



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.) – 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 its visitors with new experiences. For the latest vacation information, visit FortMyers-Sanibel.com

Save the dates! 7th Annual Island Hopper Songwriter Fest

Returning Sept. 18-27, 2020, the award-winning event will include new artists and events. The festival takes place over 10 days and offers a range of star-studded performances by some of country music greatest singer-songwriters from Nashville and beyond. It kicks off on Captiva Island Sept. 18-20; moves to downtown Fort Myers Sept. 21-24; and ends on Fort Myers Beach Sept. 25-27.

Enjoy more than 80 artists and 100 shows. Most are free in small, intimate venues. Stay tuned for details: islandhopperfest.com

Luminary Hotel & Co. opens summer 2020, downtown Fort Myers

Scheduled for opening in August 2020, the highly anticipated riverfront Luminary Hotel & Co. will soar 12 stories above downtown Fort Myers. With 243-rooms, the new property will be home to the signature Silver King Ocean Brasserie, Beacon Social Drinkery rooftop lounge, Ella Mae's Diner with a separate street level entrance, a coffee roastery located in the lobby, The Workshop culinary theater, an indoor and outdoor fitness facility, retail space and a pool area on the fourth floor overlooking the Caloosahatchee river. Luminary is the area's first hotel in the prestigious Autograph Collection® of Marriott International. luminaryhotel.com

Also opening in August with new hotel, the former Harborside Event Center will reopen as the **Caloosa Sound Convention Center & Amphitheater**. Adjacent to the Luminary, the fully renovated Caloosa Sound Convention Center will feature 40,000 square feet of function space, including a riverfront terrace. An additional 8,000 square feet of adaptable indoor and outdoor function space will be available at Luminary Hotel.

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Renovations include updates to the interior and exterior of the building, including a new roof, windows and exterior walls. Public spaces throughout the venue have also been updated to improve accessibility, add more flexible and transformable spaces, and elevate design aspects. New to the center is a ground floor space that was reconfigured to add more boardrooms, administrative offices which have been added on the second floor, and a new riverfront terrace with a view of the Caloosahatchee River.

3x the celebrating in 2020

Three important anniversaries take place this year:

- **J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge** celebrates 75 years.
- **Anne Morrow Lindbergh’s *Gift from the Sea*** was written 65 years ago.
- **Cape Coral**, the largest city in Lee County, is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its incorporation.

It’s hard to imagine this destination without J.N. “Ding” Darling’s vision to preserve the fragile wetlands of Sanibel Island. In 1945, with concern for the wildlife and wetlands that claimed most of Sanibel Island, Darling succeeded in petitioning for the creation of the Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge.

Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge later became J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. In his honor, and to celebrate its 75 years, the refuge will present a calendar full of special events leading up to the official anniversary date, Dec. 1, 2020.

Highlights of the anniversary season include a revamped exhibit that focuses on the important work of Jay Norwood “Ding” Darling, a Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist and conservationist; Clyde Butcher photography exhibition; one-of-a-kind 75th logo and “Ding” cartoon items in the Refuge Nature Store; [*Project Refuge: A Couture Fashion Show Using Trash*](#); and other unique programs. Check the full schedule at ding75.com

Anne Morrow Lindbergh’s *Gift from the Sea*

It was on Captiva Island that Anne Morrow Lindbergh enjoyed a break from the obligations of family and career. Like many of us, she found peace and solitude as she walked the shores on Captiva. Using the shells on the beach for inspiration, she reflected on the life of the American woman in the middle of the 20th century. Those same reflections resonate today.

A groundbreaking, best-selling work when it was originally published in 1955, *Gift from the Sea* continues to be discovered by new generations of readers. According to Publishers Weekly, the book was the top nonfiction bestseller in 1955, has sold 3 million copies and has been translated into 45 languages.

Cape Coral celebrates 50 years

The city of Cape Coral is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its incorporation in 1970. Throughout the year, Cape Coral and Cape Coral Historical Society and Museum will honor its unique history, diversity and those who laid the foundation for incorporation.

