



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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May 2018

239-338-3500

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

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!

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 on shelling and shelling events, 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.

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.

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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

LEE COUNTY VISITOR & CONVENTION BUREAU 2201 SECOND STREET, SUITE 600 FORT MYERS, FL 33901-3086
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What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 2

Eurowings service to Germany

Eurowings begins nonstop service from Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) to Munich Airport (MUC) with two weekly flights starting May 1; three weekly flights to Dusseldorf (DUS), starting May 3; and one weekly flight to Cologne-Bonn (CGN), starting May 4. www.eurowings.com

Accommodations and meetings

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village in Cape Coral has opened its 30,000-square-foot conference center. The resort's \$15 million Tarpon Point Ballroom with 12,250 square feet of space will accommodate 1,400 guests and has the capacity to divide into as many as 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 appeal to families with two double beds and a studio-sized kitchen. www.westincapecoral.com

The Island Inn on Sanibel Island has undergone a multimillion-dollar refurbishment of the Matthews Lodge. The 12-unit concrete block building, built in 1961, has been 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 historic Island Inn has been welcoming visitors to Sanibel Island since 1895 and is the oldest accommodation on Sanibel Island. www.islandinnsanibel.com

The Luminary Hotel & Co., a 237-room hotel along the waterfront of downtown Fort Myers, plans to open in late 2019 or early 2020. 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 will 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

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 3

Accolades

Money magazine cited Sanibel Island one of eight “gorgeous vacation spots to help you destress in 2018.”

Architectural Digest named Gasparilla Island “one of the nine most stunning islands off U.S shores.”

Coastal Living named Sanibel Island the “one of the best shelling beaches in America.”

The *Travel Channel* named Sanibel and Captiva Islands as among the best U.S. Island to visit saying, they “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.”

Dining and more

Norman Love Confections offers a traditional afternoon tea at Norman Love Confections’ McGregor Chocolate and Dessert Salon on Friday and Saturday afternoons by reservation. Guests may choose the *Afternoon Tea Special* featuring bottomless cups of Tea Forte tea and a three-tiered array of tea sandwiches and tea breads, pastries, tartlets and a fresh scone with fruit preserves and Devonshire cream. Guests may also select the tea service with champagne. For reservations, call 239-672-8797. www.normanloveconfections.com

Dogs are welcome to dine here! Many dining venues throughout The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel welcome your four-legged family members for dining. A few include Big Blue Brewing and Rumrunners in Cape Coral, Island Cow on Sanibel Island, Blue Point Oyster Bar at Bell Tower Shops in Fort Myers and McGregor Café in Fort Myers.

Fish-Tale Marina restaurant has opened on Estero Bay, Fort Myers Beach. With Waterfront dining includes local seafood, sandwiches, steaks and handcrafted cocktails. Dogs welcome! www.thefishtalemarina.com/fish-tale-restaurant

Locally-owned breweries welcome visitors to Southwest Florida. From Fort Myers to Cape Coral to Bonita Springs, area award-winning brewers and distillers blend local oranges, berries, honey and even chocolate with traditional ingredients into smooth tasting original creations. Want to tour a brew house or distillery? A guide directs visitors to the locations. To print a brew trail map and to read details of each of the local breweries, visit fortmyers-sanibel.com/local-breweries

Attractions

Mound House Eco Tours, Fort Myers Beach

The recently renovated house on Estero Bay serves as a museum showcasing Calusa artifacts and exhibits. And if you have ever wondered about exactly what is inside a shell mound, there is a huge cutaway of a mound that you will find fascinating.

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 4

There are some new ways to explore this unique historic attraction. Board the Estero Bay Express at Fish-Tale Marina and travel the bay to Mound House and then on to Mound Key, known as the capital of the Calusa. At both sites, guests learn about the rich history of the Calusa as well as new findings scientists are discovering about this ancient society. In addition, kayak tours that explore the winding mangrove creeks and backwaters are guided by Dexter Norris, biologist, naturalist and Mound House environmental educator. Conditions permitting, the tour includes a stop at Dog Key archaeological site.

Catch the full moon rising on a beautiful sunset tour and explore tidal creeks and winding mangrove tunnels extending into the hidden backwaters of Estero Bay. This unique tour offers a rare opportunity to experience the estuary in the quiet of twilight.

The tours are a fun and enlightening way to experience unspoiled nature of Southwest Florida today and imagine the Calusa people walking, fishing, and simply living in this same area more than 2,000 years ago. For details visit www.moundhouse.org

Estero historic site name change

The Koreshan State Historic Site is now officially Koreshan State Park.

The park includes 11 buildings on the National Register of Historic places from the days of the Koreshan Unity, a colony led by Dr. Cyrus Teed in 1894. The group believed the universe existed in a hollow sphere and that Teed was the messiah.

