



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Third 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

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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.

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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/*