



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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January 2017
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What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

Award-winning accommodations, nationally-recognized festivals and more!

LEE COUNTY, FL– 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-planning information, please visit www.FortMyersSanibel.com.

Kudos

Martha Stewart Living featured an eight-page story on Pine Island in the June 2016 edition. The story, "Tropic Wonders," focuses on Pine Island and says "At a bustling roadside market on Pine Island, Florida, four impassioned farmers share a mission: to produce a vast selection of exotic fruits, plants and homemade goods for a hungry, happy public...In the summer, customers from all over the world come to sample up to 30 different kinds of mangoes at a time. It's a cultural destination."

Family Vacation Critic named Captiva Island one of the [10 Best Beaches for Families in 2016](#), saying "Captiva Beach isn't for those seeking a go-go-go vacation -- it's for families who truly want to disconnect and unwind at the beach. In fact, the most popular thing to do is walk the beach and collect shells, including conch and sand dollars. The island offers shelling tours, with one hotel (South Seas Island Resort) even featuring a designated shelling concierge!"

Fodors.com included Sanibel and Captiva islands in a roundup of [America's Most Beautiful Barrier Islands](#).

Attractions and recreation

The **Southwest Florida Performing Arts Center** has opened in **Bonita Springs** with a culinary test kitchen and an Italian-themed celebrity chef restaurant. The venue will offer diversified cultural programming featuring local and national artists. For schedule and details, visit www.swflpac.com.

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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 Mound House on Fort Myers Beach has unveiled \$2 million in renovations. The 1921 period renovations to the island's oldest standing structure atop an ancient Calusa Indian shell mound serve as a backdrop for stories spanning some 2,000 years. Inside the restored two-story home, three new galleries have been added: Ancient People Gallery, Settlers on the Shells Gallery and the Digging Deeper Exploratory Gallery. The grounds have been landscaped with three gardens and guided kayak tours are available. Details: www.moundhouse.org.

The Historic Koreshan home in Estero has completed the cottage rehab where one of the "Final Four" Koreshans lived. The home of German-born Conrad Schlender, the tiny wood-frame building was likely built around 1900, then moved to the Utopian communal settlement in the 1930s. The \$50,000 restoration included leveling the foundation, repairs to siding, windows and doors and installing a new metal roof. A clattering stand of giant bamboo shades the little building on the grounds of the Koreshan State Historic Site, which offers visitors a glimpse of the lives the idealistic pioneers carved out of the subtropical scrub around the turn of the 20th century. Led by the charismatic Cyrus Teed, who renamed himself Cyrus (Hebrew for shepherd), the group planned to create the New Jerusalem. The Koreshan State Historic Site is located at Corkscrew Road and U.S. 41 in Estero. For details: Call 239-992-0311 or visit floridastateparks.org/koreshan.

The Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum on Sanibel Island hosts a weekly beach walk with a marine naturalist beginning at the Island Inn each Tuesday at 10 a.m. Cost is \$10 per person and includes half-price admission to the museum. Reservations are required. The museum offers printed self-guided maps in German. www.shellmuseum.org.

Accommodations

Gasparilla inn recognized by two travel magazines

For the first time, The Gasparilla Inn & Club (www.GasparillaInn.com) has been voted the No. 1 resort in Florida by two consumer travel magazines. The resort, located in Boca Grande on Gasparilla Island, is honored as the No. 1 resort in Florida (Gulf) in *Condé Nast Traveler's* 2016 Readers' Choice Awards. Additionally, The Inn was named the No. 1 Florida Resort, No. 14 in the United States and No. 49 in the *World in Travel + Leisure's* 2016 World's Best Awards.

Pink Shell named to top Florida resort list by Conde Nast readers

Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina on Fort Myers Beach was named to the publication's *Top Resorts in Florida* 2016 list. Readers from around the world were invited to weigh in on their experiences at premier hotels and resorts on Florida's Gulf Coast. Pink Shell ranked second on the list with a score of 96.35 out of 100, surpassing other well-known brands.

Situated on 12 lush acres of private beachfront property, the Fort Myers Beach resort is a picturesque playground for relaxing and making a splash. Visitors can arrive to paradise by land

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or sea thanks to the resort's 41-slip marina, ranked in the Top 25 Best Places to Tie Up in North America by *Power & Motoryacht* magazine in 2016.

The Florida Superior Small Lodging Association (SSLA) recently announced 14 Lee County hoteliers have successfully qualified for the distinguished SSLA designation. The SSLA certification is a statewide hospitality recognition program. In addition, 10 of the 14 total SSL properties inspected by the Property Review Program (PRP) qualified to receive the coveted Donal A. Dermody White Glove Award for best practices in housekeeping. Properties must receive a score of 100 percent for all components of the housekeeping inspection to be eligible to receive the White Glove Award. Lee County properties recognized by the SSL hospitality recognition program include:

Bokeelia, Cape Coral, Fort Myers & St. James City

Casa Loma Motel

Legacy Harbour Hotel & Suites – White Glove Award

Tarpon Lodge – White Glove Award

Two Fish Inn – White Glove Award

Fort Myers Beach

Beach Shell Inn – White Glove Award

Gulf Breeze Condos – White Glove Award

Manatee Bay Inn – White Glove Award

Matanzas Inn

Silver Sands Villas – White Glove Award

Sanibel & Captiva islands

Gulf Breeze Cottages

Mitchell's Sand Castles – White Glove Award

Shalimar Cottages – White Glove Award

Signal Inn

Waterside Inn – White Glove Award

Hampton Inn by Hilton in Bonita Springs has completed full renovation that includes its Forever Young Initiative, launched in 2014. The renovation focuses on multi-functional solutions designed to increase comfort, ease and functionality of the spaces within guest rooms and community areas, including the lobby and fitness center. Visit [here](#) for information.

