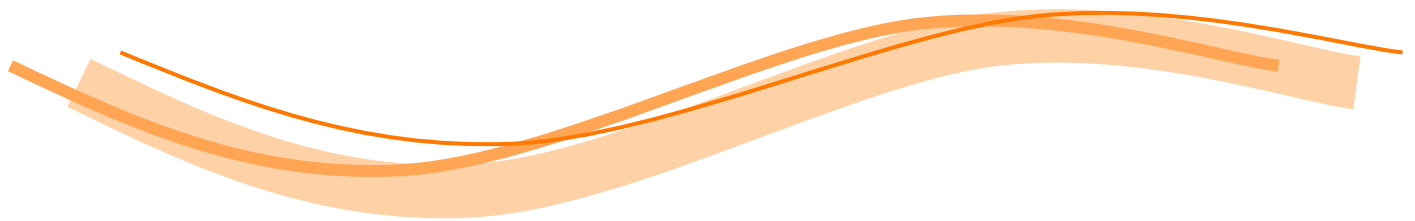




BEACHES OF FORT MYERS & SANIBEL, FLORIDA





FORT MYERS & SANIBEL

You can still find the Florida of days long past - with unspoiled white sand beaches, exotic wildlife and lush subtropical foliage - in the Fort Myers and Sanibel Island area in the south west region of the state.

This subtropical paradise is a favourite vacation spot for visitors from around the world. Escape the more congested areas for a feel of old Florida - it's the perfect sanctuary for families to reconnect with loved ones in a quiet, natural setting. With surroundings conducive to refocusing on what's really important in life, visitors find a sense of inner peace as they submerge themselves in the natural wilderness.

Few destinations in the world have such an unspoiled sandy coastline as the Fort Myers Sanibel region. Add the subtropical climate and warm Gulf waters - and it's everyone's fantasy island vacation. A family friendly destination, the beaches have soft, white sand that's great for little toes. You can collect the abundant beautiful shells – kept intact by the gentle wave action. And there is lots of water based recreation to choose from.

For divers the Coast Guard Cutter USS Mohawk rests in 90 feet of water, roughly 28 nautical miles off Sanibel Island. The Mohawk is swarming with fish inside and out. Divers report many species of fish, sea turtles and bull sharks - and have even spotted whale sharks, the world's largest living fish with a maximum size of about 65 feet.

And if shopping and spas are your ideal recreation – there are Outlet Malls, high end retailers, local boutiques, artist's stores, antique markets and more. Plus multitudes of unique spa treatments waiting to help you escape the stress of everyday life.

There's no shortage of recreational activities and adventures in The Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel. There's the renowned shell collecting, of course, and fabulous bird watching for nature lovers. The "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, part of the largest mangrove ecosystem in the United States, is home to wildlife and many migratory birds. The refuge features delightful footpaths, winding canoe/kayak trails and a four-mile scenic drive, all of which are lush with seagrape, wax and salt myrtles, red mangrove, cabbage or sabal palms and other native plant varieties.

Sixteen sites in the Fort Myers and Sanibel area form part of the South Florida Birding Trail. And the Great Calusa Blueway treats paddling enthusiasts to nearly 190 kms of clearly marked waterways and trails. Kayak or canoe where Calusa Indians once traveled, past pristine

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islands and waters that are teeming with wildlife.

Southwest Florida is prime country for bike riding and hiking all year round. Sanibel offers more than 32 kms of easily accessible, family-friendly bike paths, and a safe way to explore. Pine flatwoods and cypress swamps along the Caloosahatchee Regional Park trails offer challenges for seasoned mountain bikers and hikers. And the hard-packed sand of Fort Myers Beach invites gentle rides and walks tracing the water's edge at sunset.

Discover tropical gardens - or learn about the ocean at the Sanibel Sea School. The Sea School offers half and full day courses and is dedicated to vibrantly teaching children and adults about marine ecosystems – animals, people, plants, land, ocean and weather. Students have the opportunity to touch, feel and interact with natural surroundings.

The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum mounts exhibits to educate the public about mollusks and the hard exoskeletons they leave behind. With ties to the Smithsonian Institution, it is home to shells of southwest Florida as well as huge and rare specimens from around the world.

Without a doubt, the most famous homes in the Fort Myers and Sanibel area are those of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. Both of these fascinating historical figures had winter estates in the area.

Built in 1886, both the main home and guesthouse on Edison's 14-acre estate are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Even the road fronting the estates is historically significant. For 24 kms the boulevard is lined with towering royal palm trees, the first 200 of which were imported from Cuba and planted by Edison himself.

Visitors tour the inventor's two-story home, office, laboratory and experimental gardens, all of which have been meticulously preserved and maintained as they were when Edison was alive. While the estate's museum features rare antique automobiles, photographs and exhibits of some of his nearly 1,100 patents, the gardens remain lush with rare, tropical vegetation, including a banyan tree that measures 400 feet around. It's reputed to be the largest of its kind in the U.S. His friend, industrialist Harvey Firestone, gave the banyan tree to Edison.

Automobile magnate Henry Ford purchased the three-acre estate next door to Edison's in 1916. Named "Mangoes," the home has undergone extensive renovation to restore it to the days when Ford and his wife

