flay and an alumnus of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. The chef-inspired menu will change with the seasons and incorporate locally sourced foods in every way possible, also featuring a rooftop herb and vegetable garden. www.societyfortmyers.com

Attractions

Offshore Sailing School is expanding their presence in Southwest Florida to include The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village and Tarpon Point Marina. In its 54th year, the school will dock a 48-foot Leopard 48 catamaran that will be used for training. Also, the school will add a Colgate 26 keelboat to its Westin fleet and will teach sailing lessons, Learn to Sail, Catamaran Live Aboard Cruising and the combination Fast Track to Cruising® courses, all providing US Sailing certification to skipper boats from 30 to 50 feet.
www.offshoresailing.com/cape-coral-marina-village

'Ding' Darling lecture series visits Gulf of Mexico, puffins, and sea turtles

Self-proclaimed "bird nerd" Noah Strycker leads the 2018 "Ding" Darling Friday Lecture Series, which runs Jan. 19 through April 13. The author set a worldwide Big Year record in 2015, and his book about the experience, *Birding Without Borders: An Obsession, A Quest, and the Biggest Year in the World*, released last month. The lectures take place in the "Ding" Darling Visitor & Education Center Auditorium at J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island.

Noted bird activist, Dr. Stephen W. Kress, also joins the lineup to talk about his book *Puffin*

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Project: An Improbable Quest to Bring a Beloved Sea Bird Back to Egg Rock, as does Kevin Karlson, who collaborated on the latest *Birds of Prey: Hawks, Eagles, Falcons, and Vultures of North America* by Pete Dunne. Other lectures will examine Antarctica, the Gulf of Mexico, coral restoration, and swallow-tailed kites.

The free lectures will be held twice each Friday (except on Feb. 9), at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Visit www.dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/lecture-and-film-series for further information on lecturers.

The Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum on Sanibel Island hosts a daily beach walk with a marine biologist beginning at the Island Inn at 9 a.m. Reservations are required. www.shellmuseum.org

Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina on Fort Myers Beach has employed naturalist Vince McGrath to offer resort guests morning wildlife walking and kayaking expeditions to explore the eco-zones of the local marine environment. Guests are able to observe numerous flora and fauna, from what's under the sea to the shoreline, tide pools and upland habitats of the dunes. McGrath also is available to guests to answer questions about creatures they find during their own beach exploration. Check out details at www.pinkshell.com/things-to-do/nature-walks

Entertainment

Currently celebrating its 25th Anniversary, **Broadway Palm in Fort Myers** will present three Tony Award-winning, Broadway musicals: Pippin, Chicago and Mamma Mia. The season also includes A Christmas Story, My Fair Lady, Ring of Fire and Annie. Five productions are scheduled in the Off Broadway Palm, five concerts and four special engagements. In addition, a recent renovation includes two new dining rooms, new gallery area, new flooring throughout the building, fresh wall paper/paint and new tables and chairs. www.broadwaypalm.com

Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW)

Eurowings begins nonstop flights from RSW to **Munich** May 1, 2018 and to **Cologne/Bonn** beginning May 4, 2018.

Frontier additions

Chicago-O'Hare (ORD)-weekly
Colorado Springs (COS)-weekly
Islip (ISP)-daily
Nashville (BNA)-weekly
Philadelphia (PHL)-daily
Providence (PVD)-weekly
Trenton (TTN)-weekly

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Minneapolis/St. Paul (MSP)-weekly, started Nov. 1
Omaha (OMA)-weekly, started Nov. 2
Buffalo (BUF)-weekly, starting Dec. 10
Grand Rapids (GRR)-weekly, starting Dec. 10
Kansas City (MCI)-weekly, starting Dec. 10

Southwest additions

Hartford (BDL)-daily, started Nov. 9
Pittsburgh (PIT)-daily, started Nov. 9
Cleveland (CLE)- weekly, started Jan. 13, 2018

Spirit additions

Hartford (BDL)-daily, started Nov. 9
Pittsburgh (PIT)-daily, started Nov. 9

Upcoming events

**Friends of Lovers Key Annual Vow Renewal, Lovers Key State Park
Feb. 14, 2018**

www.friendsofloverskey.org

Love is always in the air at Lovers Key State Park, but even more so on Valentine's Day. Couples renew their vows near the gazebo on the beach, while the ocean and gulls provide background music. The ceremonies at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. include a champagne toast, brunch or lunch, coffee and cake, socializing, photo, as well as door prizes and parting gifts. Reservations required. The non-refundable donation of \$100 per couple adds to the Environmental Education Center Fund. This event has been a sell-out in the past, so reserve a spot early by contacting event chair Judy Greenwood at 708-359-0466 or fjgreenwood@gmail.com.

