



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.) – June on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel means that summer days are right around the corner as visitors begin taking 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

Happening this month

Celebrate the first day of summer and National Seashell Day on June 20

Shells have a way of transforming into treasured memories and at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel, there's a whole day dedicated to these gifts from the sea. On June 20 and all summer long, it's the perfect place to celebrate (or *shellebrate*) this national holiday. Thanks to the geography of the islands, hundreds of species of unbroken shells roll ashore.

3 ways to celebrate:

1. Be inspired by reading 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. 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.

2. Visit the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum

The Museum offers fun and educational activities for the whole family. Kids love touching live mollusks in our touch pools, winning scavenger hunt prizes, and watching a giant Pacific Octopus at www.shellmuseum.org/octocam. It's the only museum in the United States devoted solely to shells and mollusks. www.shellmuseum.org

3. Start a shell collection

Most shellers here can expect to find lettered olives, lightning whelks, Florida fighting conchs, baby's ears, worm shells, nauticas, scallops, coquinas and other bivalves. But one of the rarest finds – and the shell that keeps many returning – is the brown-speckled junonia. Only a lucky few find it! Remember to leave live shells behind, as they are protected by state law.

www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/national-seashell-day

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 opens at Lovers Key State Park

Just in time for summer, 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

Save the dates

7th annual Island Hopper Songwriter Fest

The countdown has started! Returning **Sept. 17-26**, the award-winning event will include new artists, events and star-studded performances by some of country music's greatest singer-

songwriters from Nashville and beyond. Island Hopper kicks off on Captiva Island Sept. 17-19; moves to downtown Fort Myers Sept. 20-23; and closes at Fort Myers Beach Sept. 24-26.

Visitors will enjoy more than 80 artists, 100 shows, most of which are free and in small, intimate venues. Island Hopper is presented by iHeart Media, Cat Country 107.1, BMI and The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. island-hopper.fortmyers-sanibel.com

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](https://www.facebook.com/islandhopperfest); Twitter [@IslandHopperSWF](https://twitter.com/IslandHopperSWF); and The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

Coming attractions

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

The Oxbow Bar & Grill has opened at the **Luminary Hotel & Co.** Located in what was once known as the City Pier Building in the Downtown Fort Myers River District, it offers a mix of casual dockside dining and shopping. Open daily for lunch and dinner it serves brunch on weekends.

With panoramic riverfront views on the Caloosahatchee River, Oxbow features an upbeat nautical vibe that will appeal to the area's boaters. Inspired by its unique location, the 150-seat restaurant offers both indoor and outdoor seating. Menu selections include fresh oysters and seafood, craft sandwiches, burgers and steaks. The second floor will offer 2,400 square feet of event space featuring a patio with private access and a catering kitchen for private celebrations or meetings for up to approximately 150 guests.

www.oxbowfortmyers.com

Boop's By the Bubble Room, the nostalgic, yummy, old-fashioned soda fountain, has just opened on Captiva Island adjacent to the popular restaurant. An ice cream parlor that serves Love Boat ice cream also includes espresso coffees, pastries and the famous Bubble Room cake. www.bubbleroomrestaurant.com

Cru Wine Club has opened in **Bonita Springs**. The 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

400 Rabbits on Sanibel Island, the new (and only) Mexican restaurant on Sanibel, 400 Rabbits gets its name from the 400 drunken rabbit gods, an Aztec myth involving the infinite ways people could get tipsy. Restaurant co-owners Debra and Jeramie Campana brought in Chef Don Yamauchi, who was nominated for a James Beard award as one of the top five rising star chefs in 1993. He is also a 400 Rabbits co-owner. The restaurant is known for hand-crafted margaritas, dedicated guacamole station, burritos and street tacos. www.400rabbitssanibel.com

Coming soon to downtown Bonita Springs...