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	<p>Clara lived there. In addition to tours of the home, visitors also may view a 1914 Model T, a 1917 Ford truck and a 1929 Model A.</p> <p>Sports enthusiasts will find that the area's reputation for excellent golfing is well deserved - it is known for its rich golf history, championship courses designed by legends and an endless selection of choices available year-round. Local courses provide opportunities for golfers of all levels - from golf resorts to public municipal courses to exclusive clubs that allow public play. There is also incredible fishing year round - this is "The Tarpon Capital of the World". Whether you are offshore, on the flats or surf fishing - when you find the right spot you'll know it, because the fish will be biting...</p>
Location	Southwest Florida's Gulf Coast, between Naples and Sarasota (Lee County, between Collier and Charlotte counties).
Geography	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.
Name	<p>It is believed that Spanish pirate Jose Gaspar may have lived in Pine Island Sound during the early 1800s. Legend has it that the central location enabled him to establish headquarters on Sanibel Island (Santa Isybella Island) and bury his ill-gotten gains on Gasparilla Island. Further, it's been said that Captiva Island (translated from Isle de los Captivas) was so named because Gaspar kept his ransomed female prisoners there.</p> <p>Fort Myers was named in honour of Colonel Abraham C. Myers, who wed the daughter of Major General David E. Twiggs, then commanding Fort Brooke in Tampa.</p>
Population	Approximately 515,000 people live year-round in Lee County and 58,000 live in Fort Myers city.
Language	English
Currency	US Dollar – the current rate is \$1 CDN = 80 cents US as at October 2017
Tipping	<p>The custom of tipping is a common practice in the US: 15% to 20% for waiters; 10% to 15% for taxi drivers; \$1 per bag for bellmen.</p> <p>Occasionally gratuities are automatically added to restaurant checks, but not usually.</p>
Government	Fort Myers is governed by a six member city council. Each member is elected from a single member ward. The mayor is elected in a citywide vote.
Documentation	Passports are required for Canadian visitors.
Time zone	Eastern Standard Time, same as Toronto and Montreal
Health	Excellent services available but ensure that you have travellers' health

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	insurance as health costs in the US can be very high.
Safety tips	This is a relatively safe destination for the tourist. One should use the same precautions as when traveling anywhere - try not to travel alone and avoid deserted areas at night.

CLIMATE	
General climate	<p>This destination has a warm and humid subtropical climate, and there are two major seasons each year. One of those seasons is hot and rainy, lasting from April until October (roughly coinciding with the Atlantic hurricane season). The other is a cooler season (November through March) that brings more moderate temperatures and less frequent rainfall.</p> <p>October - May Average Daily Temperatures Days - 22 C to 27 C Nights - 16 C to 20 C</p> <p>June - September Average Daily Temperatures Days - Upper 27 C to 32 C Nights - 20 C to 25 C</p>
Today's weather	Fort Myers is 26C and sunny with possibility of showers on 21 st October 2017
Best time to visit	This is very much a year-round destination, but it has a particular attraction for Canadians in Winter as an escape from the cold northern snows and freezing temperatures. However the summer season is becoming more popular too as there are so many events happening locally in the summer months. January to April is high season in Fort Myers.

GETTING AROUND	
Getting There	<p>Nonstop flights between Fort Myers and Toronto are operated by Air Canada rouge. Rouge is the leisure destination subsidiary of Air Canada. Toronto flights use 136 seat Airbus 319 aircraft. Seasonal service to Montreal continues to be operated by Air Canada. WestJet offer daily flights from Toronto to Southwest Florida International Airport in Fort Myers and frequent connections from Montreal. There is also a direct service from Ottawa.</p> <p>The airport's website is http://www.flylcpa.com/</p>
Cities	<p>Fort Myers</p> <p>The Fort Myers Downtown Streetscape has been awarded the International Making Cities Livable (IMCL) Award for "the inviting, healthy environment created in its dense urban core through the Downtown Streetscape project." The accolade was given "In recognition of the extensive landscaping, refurbishment and traffic calming that greatly improved the quality of life for everyone, creating a downtown with a genuinely urban character."</p>

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	<p>The Fort Myers Downtown Streetscape Project was completed in 2010 after a four-year, 54-block utility replacement and streetscape renovation. The project has previously won five state-wide awards from public works, planning, engineering and redevelopment associations. Since its completion, over 30 new businesses have opened up in downtown and attendance at special events has increased substantially. www.livablecities.org .</p>
Distances	<p>Fort Myers is 250 km west of Miami – about 2.5 hours driving time – and a similar distance south of Orlando. It is just under 2,000 kms from Toronto.</p>
Ferries	<p>Key West Express Enjoy the tropical island paradise of Key West in just 3½ hours when you travel from Fort Myers Beach to America’s southernmost city with the Key West Express. Modern and spacious jet-powered vessels offer year-round high-speed service to the vacation spot of pirates, poets, presidents and partygoers. Enjoy a tropical drink from the bar or bite to eat from the galley. Watch movies from any of the many big screen satellite TVs, lounge in one of the climate controlled cabins, or take in the beauty of the Gulf of Mexico from the sundecks. Getting there is half the fun when traveling with Key West Express. Stay a day or for an extended stay. www.seakeywestexpress.com</p> <p>The passenger ferry, the "Cayo Costa Star," transports visitors for a day or overnight to Cayo Costa State Park to enjoy the beaches, shelling, nature trails and swimming in the Gulf of Mexico. The “Cayo Costa Star” departs daily at 9:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. Reservations are required. Two-hour cruises on the Calusa Star, a 32-passenger pontoon boat, features Calusa mound viewing on Pine Island Sound in conjunction with Randell Research Center. For more information visit www.tropicstarcruises.com .</p>
Boats	<p>The 60-foot paddleboat Indian Princess arrived recently in Fort Myers Beach to transport passengers through the back bays of Estero Island and up the Caloosahatchee River. The double-deck vessel, an authentic replica of an American steamship, seats 85 on its lower deck. Unless reserved for a private charter, the Indian Princess offers daily cruises from 2-4 p.m. and at sunset. www.indianprincessfortmyers.com</p>
Car Rental	<p>All major car rental companies are represented at the airport.</p>
ACCOMMODATION TYPES	<p>There are more than 20,000 rooms ranging from inexpensive motels to idyllic cottages to condominiums and full-service resort properties. There are also more than 3,500 campsites in the Lee County area’s 29 RV parks equipped with electrical & sewer hookups, as well as 13 RV parks with spaces for tent camping.</p>