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Details: capecoralhistoricalmuseum.org/50thAnniversaryCelebration

Area apps to enrich a visit

- Take a tour of the **Edison and Ford Winter Estates** with this free guide that contains commentary for both adults and children and also includes historic photos. Content is available in English, French, German and Spanish. The app replaces the hand-held audio wands previously used on the tours and is now available to anyone.
- If you want to know more about the shells that you pick up on our beaches, download the **Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum** app (\$1.99). Snap a photo of your shell and learn the name of the shell and all the details about it.
- Download the free **Dunbar Cultural Landmarks, Florida Stories** app and follow the route to learn about historic places in the Dunbar community. The tour follows the route to narrated cultural stops.
- **Fort Myers' public art collection** dates back to 1913 and today includes 68 outdoor artworks. Although these pieces serve as familiar landmarks for local residents, it's easy to pass by them regularly without knowing much about their rich history. Download the free Otocast app and learn the stories behind this public art collection.

Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum reopens

The museum is still putting the finishing touches on its general construction, but is now open to visitors. The extensive renovation and expansion means more programs, exhibits, and activities than ever before, including a new exhibit, Coral Reefs: Nurseries of the Sea. Daily beach walks are available with reservations at 9 a.m. and begin at the Island Inn lobby.

shellmuseum.org

Offshore Sailing launches Fast Track to Sailing

Offshore Sailing School is launching a new six-day/seven-night experiential course called Fast Track to Sailing that provides a bachelor of sailing certificate for new and returning sailors. The inaugural start date is June 7, 2020, at Offshore Sailing School's Captiva Island location. Students will stay ashore each night at South Seas Island Resort. Taught on the school's signature, award-winning Colgate 26 sailboats, the comprehensive course covers basic sailing, coastal navigation and advanced day sailing/cruising skills in 44 hours over six days.

offshoresailing.com

Take a ride on a 1927 carousel in North Fort Myers

After a total refurbishment, this 1927 beauty has found a new home and popularity at the **Shell Factory and Nature Park in North Fort Myers**. Cost: \$1 per person. Enjoy a nostalgic trip to a past era and then go for a bite at Capt'n Fishbone's. shellfactory.com

Also at the Shell Factory...

Players Circle Theatre at the Shell Factory has opened and kicked off its inaugural season.

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Check for details and calendar. playerscircle.org

Kitchen Social offers cooking classes

With a social twist on the cooking experience, Kitchen Social offers hands-on cooking classes that focus on having fun while learning new skills in the kitchen. Open to all skill levels, each cooking class is led by a culinary instructor who guides participants through the step-by-step process of preparing a meal. Classes feature a variety of cuisines, from international flavors and techniques to hometown favorites. KitchenSocial.com

Glimpse into shrimp industry with waterfront tour

The shrimp fleet of San Carlos Island delivers more Florida pinks than any other fleet in Florida, according to a study by the University of Florida. Learn more about this fascinating industry with a three-hour tour of the area's working waterfront. For reservations and details: ostegobay.org/waterfront-tours

BIG ARTS reopens with big changes

Just in time for its 41st season, BIG ARTS has reopened with bigger shows, a bigger stage and a new \$14 million building for the Sanibel Island arts center.

The new BIG ARTS performance hall, with 410 seats, boosts a larger stage, a hydraulic lift seat section offering additional orchestra room and expanded stage space, state-of-the-art sound system, clear sight lines, comfortable seats and an "invisible" heating and cooling system delivering perfect, balanced temperatures at all times. bigarts.org

Farmers markets

It's a favorite activity this time of year. Area markets are the best way to get fresh produce and handmade crafts. There's something new to see almost every day of the week at these free and friendly farmers markets. Dates can vary, so be sure to check each website or Facebook page before visiting.

fortmyers-sanibel.com/visit/editorial/your-guide-to-farmers-markets-in-swfl

IN THE NEWS

Gallup ranks area No. 6 for well-being

Cape Coral-Fort Myers metro area was ranked No. 6 out of 156 U.S. metropolitan areas as part of the Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index. Five elements were considered in the ranking: Career, social, financial, community and physical. news.gallup.com/poll/248834/naples-florida-metro-tops-wellbeing-fourth-time.aspx?version=print

Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) plans \$175 million expansion

Plans are underway for terminal expansions, improved security checkpoints and TSA lines, improved rental car facilities, gate and concourse additions, improved curbside capacity, increased number of flights and more.