80th Annual Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers

Feb. 17, 2018

239-334-2999

www.edisonfestival.org

Parade begins at 7 p.m. at Edison Stadium and continues to the Fort Myers downtown River District. During February, Fort Myers celebrates the birthday of its most illustrious historical resident, Thomas A. Edison, in befitting fashion. Edison, who built a home on the banks of the

Caloosahatchee River and spent 46 winters there, invented the light bulb and held more than 1,200 patents. So it's appropriate that the month of activities culminates with a lighted night parade. Invention competitions, parties, craft shows and a 5K run are all part of the festival. Celebrating 79 years, the month of February is filled with special events.

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81st Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island

March 1-3, 2018

Sanibel Community House

239-472-2155

www.sanibelcommunityhouse.net/

Sanibel Island, named the best shelling beach in the U.S. and one of the best in the world, hosts shelling enthusiasts who gather each year for the shell fair that draws visitors from around the

globe. One of the most unique events in the country, it began on a porch with just a few islanders and has evolved into today's fair that includes demonstrations, shell displays, crafts, prizes, food and entertainment.

Spring Training 2018

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel is the spring training home of the Boston Red Sox and the Minnesota Twins. Get up close and see your favorite baseball players. What could be better than a beautiful spring days and great baseball? For a complete listing of packages, special rates and information on a spring training vacation, visit

www.FortMyersSanibel.com.

Boston Red Sox spring training

JetBlue Park, Fort Myers

The team opens its exhibition season February 22 with a single-admission doubleheader against the Northeastern University Huskies and the Boston College Eagles.

For schedule, tickets and package information, visit www.redsox.com

Minnesota Twins spring training

CenturyLink Sports Complex, Fort Myers

Opens Feb. 22 with exhibition game against the University of Minnesota.

For schedule, tickets and package information, visit www.twinsbaseball.com

8th Annual Fort Myers Film Festival

March 21-25, 2018

Locations throughout Lee County

www.fortmyersfilmfestival.com

The Fort Myers Film Festival is an intelligent independent filmmaker's preferred event to create, unite and showcase the finest artistic cinematic works. Known for its support of local filmmakers, the event is a must-attend for cineastes who love indie film and film festivals. Check out all the details on the website.

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**60th Annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade, Fort Myers Beach
March 10-11, 2018**

239-463-6986

www.fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com

Activities for the 60th annual Fort Myers Beach shrimp harvest event will include a parade, crowning of the Shrimp Queen, craft vendors, the boiled shrimp concession, and other seafood booths set up both days at Lynn Hall Memorial Park.

**13th Annual Fort Myers Beach Film Festival, Fort Myers Beach
April 25-29, 2018**

www.fmbfilmfest.com

The Fort Myers Beach Film Festival invites independent film fans, filmmakers and distributors to spend four days to exchange ideas, make new contacts and enjoy some great films for all ages. Area accommodations offer special rates and packages to support this international celebration of independent filmmaking.

**Smoke on the Water Barbecue Competition & Music Festival, downtown Fort Myers
April 27-29, 2018**

239-333-1933

www.sbdac.com/smoke-water-2017

The Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center will host barbecue cook teams from across the South to compete in the Smoke on the Water Barbecue Competition & Music Festival 2018. This free community event brings an authentic experience of craft barbecue, beer and bands.

“Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tourney, Sanibel Island

May 11, 2018

239-472-1000, ext. 4

www.dingdarlingtarpontourney.org

To celebrate the history of the first documented tarpon caught on a rod-and-reel in “Ding” Darling’s Tarpon Bay in 1885, Doc Ford’s and the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge have partnered to host this 7th annual “catch, care, and release” tournament on

Registration is \$500 per team of four, 100 percent of which goes back to the anglers in cash awards. Proceeds support the wildlife and conservation efforts at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Check out all of the details on the website.