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	<p>Here are some examples:</p> <p>The Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort and Spa: Located between Fort Myers and Naples, surrounded by swaying palms and the waters of the Gulf Coast – the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort and Spa is a true tropical paradise. Family memories are waiting to be made at this resort! WiFi is available in the rooms and there are 4 à la carte restaurants.</p> <p>The Outrigger: Located beach front on Fort Myers beach - white sand stretches from the foot of the hotel to the crystal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The atmosphere is warm and friendly and the beachside bar is perfect for watching the sunset. WiFi is available in the rooms and the hotel has 2 à la carte restaurants.</p> <p>Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina: Located on the beach and minutes from Bowditch Point Park, and close to Ostego Bay Marine Science Center. This 4-star resort is within close proximity of Times Square and Bunche Beach. 211 air-conditioned rooms feature kitchenettes with refrigerators and stovetops and complimentary WiFi. The resort offers a full service spa and 2 restaurants.</p> <p>South Seas Island Resort on Captiva: This beach condominium resort is minutes from Captiva Beach. Rooms have private balconies or patios and complimentary wireless Internet. The resort has a full service spa, 6 restaurants and a coffee shop.</p>
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LIFESTYLES	
Kids	<p>The ultimate sandcastle These intricate sculptures at the Annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival each November, take "playing in the sand" to a whole new level. From nothing more than a beach of sand and 300 gallons of water, about 20 master sculptors erect monuments of elaborate complexity. This popular event attracts more than 65,000 visitors each year and the public is invited to stroll the beach free-of-charge to view this open-air gallery of sand creations that bear little resemblance to those you created as a kid!</p> <p>Imaginarium Hands-on Museum and Aquarium is a fun-filled, interactive learning centre that encourages visitors of all ages to explore the principles of science, the mysteries of the humanities and the geographical region. Visitors may experience a hurricane-simulator, fossil dig, puppet theatre and a marine touch tank. www.cityftmyers.com/imaginarium</p>

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	<p>Zoomers, an 18-acre amusement park in Fort Myers, has opened with a roller coaster, bumper boats, mini golf, go-cart track and a video game arcade. 239-481-9666 or www.zoomersamusementpark.com .</p>
<p>Teens</p>	<p>Shelling Avid collectors come from all over the world to comb The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel to take advantage of the abundant treasures from the sea. A passion for shelling will soon turn into obsession as the success of a vacation for many is often judged by the number of shells collected. The area’s famous beaches have been ranked as some of the best in the U.S. for shelling. The shell is celebrated each year at the Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show that has been going on for 72 years. The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum has the largest collection of shells in North America. Shops such as She Sells Sea Shells on Sanibel Island and the Shell Factory and Nature Park in North Fort Myers cater to shell collectors and sell crafts to do at home. With more than 100 barrier and coastal islands adjacent to the Lee County, Florida shoreline, this area is home to 80kms of sandy white beaches that shelter some of the best shelling in the United States. Tourists and residents alike search the beaches for treasures. Some even set out with flashlights before sunrise to find the best specimens washed ashore. The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel yields some 400 species of multi-coloured seashells, from the commonplace scallop and clam to the exotic tulips, olives, fragile paper fig shells and the rarest of them all, the brown speckled junonia. Considered a “once in a lifetime” find, stumbling across a junonia will get your photo in the local Sanibel newspaper. Sanibel Island is widely celebrated for its shelling potential. Even the island’s configuration encourages shelling with its boomerang or shrimp shape that slows down the shells and brings them onto the beach in one piece. While many islands face northwest, Sanibel runs in a more east-west direction, a distinct advantage. A wide plateau of relatively shallow water and sandy bottom adjoins Sanibel on the south side of the island. This gradual slope of the Gulf of Mexico bottom acts like a ramp where large numbers of shells roll onto the beach, especially when driven by storms from the northwest. Such storms are common in December and January when mild cold fronts pass through Florida. He notes that the gentle slope assures that even more shells arrive in undamaged condition.</p> <p>Fossil Expeditions Guided fossil-collecting for all ages. Fossils from ancient sharks including the giant Megalodon, sea cows, dolphins, camels, mammoths,</p>

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	<p>mastodons, horses, ground sloth and saber-toothed cats. The fossils identified by fossil author and guide. http://www.fossilexpeditions.com</p> <p>Sun Splash Family Waterpark Slide into fun at Sun Splash Family Waterpark which offers 14 acres of watery adventure for all ages. Enjoy three new speed slides including Thunder Bump, Terror Tube and X-celator; as well as the popular Main Stream River inner tube ride, Lily Pads and a Tot Spot kiddie area featuring interactive squirt works, sand volleyball and Birthday Splash Zone. www.SunSplashWaterpark.com</p>
<p>Romance</p>	<p>Captiva Island has been ranked one of the country's "most romantic beaches" for two consecutive years by Stephen Leatherman, Ph.D., recognized as the nation's foremost beach authority.</p>
<p>Honeymoons & Weddings</p>	<p>Getting married in a beautiful beach setting is all about location, and this popular wedding destination offers many choices and packages for a picture-perfect backdrop.</p> <p>Balmy breezes, endless Gulf beaches and year-round sunshine make southwest Florida's Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel one of the world's most romantic wedding destinations. For those seeking a secluded spot for a wedding in paradise, the area offers every accommodation and setting to make your special day unforgettable.</p> <p>With the popularity of destination weddings in tropical locales, area resorts and hotels offer special packages and options that make this the perfect time to plan a wedding that is affordable for the wedding party and guests.</p> <p>Who can resist a wedding under a gazebo at Lovers Key, Florida's most romantic state park? Lovers Key's secluded Gulf-front setting resulted in recognition as Florida's most romantic state park, and it is a preferred site for beachside weddings and the party that follows. Or sail away on the Sanibel Princess, a 100-foot luxury yacht that accommodates 103 wedding guests for a fairytale ceremony and reception surrounded by the beauty of the Gulf of Mexico.</p> <p>For a riverfront setting steeped in history, the beautiful and tropical landscape of the Edison & Ford Winter Estates will make unforgettable memories with a backdrop of royal palms, historic bamboo, orchids and other exotic plants.</p>
<p>Zoomers</p>	<p>Many Canadian Seniors have winter homes in this area or are "Snowbirds" on a regular basis. It's ideally suited to warm winter days of leisure a million miles away from the harsh Canadian winter.</p>
<p>UNIQUES</p>	<p>The walls of Cabbage Key's historic inn are papered in more than 30,000 autographed dollar bills. The inn, built by playwright Mary Roberts Rinehart and her son in 1938, serves breakfast, lunch and</p>