Sundial Beach Resort on Sanibel Island completed a multimillion-dollar renovation that includes refreshing of accommodations, new fitness center, HydroGrid tennis courts, a campus of the Sanibel Sea School, a Kay Casperson Lifestyle Spa and Boutique and a satellite operation of Sanibel's Bailey's Marketplace. Recently opened: **Shima Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar**. The restaurant features a Japanese-style menu that includes sushi rolls prepared by a third-generation sushi chef. Visit www.sundialresort.com.

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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. Visit www.pinkshell.com.

Casa Ybel Resort on **Sanibel Island** has been ranked by *Travel + Leisure Family* magazine as one of North America's Top 20 Family Resorts. www.casaybelresort.com.

At the **Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa** in **Bonita Springs**, A \$7.1 million triple waterslide and lazy river pool complex has opened.

The complex includes a three-story Everglades lookout tower topped by a tin-roofed fishing shack. Beneath the tower, a 575-foot-long meandering lazy river pool with water hazards will drench guests along the way. Additional pool coves accommodating nearly 300 swimmers complete the more than 249,000-gallon waterscape. Surrounding the Everglades tower and the lazy river a forest of Southwest Florida native plants including live oak, Sabal palm, and Saw palmetto. A lushly landscaped pool deck accommodates a large number of guests, event space and two food trucks to serve a changing selection of local cuisine. The one-acre expansion to Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort's pool amenity increases the total pool area to three acres in size. www.coconutpoint.hyatt.com.

Food and Dining

Fort Myers Brewing Company was named "Best Brewery in Florida" at a competition of 87 Florida breweries.

The **Cape Coral Brewing Company** has opened in **Cape Coral**. For details and tour times, visit www.capecoralbrewing.com.

Arts and Walks

Art Walk in the River District, downtown Fort Myers, takes place the first Friday of each month, 6-10 p.m. and the following Saturday from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. www.fortmyersartwalk.com.

Kudos

U.S. News & World Report has named Sanibel Island among the top 10 family beaches in the U.S. Check out the article [here](#). The article says the island "*is popular with families because its beaches have plenty of beautiful – sometimes unusual – seashells, which little ones love to collect.*"

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Best beach

Lovers Key State Park was named **one of 10 Florida "best beaches"** by readers of *USA Today* and *10 Best*. www.10best.com/awards/travel/best-florida-beach/

Dog-friendly

Sanibel Island was ranked among the top 10 dog-friendly vacations in the United States by *bringfido.com*. The island offers pet friendly hotels, events, restaurants and parks and beaches for dogs to enjoy. www.bringfido.com/destination/

Upcoming special events and festivals

Cape Coral Festival of the Arts, Cape Coral

Jan. 14-15, 2017

www.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. 3-5, 2017

<http://artfestfortmyers.com/artfest-overview/>

On the waterfront in downtown Fort Myers, visitors enjoy made-in-USA original art by more than 200 artists. Browse the online gallery to get a feel for the exceptional quality. Enjoy food, music and fun for the whole family.

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

Feb. 14, 2017

www.friendsofroverskey.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 are required. The non-refundable donation of \$75 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.

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79th Annual Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers

Feb. 18, 2017

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.

80th Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island

March 3-4, 2017

Sanibel Community House

239-472-2155

www.sanibelcommunityhouse.net/calendar/shell-festival/

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.

7th Annual Fort Myers Film Festival

March 8-12, 2017

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. [Also visit www.fortmyersriverdistrictalliance.com/events/tgim-at-sbdac/](http://www.fortmyersriverdistrictalliance.com/events/tgim-at-sbdac/).

59th Annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade

March 11-12, 2017

239-463-6986

www.fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com.

Activities for the 59th 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.

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Spring Training 2017

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? The destination makes it easy for fans to take advantage of all that it has to offer along with great accommodation deals for spring training. 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

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

Minnesota Twins spring training

Hammond Stadium, Fort Myers

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

11th Annual Fort Myers Beach Film Festival

April 26-30, 2017

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.

MangoMania Tropical Fruit Festival, Pine Island

July 2017

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.

Island Hopper Songwriter Fest: plan ahead for fall and save the date!

The 4th annual **Island Hopper Songwriter Fest** brings music back to the beach Sept. 22-Oct. 1, 2017 when the festival returns for 10 consecutive days on the area's most beautiful barrier islands with a range of star-studded performers. The event is presented by BMI, the largest music rights organization in the U.S., along with iHeartMedia. Visit www.islandhopperfest.com for more information. Once the line-up is announced, tickets will be available to special performances. Most performances are free. Follow the festival #islandhopper on Twitter.

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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.*