RSW served nearly 9.4 million passengers in 2018 and is one of the top 50 U.S. airports for passenger traffic.

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The terminal expansion design is planned to be an integration of the land and sea, a neutral color palette that reflects the influences found throughout the region and where the boardwalk meets the water's edge. The interior of the facility also will get a new look with up-to-date flooring, walls and paint, all designed to fit the theme. Construction is expected to begin summer 2020. flylcpa.com

RECENT OPENINGS

Shangri-La Springs in downtown Bonita Springs

The historic property has opened **Harvest & Wisdom**, a farm-to-table restaurant specializing in fresh, organic cuisine. Seasonal ingredients from the property's nearly five-acre organic, no-till garden; grass fed, pastured-raised protein delivered from nearby Circle C Farm, and organic spices are crafted into innovative and delectable dishes.

Culinary creations will be led by Michelin-starred Executive Chef Allen Fisher, competitor on Food Network's *Chopped*. The 86-seat restaurant is currently open for lunch.

ShangriLaSprings.com

New brewery and a family farm experience

Southern Fresh Farms in Fort Myers has partnered with the new **Crazy Dingo Brewing Company**. It's a unique combination with fun for the whole family. This small estate farm includes fresh produce, hydroponic fish farming and vertical farming to maximize space.

There's also a farmers market and a playground for the kids. A barnyard petting zoo (all rescue critters) includes cows, goats, chickens, a turkey and a mini donkey named Murphy. Visitors are invited to take a tour of the farm. southernfresh.farm

Southern Fresh Farms is one of the southern-most hop producers, making Crazy Dingo one of the only craft breweries in the state of Florida that uses hops grown on site in the brewing of some of their beers. Currently only open on Friday evenings and Saturdays, the small batch brewer creates delicious ales made with fresh fruits and spices, many of which are grown on the farm. crazydingobrewing.com

Planning ahead: Turtle nesting season

Each summer, loggerhead sea turtles travel hundreds of miles to return to our Florida coastline beaches. Most adult loggerheads nest every year, laying several clutches of eggs. Turtle nesting and hatching season begins May 1 and lasts through Oct. 31. Unfortunately due to human actions, coastal development, loss of habitat, pollution, artificial lights, shrimp nets or boating related accidents, sea turtles are facing extinction. Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau and Turtle Time, Inc. are committed to protecting our endangered marine turtles. Help protect our sea turtles by following a few basic turtle-friendly rules. For a complete list of rules and more sea turtle information, visit turtletime.org

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Sanibel Island celebrates status as Bicycle Friendly Community

Sanibel Island is celebrating its recently elevated Gold Status as a Bicycle Friendly Community. The League of American Bicyclists raised the previous Silver Status to Gold Status in

recognition of recent extensions and improvements to its 26-mile shared use path. It is one of only two communities in Florida to have achieved top status. The wide, paved trail covers the island from one end to the other along Periwinkle Way and Sanibel-Captiva Road, and also takes interesting turns along Gulf Drive and Rabbit Road. The newest extension connects Sanibel-Captiva Road's path to Bowman's Beach. mysanibel.com

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island

The Bailey Tract has been restored to its historic marsh status and visitors are now seeing more birds than ever, including some not seen in 40 years. In addition, the wildlife refuge has gone solar. A new solar kiosk informs visitors about its solar conversion and the energy and dollar savings that have resulted.

Coming soon: In late 2019, the refuge celebrates its 75th anniversary. Beginning in November, a three-month Clyde Butcher exhibit, programs and commemorative events run through 2020.

fws.gov/refuge/jn_ding_darling

ANNUAL FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Spring training 2020

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 beautiful spring days and great baseball? For a complete listing of packages, special rates and information on a spring training vacation, visit FortMyersSanibel.com.