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	<p>dinner to guests and boaters at Milemarker 60 on the Intracoastal Waterway.</p> <p>Koreshan State Historic Site in Bonita Springs commemorates an eccentric religious sect, which believed the world to be a hollow globe, with mankind residing on the inner surface, gazing into the universe below.</p> <p>Lee County area beaches are ranked some of the best in the nation for shelling, with more varieties found here than anywhere else in North America. The shelling posture is so common; it's given a name – the Sanibel Stoop and the Captiva Crouch.</p>
<p>Surprising</p>	<p>Kayak fishing along The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel</p> <p>This sport is growing as fishing enthusiasts and paddlers realize the thrill and challenges of being at fish level in the shallows when they land large fish from a small boat. Kayak fishing is the largest growth sector of the fishing and paddle sports markets. Kayak manufacturers are trending toward kayaks specific to anglers and their needs, including those with rod holders, bait wells, pedals (so you can move hands-free), light-weight anchors (so you can leave your boat and wade fish), and more.</p> <p>Being close to wildlife in the area's estuaries, results in encountering snook, redfish, sea trout, and tarpon. There are many advantages of kayak fishing in southwest Florida. The cost is low because you save on gas! There is no wait to launch a boat and launch sites are plentiful. Using a stealth-like paddling technique, it is possible to access flats where powerboats cannot venture.</p>
<p>History</p>	<p>Given the area's wealth of natural resources, it's no surprise that the Fort Myers/Sanibel area in southwest Florida is also rich in history. An abundance of intriguing attractions and museums throughout the county will satisfy visitors seeking a different perspective on the nation's heritage. The Calusa Indians were the first to discover the charms of the Fort Myers/Sanibel area as long ago as 5,000 B.C.</p> <p>Much of southwest Florida's earliest, most colorful history can be found on and around the barrier islands that dot its coastline. Because their beauty can be enjoyed by land or water, these islands are popular among boaters and beachcombers. They also have long been a Mecca for explorers, including Ponce de Leon who discovered Sanibel and Captiva in 1513.</p> <p>By 1900, sea captains and farmers were homesteading the islands. And in 1925, inventor Clarence Chadwick converted Captiva into a key lime plantation. Today, Chadwick's plantation is the 330-acre South Seas Resort. While some information is based on oral history, most of the background on the area's most noteworthy people and places can be</p>

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	<p>verified. Carbon dating, for instance, reveals that southwest Florida was the cultural centre of the Calusa Indians. Evidence of the now-extinct tribe remains in the shell mounds and other artifacts found on several islands along the coast.</p> <p>Impressive historical proof of the Calusa Indian's shell mounds reside on Mound Key, a state-designated historical site in Estero Bay behind Fort Myers Beach. Accessible only by boat, the key is a favorite with history buffs and archaeologists. One of the best ways to learn about the tiny island and its first inhabitants is on a boat tour. The area's historical archeological records start 12,000 years ago, including the period from 1513, when the first Europeans arrived, until the mid-1700s, when the Calusa Indians vanished.</p> <p>In 1912, advertising entrepreneur Barron Collier bought the nearby 100-acre Useppa Island and developed it as a resort for the rich and famous.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the duPont family had founded Boca Grande, renowned for being rich in fish, on Gasparilla Island. Today, the island's well-heeled visitors and fishing aficionados range from movie stars and moguls to political heavyweights like the Bush family. During the winter, several generations of Bushes (including both the former U.S. presidents, and ex Florida's governor) often gather there for the holidays.</p>
Books	<p>Lonely Planet's Florida is the recommended guide book. http://shop.lonelyplanet.com/north-america/florida-travel-guide-7/</p>
1000 Places to See Before You Die	<p>Sanibel and Captiva Island – a beachcomber's paradise Key West – just a ferry ride away Everglades National Park – the 'River of Grass'</p>
Must Sees	<p>Everglades National Park protects an unparalleled landscape that provides important habitat for numerous rare and endangered species like the manatee, American crocodile, and the elusive Florida panther. An international treasure as well - a World Heritage Site, International Biosphere Reserve, a Wetland of International Importance, and a specially protected areas under the Cartagena Treaty.</p>

SPORTS ACTIVITIES	<p>Baseball Spring Training</p> <p>The Minnesota Twins are the fifth team in more than 65 years to train in Lee County. In 1988 Lee County began pursuing the team, which commenced their spring training here in 1991. It was the first time the entire Twins organization had operated from the same place. Immediately on the heels of this auspicious spring training, the Twins went on to become World Champions. Lee County recently inked a deal with the Twins that will keep them in Fort Myers for Spring Training through 2020.</p> <p>In 1993, the Boston Red Sox left Winter Haven, Florida, and headed to Fort Myers to begin their spring training. The Red Sox and Lee County</p>
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	<p>struck an agreement in 2004 to extend the club's stay in Fort Myers through 2019. Upon winning the 2004 World Series, the Red Sox became the fifth Major League team to win the Series after training in Lee County.</p> <p>Tarpon Bay Explorers recreation concession at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island has begun offering stand-up paddleboarding rentals and daily tours in the refuge's Tarpon Bay. www.tarponbayexplorers.com</p>
<p>Golf</p>	<p>1,549 holes on 95 courses in southwest Florida include 47 public courses and semi-private courses.</p> <p>Play at the world class Raptor Bay Golf Club, designed by golf legend Raymond Floyd. Unique to Raptor Bay is the use of native sand and palmetto areas, which are incorporated into the design of waste areas. The course is devoid of any sand bunkers; instead, golfers will selectively encounter these sandy native areas adjacent to greens and fairways. Surrounding the course are 22 acres of lakes and more than 200 acres of native vegetation and nature preserve areas, giving some lucky guests a chance to glimpse a bald eagle or gopher tortoise.</p>
<p>Fishing</p>	<p>Inshore fishing Inshore fishing supplies great year-round opportunities to catch snook, redfish, spotted sea trout, sheepshead, jack crevalle, mangrove snapper and other species. Inshore fishing areas include mangrove shorelines, beaches, open flats, bridges, piers, docks and the many passes and inlets to the Gulf of Mexico. For non-residents over the age of 16, Lee County requires a saltwater license to fish from a pier, bridge, dock or beach.</p> <p>Offshore fishing Offshore fishing continues as an excellent way to find shark, grouper, bonito, barracuda, permit, black fin tuna, cobia, and Spanish and king mackerel. These can be caught above the many natural and artificial reefs offshore. Southwest Florida is reputed to have some of the best grouper grounds in the state. Sight casting to tripletails gathered around floating objects is fast becoming a favorite fishing method.</p> <p>Tarpon fishing Sports-fishing for tarpon has a long history as a favorite Lee County visitor activity. Fighting tarpon are one of the world's most sought after fish for good reason. One of the largest tarpon migrations in the world takes place annually off the shores of The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. Thousands of these mighty fish migrate through Boca Grande Pass and the reefs off Sanibel Island and Fort Myers Beach during April, May and June. Some even reside here year-round, but migration</p>