While the history of the park remains the focus, the name emphasizes the park's recreational opportunities that include camping, a boat ramp, kayaking and canoe rentals and hiking trails. www.floridastateparks.org/park/Koreshan

At **Everglades Wonder Gardens** in Bonita Springs, visitors may purchase a handful of flamingo chow and feed the friendly flamingos at this historic Florida attraction. www.evergladeswondergardens.com

The **Bailey-Mathews National Shell Museum** on Sanibel Island conducts daily beach walks with a marine biologist leaving from the Island Inn (also on Sanibel Island) at 9 a.m. Reservations are required. www.shellmuseum.org. This summer, world-renowned marine biologist, Dr. Jose Leal will lead excursions at Bunche Beach. Check website for dates and details.

Farmers Markets are a great way to get outdoors and enjoy the beautiful Southwest Florida weather. For details, visit www.buylocalee.com. A sampling:

- **Sanibel Island**, Sanibel City Hall, 800 Dunlop Road, 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Sundays, through May 27
- **Fenway South**, JetBlue Stadium, 11500 Fenway S Drive, Fort Myers, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Mondays, through March 26

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 5

- **Coconut Point**, Coconut Point Mall, 23106 Fashion Drive, Estero, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Thursdays, through April 26
- **Lakes Park**, Lakes Regional Park, 7300 Gladiolus Drive, Fort Myers, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Wednesdays, through April 25
- **Bonita Springs**, The Promenade 26795 South Bay Drive, Bonita Springs, 8 a.m.-noon Saturdays, through April 28
- **River District**, Centennial Park, 201 Cleveland Ave., Fort Myers, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Thursdays, year-round
- **Captiva Island**, South Seas Island Resort, 5400 Plantation Road, Captiva, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Tuesdays, through April 3
- **Boca Grande Farm & Fish Market**, Ball field on Wheeler Road, 305 Wheeler Road, Boca Grande, through April 27
- **Fort Myers Beach**, Nervous Nellies parking lot, 645 Old San Carlos Blvd., Fort Myers Beach, 8 a.m.-noon Tuesdays, through April 24
- **Fleamasters Fleamarket**, 4135 Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, Fort Myers, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday through Sunday.

Upcoming events

“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

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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

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 6

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 19-21 and 26-28, 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 12-14, 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.

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.

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 7

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 16-25, 2018

239-454-7500

www.fmbsandsculpting.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.

43rd Annual Holiday Nights at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers

December 2018 (Event closed Dec. 25)

239-334-7419

www.edisonfordwinterestates.org

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 *10Best Historic Homes for the Holidays*, which also included The White House, Mount Vernon, Monticello and the Biltmore in North Carolina. To view the article visit:

www.10best.com/interests/trip-pics/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*. Edison Ford Holiday Nights has also been featured in *Destinations* magazine noting that Edison Ford Holiday Nights offers excellent entertainment value to both tour groups and individual travelers from around the world.

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 8

A not-to-be-missed holiday tradition, the historic buildings and acres of gardens are decorated with lights and traditional decorations. The holiday estates offer a behind the scenes tour, Children's Holiday Tree Trail, Santa visits on select nights, refreshments and shopping in the Holiday Cottage Shoppe, Museum Store and Garden Shoppe. For admission and details: www.edisonfordwinterstates.org/events/annual-events/holiday-nights/

**34th Annual Christmas Luminary Trail and Open House, Sanibel and Captiva islands
December on Sanibel Island and Captiva Island 2018.**

www.sanibel-captiva.org

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

River District Holidays, downtown Fort Myers

Dec 1, 2018-Jan. 2, 2019

www.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 2018. Check the website for a complete calendar.

**Barrier Island Parks Society annual Lighthouse Lighting, Boca Grande
December 2018**

www.barrierislandparkssociety.org/events

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

Cape Coral Festival of the Arts, Cape Coral

Jan. 12-13, 2019

www.capecoralfestival.com

239-699-7942

This annual event in its 33rd year draws hundreds of artists and more than 100,000 visitors.

Twisted Strings, Fort Myers

Top Rocker Field at Six Bends Harley Davidson

January 2019

www.twistedstrings.org

The annual, outdoor festival brings together classically trained musicians who fuse their years of musical training on stringed (and other) instruments with the sounds of jazz, blues, soul, rock, hip hop and world music. Visit site for lineup and ticket information.

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 9

ArtFest Fort Myers, downtown historic district

Feb. 1-3, 2019

239-768-3602

www.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.

Friends of Lovers Key Annual Vow Renewal, Lovers Key State Park

Feb. 14, 2019

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.

81st Annual Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers

Feb. 16, 2019

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.

Spring Training 2019

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

www.redsox.com

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 10

Minnesota Twins spring training
CenturyLink Sports Complex, Fort Myers
www.twinsbaseball.com

82nd Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island

March 7-9, 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.

20th Annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival

Fort Myers Regional Library Campus

March 2019

Celebrate books and the written word at the **Southwest Florida Reading Festival** on March 3 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Fort Myers Regional Library campus at 1651 Lee St., Fort Myers (a new location this year). 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. Check the schedule and list of authors at www.readfest.org

61st Annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade, Fort Myers Beach

March 10-11, 2019

239-463-6986

www.fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com

Activities for the 61st 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.

9th Annual Fort Myers Film Festival

March 2019

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.

-MORE-

What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 11

**13th Annual Fort Myers Beach Film Festival, Fort Myers Beach
April 2019**

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.

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

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-30-

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