Boston Red Sox spring training

Feb. 21-March 24, 2020

JetBlue Park, Fort Myers

redsox.com

Minnesota Twins spring training

Feb. 21-March 23, 2020

CenturyLink Sports Complex, Fort Myers

twinsbaseball.com

83rd Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island

March 5-7, 2020

Sanibel Community House

239-472-2155

sanibelcommunityhouse.net/p/84/shell-festival#.XT3cY_JKiiQ

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.

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21st Annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival

Fort Myers Regional Library Campus

March 7, 2020

Celebrate the power of reading at the 21st annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival at the Fort Myers Regional Library campus at 2450 First St., Fort Myers. The free, family-oriented festival is a chance to meet well-known authors and to focus on the importance of reading. There will also be books and authors for kids and teens. readfest.org

62nd Annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade, Fort Myers Beach

March 14-15, 2020

fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com

The 62nd Annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade takes place at Lynn Hall Memorial Park on Fort Myers Beach. Both days are filled with fun, food and crafts as well as the world-famous Lions Club shrimp dinners. Shrimp are from our local fleets and are as fresh as you can get. Enjoy a 5K run, the Shrimp Festival Parade, crowning of the Shrimp Queen and a shrimp eating competition.

ECHO Global Food & Farm Festival, North Fort Myers

March 13-14, 2020

echonet.org/food-and-farm-festival

For 29 years, ECHO (Educational Concern for Hunger Organization) has been host to Southwest Florida's premier festival focusing on sustainable living, agriculture and food. Partnering with local organizations and businesses, ECHO's Global Food and Farm Festival has provided thousands of attendees with the opportunity to taste exotic foods, experience life in a foreign country and explore the Global Farm, learning about food and culture in a new way.

Visitors will tour a tropical rainforest demonstration, a 300+ variety seed bank, take an educational tour of the fruit tree arboretum or learn about alternative energies. Kids of all ages can taste, touch and experience their way around the world as they learn about world hunger and ways they can make an impact.

14th annual Fort Myers Beach International Film Festival, Fort Myers Beach

April 22-26, 2020

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 26-27, 2020

239-333-1933

sbdac.com/smoke-on-the-water-fort-myers

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The Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center will host barbecue cook teams from across the South to compete in the 7th Annual Smoke on the Water Barbecue Competition & Music Festival 2020. This community event brings an authentic experience of craft barbecue, beer and bands.

10th Annual Fort Myers Film Festival

May 6-10, 2020

Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center

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.

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

May 22, 2020

239-472-1000

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 9th annual “catch, care and release” tournament.

Proceeds support the wildlife and conservation efforts at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

25th Annual MangoMania Tropical Fruit Festival, Cape Coral

July 11-12, 2020

German-American Social Club

239-283-0888

mangomaniafl.net

The mango is the star attraction for two days each summer on Pine Island. Go wild for fruit as with samples of locally grown delicacies at this annual affair, an unusual celebration of all the tropical fruit grown on the island. 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, activities area for kids and a chance to meet the Mango Queen.

Roar Offshore, Fort Myers Beach

Oct. 8-10, 2020

fortmyersbeach.org/events/roar-offshore

Get ready to celebrate the return of Offshore Powerboat Racing to Fort Myers Beach with this National Championship Race. The entire race will be visible anywhere on the beach from the pier to mid-island and on the water in the spectator anchoring area.

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34th Annual Oktoberfest, Cape Coral

Oct. 16-18 and 23-25, 2020

German-American Social Club

239-283-1400

capecoraloktoberfest.com

Hosted by the German-American Social 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.

32nd Annual “Ding” Darling Day, Sanibel Island

Oct. 18, 2020

239-472-1100

Check website for a list of free events throughout the day.

dingdarlingdays.com

Sanibel Island Writers Conference, Sanibel Island

Nov. 5-8, 2020

BIG ARTS

900 Dunlop Road, Sanibel

239-590-7421

The conference is open to aspiring writers who want to create new work or refine a project already in progress.

Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival, Cape Coral

Nov. 12-15, 2020

239-573-3121

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.