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	<p>season is the best time to ensure success at this sport.</p> <p>Freshwater fishing Freshwater fishing in the Fort Myers/Sanibel area runs all year long. Inland waters abound with eating fish like bass, crappie, blue gill and catfish as well as shellcrackers and oscar. Anglers use cane poles, plug casting outfits, spinning reels or fly rods. Baits of choice include plastic worms, wild shiners, artificial lures, crickets (in the spring) and fly-fishing flies. Freshwater sources virtually surround land areas, with the Caloosahatchee River leading off hundreds of miles of canals and both natural and manmade lakes and ponds throughout Lee County.</p> <p>Boat fishing Offshore commercial party boats post no age limits, do not require a fishing license, and supply all tackle. Boats range from 60 to 100 feet, have onboard restrooms and typically provide a small galley. Fees for half-day and all-day trips are affordable. Anglers usually return to shore with strings of grunts, grouper, lane and mangrove snapper or Spanish and king mackerel. Most boats for hire are found on Fort Myers Beach. Sportsmen and women with any degree of fishing expertise also can charter a boat with a fishing guide for a half day or full day. No fishing license is required. Spin, plug or fly tackle is furnished, but you can bring your own gear. Target fish vary through the year. Charters cost from a couple of hundred to several hundred dollars for the day.</p>
Horse riding	There are horseback trails in Caloosahatchee Regional Park .
Boating	<p>Southwest Florida Yachts in North Fort Myers has added a 37-foot, twin-engine fiberglass trawler to its charter fleet. Avocet, a Great Harbour N-37, features two cabins, a state-of-the-art galley, and a shallow-draft zest for exploring local inland waterways.</p> <p>www.swfyachts.com</p>
Hiking	There are beach walks, boardwalks and hiking paths in the local state parks, so no excuse for not getting out there and enjoying all that this destination has to offer.
Cycling	<p>This is perfect biking country. Sanibel Island for instance has over 35kms of paved paths.</p> <p>Finnimores Bike and Beach Rental is the place for all your biking and beach needs. Family owned and operated on Sanibel Island since 1985, they pride themselves on providing courteous, professional service along with low rental rates.</p> <p>http://www.finnimores.com</p> <p>The League of American Bicyclists has designated Sanibel Island a Bicycle Friendly Community because of its shared-use path system; convenient bike parking in front of stores, at the beach, and at parks; bicycle master plan that strategically improves bicycle safety and</p>

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	comfort; and promotion of bicycling for health, transportation, and recreation. www.bikeleague.org
Diving	<p>The World War II warship USS Mohawk CGC was deployed to its final resting place 90 feet under water, roughly 28 nautical miles off of Sanibel Island on Florida’s southwest coast on July 2nd, 2013. Creating the first Veterans Memorial Reef dedicated to all U.S. veterans, the official name of the reef is the USS Mohawk CGC Veterans Memorial Reef. The 165-foot World War II Coast Guard Cutter Mohawk is the last remaining ship of the Battle of the Atlantic, having launched 14 attacks against submarine contacts between 1942 and 1945. One of her most famous deeds was being the last ship to radio Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower that the weather was clearing for the D-Day invasion.</p> <p>The Mohawk, or “Mighty Mo,” in full fighting trim, offers an exceptional diving experience, with the ship’s replica guns, huge smokestack, crow’s nest, bridge, deckhouse and massive propeller. Trained and equipped divers descend the smokestack into the Mohawk’s enormous engine room to the giant engine’s inner parts and reduction gear. The sinking of the Mohawk is expected to create one of Florida’s premier diving destinations.</p>

CULTURE	<p>True Tours offer visitors a chance to learn more about the downtown Fort Myers area’s history, architecture, public art, revitalization and even haunted history with its walking tours. The 75-minute history walking tour takes place Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and combines stories of local history and antidotes of the founding fathers. 239-945-0405 or www.truetours.net .</p> <p>Art Walk, the River District, Downtown Fort Myers, takes place the first Friday of each month 6-10 p.m. An opportunity for art buyers and art enthusiasts to meet artists at their galleries during show openings, the events ends with an after party. www.fortmyersartwalk.com .</p>
Arts	<p>The Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center in Downtown Fort Myers is a stately building and its surrounding site is part of the local heritage. The site on which the building now stands was a Native American (Calusa) settlement hundreds of years ago. In the mid-1800s, it became the officers' quarters of the original fort of Fort Myers.</p> <p>www.sbdac.com</p>
Music	<p>Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall</p> <p>The Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall presents a schedule of national Broadway productions, prominent entertainers, dance performances, popular ensembles and classical music concerts year-round.</p> <p>www.bbmannpah.com</p>

