



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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239-338-3500

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

Hobie 16 World Championship in 2019, 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, visit www.FortMyersSanibel.com

Save the date and plan ahead: Hobie 16 World Championship in 2019

Hobie 16 World Championships is returning to the USA, after 35 years of events being held in other beautiful locations worldwide. And it is coming to the Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel Nov. 1-16, 2019.

Sailors from around the world will compete in three world championship disciplines: Women's, Youth and Open, and three additional disciplines; Masters Cup, Grand Masters Cup and Great Grand Masters Cup.

South Seas Island Resort will host more than 1,000 athletes and 336 teams on 60 new Hobie Cat racing catamaran sailboats for 16 sailing days. Sailors from 30 countries are expected to attend. In past world events, as many as 7,000 people have attended the championships.

The Hobie 16 World Championships is the only sailboat class in the world to supply 60 brand-new identical Hobie Cats, 16-foot catamaran sailboats, for all competitors to race. Hobie Cat Company will provide the boats that will be used exclusively on the racecourse located just off Sunset Beach at the north end of Captiva Island. www.hobieworlds.com.

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Pedal your way through Sanibel's history

In addition to its bike-friendly paths, Sanibel Island bikers can now enjoy the new **Sanibel Heritage Trail**. A series of 22 panels throughout the island tell the story of Sanibel's historic past including commercial farming, the Sanibel School, the Sanibel Lighthouse and much more. The trail is an easy ride and is concentrated on the east end and middle of the island. There is no start or finish location but many like to use the Sanibel Historical Museum and Village as a beginning point. www.sanibelmuseum.org

Everglades Wonder Gardens in Bonita Springs broke ground on a new tea house that will take the form of a Victorian-era solarium built in France with ornately crafted iron and glass panes. The Tea House and the other pavilions are expected to immerse visitors in the story of pollination with butterflies, flowering orchids, and tropical birds such as bananaquits and Australian lorikeets. Tea will be served in the new Tea House and it will also be available as a venue for weddings and other special occasions. www.evergladeswondergardens.com

Grab your binoculars!

Add to your life-list and take advantage of the seasonal populations of snowbirds that grace our beaches, wetlands and mangrove forests. Lee County counts around 250 different species of birds. Check out these spots along the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail (floridabirdingtrail.com) to watch and photograph birds – from sweet, tiny warblers to majestic roseate spoonbills - during prime Florida birding season.

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island. Easy access to close-up birds have made this a hot spot for birders since it first opened in 1945. Merely cruising along Wildlife Drive, you can check off a number of species, some – like the shy, elusive mangrove cuckoo – quite rare. You needn't be a birder, however, to love watching the behaviors and antics of the white pelican – visiting in the winter – and "dancing" reddish egret. Most iconic, roseate spoonbills flock in the wetlands year-round, but most abundantly this time of year. To see birds coming in to roost, plan a sunset nature cruise or kayak paddle into Tarpon Bay. fws.gov/dingdarling

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, south Lee County. The designated "gateway" to the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail's South Trail, Corkscrew Swamp was originally best known for its colonies of nesting American woodstorks. The nesting season can be iffy, dependent on all the right weather and water conditions, but birders get their rewards in the winter and spring, when limpkins, warblers, vireos and painted buntings are the stars of the show. corkscrew.audubon.org

San Carlos Bay - Bunche Beach Preserve, south Fort Myers. Mangrove and beach habitat combine here to provide legendary birding opportunities. Low tide and evening's roost are the best times to see flocks of black skimmers, plovers, white ibis, roseate spoonbills and even the occasional bald eagle. Saturday Bird Patrol Tours (birdpatrol.org) take place throughout the season www.leeparks.org

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Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve, Fort Myers. From the 1.2-mile boardwalk, you can easily spot gallinules, moorhens, pileated woodpeckers, white and glossy ibises, belted kingfishers, bald eagles, ospreys and a variety of egrets and herons. The most determined birders lurk on the observation decks and blinds the park provides. In the interpretive center, watch a short video about bird migration. leeparks.org

Lighthouse Beach Park, Sanibel Island. In spring and fall, when birds are migrating, a phenomenon known as “fall out” happens at points of land that provide the aviary travelers a rest stop after long flights. Lighthouse Beach is one such stop for weary wingers. Watch and listen at sunrise for small birds in transit, such as rare warblers (more than 35 species have been recorded), flycatchers and indigo and painted buntings. Birders also report peregrine falcon, brown pelican, and shorebird sightings. www.mysanibel.com

Caloosahatchee Regional Park, Alva. A variety of riverfront habitats means good diversity. Look in the flatwoods for red-shouldered hawks and barred owls. Along the park’s biking and horse trails, birders spot wild turkey and swallow-tailed kites. leeparks.org

Eurowings service to Germany

Eurowings has nonstop service from Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) to Munich Airport (MUC) with two weekly flights; three weekly flights to Dusseldorf (DUS); and one weekly flight to Cologne-Bonn (CGN). 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.