34th Annual American Sand Sculpting Championships, Fort Myers Beach

Nov. 20-30, 2020

In front of Wyndham Garden Hotel

239-454-7500

fmsandsculpting.com

Join the fun on Fort Myers Beach for the Annual American Sand Sculpting Championship. Sponsored by the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce, *USA Today* and *CNN Travel* have named a “must-see” and one of the 10 best sand-sculpting competitions in the world.

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Fort Myers Tip-Off, Fort Myers

Nov. 23 and 25, 2020

Suncoast Credit Union Arena

fortmyerstipoff.com

Come see who will #OwnTheFort Thanksgiving week as the nation's top college basketball programs compete in the third annual Fort Myers Tip-Off. The campus of Florida SouthWestern State College is home to this four-team tournament which has quickly become a staple of the Southwest Florida sports calendar.

45th Annual Holiday Nights at the Edison and Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers

December 2020

239-334-7419

edisonfordwinterestates.org

A not-to-be-missed holiday tradition, the historic buildings and more than 20 acres of gardens are decorated with lights and traditional decorations. The event offers a special holiday tour, Children's Tree Trail, Santa visits on select nights, refreshments and shopping in the Ford Cottage Shoppe, museum store and garden shoppe. edisonfordwinterestates.org/calendar

Edison Ford Holiday Nights reflect the many contributions of Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and their families to the local community. It was chosen by the editors of *USA Today* as one of the *10 Best Historic Homes for the Holidays*. In addition, The American Bus Association (ABA) designated the event as one of the *Top 100 Events in North America for 2016*.

14th Annual Festival of Trees presented by Goodwill Industries, downtown Fort Myers

Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center

December 2020

goodwilltrees.com

Get into the holiday spirit with a stroll through a showcase of festive trees in the historic Fort Myers River District.

36th Annual Christmas Luminary Trail and Open House, Sanibel and Captiva islands

Dec. 4 on Sanibel Island and Dec. 5 on Captiva Island, 2020

sanibel-captiva.org

This event draws visitors from all over the world as they join local residents to celebrate the season with 3 miles of luminary candles and events.

8th Annual Holiday Stroll on South Seas Island Resort

December 2020

southseas.com

South Seas Island Resort on Captiva Island hosts its 7th annual Holiday Stroll every Friday and Saturday night. In conjunction with the 2019 Captiva Holiday Village, the 330-acre resort transforms its picturesque marina and north end into a winter wonderland with thousands of twinkling lights. During the first weekend, Peter Mayer, lead guitarist of Jimmy Buffet's Coral

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Reefer Band, will perform two festive concerts from 8 to 9:30 p.m. on the Marina Walk in the Yacht Harbour Marina. The Holiday Stroll is free and concert is \$10.

River District Holidays, downtown Fort Myers

Dec. 1, 2020-Jan. 2, 2021

fortmyersriverdistrictalliance.com/holidays

The calendar is packed with holiday events to get you in the spirit of the season. Festival of Trees, Holiday Stroll and Tree Lighting, Burroughs's Home & Gardens Holiday House, Music Walk, holiday concert and a New Year's Eve celebration to welcome 2021.

Annual Port Boca Grande Lighthouse and Museum Lighting, Boca Grande

Dec. 12, 2020

barrierislandparkssociety.org

Celebrate the annual lighting of the Gasparilla Lighthouse at 6 p.m. with music and refreshments. Gates open at 5:30 p.m.

Third annual Fort Myers Seafood & Music Festival, Fort Myers

River District

Jan. 8-10, 2021

seafoodfestivals.com/S-62-Ft.+Myers+Seafood+%26+Music+Festival

Enjoy great food, live music and a marketplace.

36th Annual Cape Coral Arts & Music Festival

Jan. 9-10, 2021

capecoralfestival.com

239-699-7942

This annual event draws hundreds of artists and more than 100,000 visitors.

ArtFest Fort Myers, downtown historic district

Feb. 6-7, 2021

239-768-3602

artfestfortmyers.com

On the waterfront in downtown Fort Myers, visitors enjoy made-in-USA original art by more than 200 artists. Enjoy food, music and fun for the whole family.

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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 and Lehigh Acres. For media assistance, visit fortmyers-sanibel.com/media-central/