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<p>Museums</p>	<p>The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum on Sanibel Island is in its twelfth year of mounting exhibits and educating the public about mollusks and the hard exoskeletons they leave behind. With ties to the Smithsonian Institution, it is home to shells of southwest Florida and huge and rare specimens from around the world. The museum has the largest collection of shells in North America, including the intricate Sailor's Valentines. A comprehensive Web-based system allows malacologists (zoologists who specialize in mollusks) the world over to access the museum's collection online. Shell buffs of every sort may view the museum's holdings as well. A learning lab offers a hands-on area for children and a gift shop filled with unique objects to take home, including a kit to make your own Sailor's Valentine. For more information visit www.shellmuseum.org</p> <p>The Art of the Olympians Museum and Gallery at the Al Oerter Center for Excellence is a non-profit organization home to unique exhibitions of Olympian art, Olympic memorabilia and educational activities. www.artoftheolympians.org .</p>
<p>Festivals 2017-2018</p>	<p>There are festivals galore in the Fort Myers and Sanibel area.</p> <p>National Seashell Day June 21, 2018</p> <p>National Seashell Day at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel coincides with the first day of summer. It reminds us to put our toes in the sand and admire the beauty of sea shells.</p> <p>Many hotels throughout the destination are offering special deals and packages just for the occasion. Special events, lectures, shelling tours, workshops with area shell artists and more will take place to celebrate the day.</p> <p>The Island Hopper Songwriter Fest Sept. 21-30, 2018</p> <p>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 festival includes venues on Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach and historic downtown Fort Myers.</p> <p>Attendees will hear some of their favorite songs while getting a taste of the destination at small, intimate live music venues. This festival gives the audience a unique opportunity to hear the stories behind the songs from the writers themselves.</p> <p>Annual J.N. "Ding" Darling Days, Sanibel Island, Oct. 15-21, 2017</p>

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The event honors National Wildlife Refuge Week and **celebrates** the birthday of the refuge's namesake. Family Fun Day kicks off the weeklong birding and ecofestival with free activities, including narrated refuge tram tours, the Florida WaterVentures Traveling Lab, live wildlife presentations, kids nature crafts and archery lessons. Check the schedule for all activities

The 29th annual celebration ends on Saturday, Oct. 21, with Conservation Art Day, where Federal Duck Stamp Winners, other artists, cartooning, and a refuge photography tram tour will highlight a day devoted to Jay Norwood Darling's legacy as the first duck stamp artist and a Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist.

Cape Coral Oktoberfest, Oct 20-22 and Oct 27-29, 2017

Hosted by the German-American Club, this huge celebration includes German culture, food, music and dancing. Highlights include authentic live entertainment with large musical groups from Germany, along with enough German food and beer to make anyone do the "Chicken Dance." Kids will enjoy the carnival area. Call or check website for schedule and ticket information.

Annual Taste of the Town, Nov 5, 2017

This annual favorite charity fundraiser, sponsored by the Junior League of Fort Myers, brings together music, children's entertainment and more. Each year a great selection of local restaurants participate by offering small "tastes" of their menu.

This year marks the 35th Taste of the Town event, which began in the early 1980s as a public picnic called "The French Picnic," in which Junior League members prepared and served all the food. Since then, Taste of the Town has developed into a locally anticipated event, bringing an average of 10,000 guests from all over southwest Florida.

Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival, Nov 9-12, 2017

The Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival celebrates Cape Coral's reputation in the Lee County area for coconuts, multi-cultural food, boating, fishing and wildlife. The event includes bands, entertainment, carnival rides, games, food, contests, fireworks, and much more! There is also a 5K race – the Achieva Credit Union "Coconut run". New this year is a Craft Beer Garden.

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Annual American Sand Sculpting Championship, Fort Myers Beach, Nov. 17-26, 2017

Come and join the fun on Fort Myers Beach for the 31st Annual American Sand Sculpting Championship and Beach Festival. 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.

Annual Holiday Nights at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers, Nov 24 - Dec 31, 2017

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.

Edison Ford Holiday Nights has become a “must see” holiday tradition in Southwest Florida. During the holidays the homes and gardens of the Edison and Ford families are seasonally decorated with millions of lights and historic decorations. Holiday Nights runs from 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. nightly. 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.

Captiva Holiday Village, Captiva Island. End of Nov-mid-Dec, 2017

Joyful sights and sounds will fill the beaches, bays and lanes of this quaint and cozy village. Packed with holiday activities for everyone in the family, this event includes nightly entertainment, tree lightings, Junkanoo Parade, Santa visits, decorated boat and golf cart parades, musical performances, fireworks, and much more.

Edison Festival of Light, Fort Myers, Feb 10-18, 2018

Parade begins at 7 p.m. at Edison Stadium and continues to the Fort Myers Downtown River District. During February, Fort Myers celebrates

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	<p>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 80 years, the month of February is filled with special events.</p> <p>Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island, March 1, 2018</p> <p>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.</p>
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<p>ATTRACTIONS</p>	
<p>Beaches</p>	<p>The destination's 950 kms of shoreline features 80 kms of dreamy, white sand beaches.</p> <p>Natural sand beaches and warm waters provide the perfect backdrop for relaxing, reading and shelling -- discover your favorite beach pastime. Few destinations in the world have such an abundance of uninterrupted sandy coastline, much of it undisturbed by man. Add a subtropical climate and warm Gulf waters, and it's a recipe for everyone's fantasy island vacation.</p> <p>Families will find soft, white sand great for kids, and a few beaches with excellent playgrounds nearby. Couples can experience solitude and exceptional sunsets. And active types can enjoy volleyball, picnicking, shelling, cycling and skimboarding.</p> <p>Great Variety of Shells</p> <p>One of the most popular beachside activities on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel is the collection of seashells. Shelling aficionados come from all over the world to comb the beaches for their favorites, and it's not hard to see how this pastime can turn into an obsession. There are shells everywhere on area beaches, including Bonita Beach, Fort Myers Beach and the outer islands, but Sanibel and Captiva islands get the lion's share. Take the Sanibel Causeway (\$6) to reach both islands.</p> <p>Geography here plays a key role, as shells from the Caribbean roll up the gradually sloping undersea shelf, and gentle wave action keeps</p>