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

Margaritaville Resort, a 354-room property is in the planning stages to be built near the Times Square area of Fort Myers Beach. Construction is expected to begin in December and opening is set for early 2021. The resort is a partnership with Margaritaville Holdings, the global lifestyle brand famous for the lyrics and lifestyle of singer, songwriter and best-selling author, Jimmy Buffett. TPI will develop, own and operate the property.

The Luminary Hotel & Co., a 237-room hotel along the waterfront of downtown Fort Myers, plans to open in 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. Outlets: Silver King, Ella Mae's Diner, The Workshop, Beacon Social Drinkery.

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

The **Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa** in Bonita Springs has redesigned its popular **Mangroves Bar** off the lobby. The new space reflects the natural landscape with a design reminiscent of the nature surrounding the resort. www.coconutpoint.hyatt.com

Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) named to top 25 list

VacationIdea.com named RSW one of the 25 best airports in the U.S. saying: "Located in South Fort Meyers in Lee County, Florida, Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) primarily serves Florida's Gulf Coast including Fort Meyers, Sanibel, Marco Island, Greater Naples, Cape Coral, Charlotte Harbor, the Everglades, and Gulf Islands. Area attractions are a quick drive from the airport. This sleek, modern, state-of-the-art facility received a grand upgrade in 2005. Fifteen airlines fly in and out of RSW with nonstop service to major gateways, and international service to Germany and Canada. There are 36 restaurants, markets, and shops throughout the main terminal and three concourses. Airport services include currency exchange, business center, and visitor information services."

www.vacationidea.com/ideas/best-airports-in-the-united-states.html

More airport News

The Lee County Port Authority announced nonstop seasonal service to Miami International Airport (MIA) from Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) in Fort Myers on Dec. 19, 2018. American will operate two daily flights between RSW and MIA. www.flylcpa.com

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Accolades (what they are saying about us)

To learn more about these recognitions, visit the [accolades](#) page.

Best Places to Retire

U.S. News and World Report recently featured Fort Myers, awarding it the #2 spot on its Best Places to Retire List and #41 on the list of Best Places to Live. The publication recognized the area's small-town feel and downtown area filled with shops and restaurants. This includes all of the events and activities we enjoy regularly, including parades, theaters, festivals, historical sites and more.

Best Beaches in Florida

Fort Myers Beach and Sanibel Island were recognized by Thrillist, both earning the designation of two of the best beaches in Florida. Fort Myers Beach was recognized for being a go-to for those looking to have a good time at beachside restaurants and bars, while Sanibel was praised for its world-class shelling opportunities and charming atmosphere.

Best Small Beach Town Getaways

TripAdvisor named Sanibel Island one of its [15 Small Beach Town Getaways in America](#). Citing its proximity to Fort Myers, the publication highlighted Sanibel's white beaches, shopping and dining opportunities and outdoor activities—from deep sea fishing to dolphin spotting. Nature lovers will also be happy to see a shout-out to the J.N. Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

Best Islands in America

[CNN Travel](#) named Sanibel Island one of the Best Islands in America. The beautiful island's abundant seashells and 82nd Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show were featured, as well as wildlife refuges and outdoor recreation opportunities such as biking.

Fastest Growing Cities in America

While we all know the allure of the area's beautiful beaches, there is much more. [Wallet Hub](#) named Fort Myers one of the fastest-growing cities in America. And Fort Myers was also awarded the #1 spot for job growth and was the city with the largest decrease in poverty. We know this has been a challenging summer, but these accolades are encouraging signs of our community's resilience. Whether you call the area home or are a new or returning guest please join me in celebrating the natural beauty, cultural events and community hospitality the area has to offer.