3rd National Seashell Day

June 21, 2018

Shelling is such a popular pastime at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel that it has its own special day. The third annual **National Seashell Day** takes place on **June 21, 2018** and shelling enthusiasts now have a reason to *shellebrate* the joy of shelling and pair it with the perfect summer getaway. For details visit www.nationalseashellday.com

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22nd Annual MangoMania Tropical Fruit Festival, Pine Island

July 14-15, 2018

239-283-0888

www.mangomaniafl.net/

The mango is the star attraction for two days each summer on Pine Island. Go wild for fruit as you sample locally-grown delicacies at this annual affair, an unusual celebration of all the tropical fruit grown on the island, which includes lychee, carambola, longan, papaya, and "chocolate pudding fruit." Fruit, exotic fruit trees, and fruit-related products are available for purchase. This fun, family event celebrates Pine Island's mangoes and other tropical fruits. In addition to mango food and beverages, the event features live music, art and craft vendors, food and recipe contests, and activities area for kids and a chance to meet the Mango Queen.

32nd Annual Oktoberfest, Cape Coral

October 2018

German-American Club

239-283-1400

www.capecoraloktoberfest.com

Hosted by the German-American Club, this huge celebration brings organizes Munich to Cape Coral. The Cape Coral Oktoberfest is the largest party of the year in the community and is THE event for fun, good food, freshly poured domestic and German beer, live music on several stages, laughter, dancing. Call or check website for schedule and ticket information.

30th Annual J.N. "Ding" Darling Days, Sanibel Island

October 2018

239-472-1100

www.dingdarlingdays.com

A week of eco-activities with all-free refuge tram tours, live wildlife presentations, hot dogs, kid's crafts, and other family activities. Birding, boating, tram, paddleboarding, and kayaking activities fill the week. Check website for schedule.

36th Annual Taste of the Town, Fort Myers

November 2018

www.jlfmtaste.com

Join the Junior League of Fort Myers for a great day of food, music and kids entertainment for the 34th Annual Taste of the Town. All proceeds from this event go to support the projects of the Junior League.

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Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival, Cape Coral

November 2018

239-573-3121

www.cocofest.com

Sun Splash Family Water Park

Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival celebrates Cape Coral's reputation for coconuts, multi-cultural food, boating, fishing and wildlife. The festival will feature a national musical act, gymnastic entertainment, carnival rides, water-ski shows, tropical food, contests, coconut crafts and fireworks.

13th Annual Sanibel Island Writers Conference

November 2018

239-590-7421

www.fgcu.edu/siwc/

BIG Arts and the Sanibel Island Public Library

This intimate writers' conference draws acclaimed authors and songwriters, award-winning poets and screenplay writers. The talented group holds small workshops for all levels of aspiring writers who want to follow in their creative footsteps. Participants also enjoy nightly readings and concerts, which are open to the public. The conference welcomes any writer who wants to create new work or refine a project in progress

For details and reservations, visit website or contact Tom DeMarchi at tdemarch@fgcu.edu, 239-590-7421.

32nd Annual American Sand Sculpting Championship, Fort Myers Beach

November 2018

239-454-7500

www.fmbandsculpting.com

Come and join the fun on Fort Myers Beach for the 31st Annual American Sand Sculpting Championship and Beach Festival. Sponsored by the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce, this fun-filled event will include world-class master sand sculptors, a state championship contest, an amateur contest, sand sculpting demonstrations and lessons, and much more. With more than 1,000 tons of sand, master sand sculptors are returning to Fort Myers Beach forming the largest sand sculpting event in the state, plying their craft and showcasing their artistry in what *USA Today* and *CNN Travel* have named a "must-see" and one of the 10 best sand sculpting competitions in the world.

For the latest information on the area's accommodation choices, event and activities, visit www.FortMyers-Sanibel.com.

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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, Lehigh Acres. For media assistance, visit www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/media-central/. Images available upon request.*