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	<p>shells intact. Find the best shell specimens early in the morning, before the selection is picked over. Shellers share the beach with nature lovers, as beaches on these barrier islands are groomed only by nature, not machines, so wildlife feels right at home.</p> <p>Estero Island Beaches Estero Island beaches are a study in contrasts: Wide stretches of white, powder-soft sand and a gently sloping shoreline about a 1940s beach town gone 21st century. Brightly coloured umbrellas propped in the sand shelter moms and dads watching kids at play, and a lively scene visits the area by night. Times Square, a pedestrian shopping and dining area, does double duty: By day, it's a sandy lunch spot, and by night it's a jumping-off point for evening festivities. Festivals abound here, and two notables are the Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival at Lynn Hall Memorial Park and the American Sandsculpting Championship Festival, which attracts competitors from all over the world – and spectators from near and far. Music emanates from the bars, restaurants and shops lining Fort Myers Beach. Public beach accesses, marked by coloured banners extending south along Estero Boulevard, lead the way to tranquil sands. Sand quality varies, but is generally white and powder soft.</p> <p>Secluded Spots Lovers Key State Park provides couples – and families – a true castaway experience. Ride the trolley or walk the boardwalks over tidal lagoons to a white sandy beach, complete with fledgling sea oats. Sand is soft and powdery. Beaches farther south in Bonita Beach include the county's only dog beach and good shelling. The beach is a mix of sand made from crushed shells and swaths of shells. Remote and sparsely populated, beaches on the bridgeless islands of North Captiva and Cayo Costa offer a secluded, wide-open-spaces beach experience. Sand is white, soft and squeaky underfoot.</p> <p>Boca Grande is accessible by road (there's a \$4 toll for its causeway). Gasparilla Island State Park has five beaches on the Gulf of Mexico. Sand quality varies, but it's generally soft and white, mixed with crushed shells. Some shelling on southernmost beaches.</p>
<p>Wildlife</p>	<p>Bird watching has become one of the most popular American pastimes, and nowhere can it be enjoyed more fully than on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. In fact, such a variety of birdlife thrives here, that it easily can be considered an ornithologist's Mecca. Southwest Florida boasts more than one million acres of nature</p>

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sanctuaries, most of which have paths or boardwalks that allow visitors to easily explore and enjoy. These refuges boast unspoiled wetlands where everyone can experience the beauty of the state in its virgin condition and an abundance of wildlife thriving in its native setting.

Prime examples of such areas and activities include: the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, the Sanibel-Captiva Nature Conservation Foundation, the Calusa Nature Center, Lovers Key State Park, Matanzas Pass Wilderness Preserve, Mound Key, Cayo Costa State Island Preserve, Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve, Manatee Park, Babcock Wilderness Adventures, Gulf Coast Kayak, Ostego Bay Foundation, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, Big Cypress Preserve and the Everglades National Park.

The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, named for 1920's Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist and pioneer environmentalist Jay Norwood Darling, is a 6,400-acre tract on the northeast side of Sanibel Island. The refuge features delightful footpaths, winding canoe/kayak trails and a four-mile scenic drive, all of which are lush with seagrape, wax and salt myrtles, red mangrove, cabbage or sabal palms and other native plant varieties. A booklet, available from the refuge's interpretative center, highlights points of interest and observation towers, where naturalists will get their best view of a variety of fauna and flora.

Meandering through a lush mangrove forest is **the Commodore Creek Canoe Trail**, a 2km waterway named after an early homesteader, and the 5km Buck Key Kayak Trail. For the athletically inclined, Canoe Adventures, Tarpon Bay Explorers and Captiva Kayak & Wildside Adventures rent canoes and kayaks. A guided tour with a naturalist is essential for maximum appreciation of the refuge.

During a stimulating walk, canoe trip or drive, visitors may see one of many endangered or threatened species, some of which are relatively common here. Shy white pelicans, roseate spoonbills (often mistaken for flamingos), manatees, wood storks, bald eagles, American peregrine falcons, ospreys, herons, American alligators and Atlantic loggerhead turtles have been sighted with frequency.

The Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium, located on Ortiz Boulevard, southeast of Fort Myers, maintains bird and butterfly aviaries, a short boardwalk through a natural swamp and several exhibits in a central building. The planetarium, opened in 1986, offers day and evening presentations, laser light shows, lectures and special programs. Field trips and guided tours also are available. Admission is

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\$8 for adults and \$5 per child.

Equally beautiful is **Mound Key**, which is largely constructed from shells deposited there by Calusa Indians several centuries ago. A favorite with professional archaeologists, history buffs and picnickers, Mound Key is accessible only by boat from the southern tip of Estero Island.

Also accessible only by boat, and well worth the trip, is **Cayo Costa State Island Preserve**, north of Captiva Island in Pine Island Sound. One of the older barrier islands along the coast, Cayo Costa is a veritable paradise of deserted white-sand beaches, sabal palms, Australian pines, dense cabbage palm forests and gumbo limbo hammocks. The only full-time human residents on the island are the assistant park manager and two park rangers, who share this natural environment with sea birds and a few wild pigs.

The true excitement of a real Florida adventure can be obtained through Babcock Wilderness Adventures east of North Fort Myers. Here, visitors can travel in a comfortable **swamp buggy** on a voyage through the beautiful woods and wildlife-populated waters of the Telegraph Cypress Swamp to come close to panthers, alligators, deer, wild turkey and boars in their natural settings. Tours run daily, November through April

Interact with a variety of fauna and flora, mammals and reptiles in their natural habitat as you visit a 2,000-acre wetland ecosystem. Stroll at your leisure along the mile-long boardwalk through the **Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve**, a natural "drainage-way" that collects rainfall runoff from a 57-square-mile watershed area, cleans the water as it flows southwest, and delivers fresh water to the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve.

Expand your outdoor activities and tour southwest Florida's subtropical and unspoiled waters in the Pine Island Sound and Matlacha Pass with Gulf Coast Kayak. Explore plant and animal habitats as you paddle through "Florida's rainforest" mangrove system. Nature tours leave daily from 9 a.m. to noon year-round for \$40 per person. Trips to Matlacha, North Captiva Island, and Cayo Costa Island State Park with overnight and weekend options also are available. Moonlight on Matlacha, sunset birding and **manatee watches** offer something for everyone.