Chartreuse Craft and Cocktail Lounge is under construction in the Bonita Springs Historic District. Scheduled to open this month, the lounge offers classic and craft cocktails and a variety of desserts with a 1930s, Old Florida, swanky vibe. www.chartreuselounge.com

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

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in the news

In her **Road Trips for Families**, Travel writer Cheryl Rodewig says that a road trip from Fort Myers to Marco Island is the "best Southwest Florida trip itinerary." In her article for Road Trips for Families, she includes visits to Edison and Ford Winter Estates, IMAG History & Science Center, Calusa Nature Center & Planetarium, Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum, the River District, Ella Mae's Diner, Luminary Hotel & Co., Wonder Gardens and more. www.roadtripsforfamilies.com/fort-myers-to-marco-island-best-southwest-florida-road-trip-itinerary

Southern Living picks Sanibel Island as one of The South's Best Beach Towns

The editors of Southern Living magazine featured Sanibel in its fifth annual The South's Best issue, selecting the island as one of its Beach Towns of 2021. Sanibel was featured on the cover of Southern Living's April edition. The island "kept the heart of the South beating during some of the toughest times of 2020 and 2021," says the magazine. www.southernliving.com

Fort Myers, Sanibel and Matlacha on "Samantha Brown's Places to Love"

Award-winning "Samantha Brown's Places to Love" returned for season 4 on PBS and featured Fort Myers, Sanibel, Matlacha and more. www.samantha-brown.com/episodes/season-4

Town & Country magazine features Boca Grande's renovated Gasparilla Inn

The classic, Old Florida resort has undergone a refresh that is detailed in Town & Country magazine. The article begins with "Because sipping on Boca Punch and playing a game of backgammon sounds good right about now, doesn't it?"

Forbes picks "Fort Myers: One of Florida's most underrated cities for a weekend getaway."

"A historic community once frequented by Thomas Edison, Fort Myers is the ideal destination for a relaxing weekend getaway. While nearby Sanibel and Fort Myers Beach have earned acclaim for their idyllic beaches and shoreside resorts, the city of Fort Myers is undergoing a tourism renaissance of its own right now—a quality that's best represented by the Luminary Hotel & Co., a brand new addition to the banks of the Caloosahatchee River. Officially unveiled in September 2020, this polished AAA Four Diamond venue is breathing new life into the food, drink, and hospitality scene across the Fort Myers River District."

U.S. News & World Report, MSN says Sanibel Island is an underrated Florida destination that "will give you a taste of the tropics without having to leave the country. All the money you'll save from international airfare can be put toward staying in one of Sanibel Island's many luxurious hotels. Plus, with the island's greatest attractions outdoors (and free), you won't have to put aside a whole lot of coin for activities. Free attractions here include Bowman's Beach, Blind

Pass Beach, the beaches of nearby Captiva Island and the Sanibel Lighthouse.” **50 cheap tropical vacations to take this year**

Give our new Shellcast podcast a listen

Think of **Shellcast** as a beach break for your ears. The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel’s new podcast gives listeners a chance to soak up some virtual sun and learn more about our slice of paradise. Listeners tune in to experience the sounds of the destination’s beaches, nature and interviews with local experts.

Shellcast is available on fortmyers-sanibel.com, Apple Podcasts, Pandora, Spotify, iHeartRadio, GooglePodcasts and wherever fine podcasts are downloaded. Follow Shellcast on Instagram [@shellcastthepodcast](https://www.instagram.com/shellcastthepodcast).

Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum opens “Beyond Shells” on Sanibel Island

Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum’s new \$6 million expansion, “Beyond Shells: The Mysterious World of Mollusks,” transforms the visitor’s experience. It connects them to the little-known live animals that contribute to the ocean’s stunning shells and educates visitors about the important role these animals play in our ecosystem.

The bright new space gives visitors the chance to rediscover the museum with 11 aquariums that showcase cold and warm water species, like octopuses, squid and nautilus. Visitors duck into a pop-up bubble for a 360-degree look at mollusks and fish, and immerse their hands in two engaging 15-foot touch-pool experiences.

To learn more about the shells from our beaches, download the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum app (\$1.99). Snap a photo of your shell and learn what kind it is and all the details about it. shellmuseum.org

-30-

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*