Fort Myers has been selected by *Expedia* as one of the **best hidden gems in America**. *Expedia* highlighted 15 of the top under-the-radar cities in America that will appeal to specific interests, and Fort Myers was named the *best city for families*, saying “Hands-on and educational are part of Fort Myers and the city hosts so many ways for the young minds to learn and play. The Southwest Florida Reading Festival is perfect for book lovers of all ages, and the Edison Festival

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of Light celebrates the spirit of invention with parades, music, and science exhibits. Shell Factory & Nature Park gets you up close to critters from the sea and land. Round out the day building castles in the sand, and cap it off with sweet cold treats at Culver's."

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."

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

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Attractions

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary unveils artists series

The Gallery Café Artists series features the works of four artists and a special traveling Audubon Photography Awards exhibit that will be displayed in five shows through July 2019.

For the exhibit schedule, details and “meet the artists” dates, visit corkscrew.audubon.org/visit/gallery-cafe-exhibits

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.

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

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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.

Upcoming events

**43rd Annual Holiday Nights at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers
November 23 through December 30, 2018 (Event closed Dec. 24 and 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 *10 Best 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.

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. For admission and details:

www.edisonfordwinterestates.org/events/annual-events/holiday-nights/

**34th Annual Christmas Luminary Trail and Open House, Sanibel and Captiva islands
December 7 on Sanibel Island and December 8 on 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

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Walk, holiday concert and a New Year's Eve celebration to welcome 2018. Check the website for a complete calendar.

**Annual Port Boca Grande Lighthouse and Museum Lighting, Boca Grande
December 8, 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
Jan. 26, 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.

**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.friendsofloversonkey.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.

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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

February 22-March 23

17 home games

JetBlue Park, Fort Myers

Tickets go on sale Dec. 1

www.redsox.com

Minnesota Twins spring training

February 23-March 26

18 home games

CenturyLink Sports Complex, Fort Myers

www.twinsbaseball.com

82nd Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island

March 1-3, 2019

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.

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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.

14th 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 2019

239-333-1933

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

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.

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

May 3, 2019

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 8th annual “catch, care, and release” tournament.

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.

23rd Annual MangoMania Tropical Fruit Festival, Pine Island

July 13-14, 2019

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.

Save the dates and plan ahead!

The sixth annual **Island Hopper Songwriter Fest** returns **Sept. 20-29, 2019**. The popular event brings music back to the beach with new artists and new events. The festival takes place over 10 days and offers a range of star-studded performances. It kicks off on Captiva Island Sept. 20-22; moves to downtown Fort Myers Sept. 23-26; and ends at Fort Myers Beach Sept. 27-29.

Visit www.islandhopperfest.com for details as they are announced including artists, venues and great deals on accommodations for locals and out-of-town guests (coming soon).

The festival is presented by The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel, iHeartRadio, Cat Country 107.1 and BMI. It was named one of the top events for summer by the Southeast Tourism Society. Past performers include Midland, Parmalee, Thompson Square and Grammy Award winner Maren Morris. The sixth 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.

For more information visit www.islandhopperfest.com. Follow the festival hashtag #islandhopper on Twitter and other social channels.

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33rd Annual Oktoberfest, Cape Coral

Oct. 18-20 and 25-27, 2019

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.

31st Annual J.N. "Ding" Darling Days, Sanibel Island

October 2019

239-472-1100

www.dingdarlingdays.com

Let's Get Outside Day kicks off the annual celebration with free admission to Wildlife Drive for cyclists and hikers and various free and discounted tours and eco-activities.

Conservation Art Day follows on with visits from Federal Duck Stamp and Junior Duck Stamp winners and nature art workshops.

Family Fun Day culminates the weekend with free activities. It features all-free refuge tours, live wildlife presentations, archery clinics, hot dogs, live music, and kids' nature crafts. Cool Kids Zone will provide activities in the Visitor & Education Center, so families can come in to cool off. It will include puppet shows, story and crafts, DIY nature crafts, face-painting, and a selfie photo station. Check website for schedule.

37th Annual Taste of the Town, Fort Myers

November 2019

www.jlfm.org

Alliance for the Arts

Join the Junior League of Fort Myers for a great day of food, music and kids entertainment for the 36th 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 2019

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.

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14th Annual Sanibel Island Writers Conference

November 2019

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.

33rd Annual American Sand Sculpting Championship, Fort Myers Beach

November 2019

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.

For the latest information on the area's many accommodation choices, events 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 and Lehigh Acres. For media assistance, visit www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/media-central/