Internationally recognized **Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary** southeast of Bonita Springs is a watershed and cypress forest owned and operated by the National Audubon Society. See varieties of wading and migratory birds and other wildlife on 3kms of nature trails through the largest virgin

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	<p>bald cypress forest in the United States.</p> <p>Somewhat further afield, the Everglades National Park and Big Cypress Swamp, home of the National Audubon Society, are a convenient day-trip from anywhere in the vicinity.</p> <p>iNature Trail is first of its kind at J. N. 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge. If you have a smart phone that downloads apps, you're ready to hit the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge's latest innovation. Designed to appeal to techies to get them outside, the Refuge iNature Trail along Wildlife Drive has two components, one for kids and one for adults. This is the first such interactive trail in the 550-plus national wildlife refuge system.</p> <p>www.fws.gov/dingdarling .</p> <p>At Lee County's 16 sites on the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail, new brown and white signs with the image of a swallow-tailed kite, now point the way for birding enthusiasts. The trail is part of a program of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission that spans a 3,200km trail to promote bird and wildlife viewing and conservation.</p> <p>www.floridabirdingtrail.com .</p>
<p>Parks</p>	<p>Lovers Key State Park on Fort Myers Beach and Gasparilla State Park in Boca Grande have been named among the top 10 visited state parks in Florida by the Florida State Department of Environmental Protection. Nearly \$2.5 million has been spent at Gasparilla for beach renourishment and restrooms, while nearly \$3.4 million was spent for park development, bridges, multiuse trails, tram, bayside park and beach renourishment at Lovers Key.</p> <p>www.floridastateparks.org</p> <p>Lakes Regional Park in Fort Myers is getting a new look as it undergoes a \$2.4 million project that will improve the quality of water that flows into Estero Bay and will extend a wetlands area at the north end of the park. Soon to be completed, the park will have more foraging habitat for wading birds and cleaner water for all wildlife. More than 700,000 visitors each year relax, exercise and explore Lakes Park with several miles of paved and unpaved trails, boardwalks, canoeing and kayaking, fishing, picnicking, bird watching and a fragrance garden.</p> <p>www.leeparks.org .</p>
<p>Gardens</p>	<p>Everglades Wonder Gardens</p> <p>Established in 1936, Everglades Wonder Gardens is one of Florida's earliest wildlife attractions. Botanists often refer to its lush tropical tree gardens as one of the finest in the world. Giant kapok, delightful akee, mysterious monkey puzzle, fascinating shaving brush and colossal</p>

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	<p>Cuban laurel trees surround visitors as they learn of life in the vast and silent Everglades. Guests are enchanted as they watch guides feed giant gators. Playful otters perform shows on every tour, demonstrating why they are called the clowns of the Everglades. Other residents include Florida panthers, Florida black bear, American crocodiles and alligators, white tail deer, bobcats, hawks, owls, snakes and wild boars.</p> <p>The Butterfly Estates Located in the River District of downtown Fort Myers, visitors surround themselves with thousands of butterflies at this new eco-attraction. The venue includes a botanical garden and butterfly habitat with cascading waterfalls, lush tropical nectar plants and butterflies that delight guests with their astounding beauty. Admission: \$15 for adults 17 and older, \$9 for children 3 to 16. www.thebutterflyestates.com</p>
<p>Historical Sites</p>	<p>Edison Ford Winter Estates Without a doubt, the most famous homes in the Fort Myers/Sanibel area are those of winter residents Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, located on 17 acres at the gateway to downtown Fort Myers on McGregor Boulevard. For years, the Edison & Ford Winter Estates have been among the area's most popular man-made attractions, with guided tours of the homes and gardens of the icons that lived there.</p> <p>Built in 1886, both the main home and guesthouse on Edison's 14-acre estate are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Even the road fronting the estates is historically significant. For 24 kms the boulevard is lined with towering royal palm trees, the first 200 of which were imported from Cuba and planted by Edison himself. Visitors tour the inventor's two-story home, office, laboratory and experimental gardens, all of which have been meticulously preserved and maintained as when Edison was alive.</p> <p>While the estate's museum features rare antique automobiles, photographs and exhibits of some of his nearly 1,100 patents, the gardens remain lush with rare, tropical vegetation, including a banyan tree that measures 400 feet around. It's reputed to be the largest of its kind in the U.S. His friend, industrialist Harvey Firestone, gave the banyan tree to Edison.</p> <p>Automobile magnate Henry Ford purchased the three-acre estate next door to Edison's in 1916. Named "Mangoes," the home has undergone extensive renovation to restore it to the days when Ford and his wife Clara lived there. In addition to tours of the home, visitors also may view a 1914 Model T, a 1917 Ford truck and a 1929 Model A.</p>

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Other than Thanksgiving and Christmas, the estates are open to the public daily, Monday through Saturday, from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 5:30 p.m.

<http://www.edisonfordwinterestates.org>

The world of the Calusas is the focus of tours offered at the **Randell Research Center at Pineland**, part of the 200-acre Pineland Site Complex on Pine Island. For more than 1,500 years, the Calusa Indian tribe occupied this 200-acre, internationally-significant archaeological site, leaving behind enormous shell mounds, remnants of an ancient canal and artifacts of daily life. Standing historic structures represent Florida's early pioneer history and have earned the Pineland Site Complex a listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The centre allows both a walking tour of the Pineland site and a kayak trip to Josslyn Island, offering informed insight to the archaeology, history and culture of the Calusas.

The Calusa Heritage Trail at Randell is a 3,700-foot interpretive walkway that leads visitors through the mounds, canals, and other features of the Pineland archaeological site. Signs along the trail provide visitors with detailed information regarding the Calusa Indians. The trail also features observation platforms atop the site's tallest shell mound. Guided tours are offered to the public during peak season (January – April) on Wednesdays at 10 a.m.

The Mound House on Fort Myers Beach has unveiled \$2 million in renovations. The 1921 period renovations to the islands 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. A stand of giant bamboo shades the little building on the grounds of 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

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	shepherd), the group planned to create the New Jerusalem. Visit www.floridastateparks.org/koreshan
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OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	<p>When you need a break from the beautiful sugar-white beaches, sparkling Gulf waters and picture-perfect year round weather, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel offers unique shopping opportunities to visitors from all over the world. For shopaholics in need of some retail therapy there are upscale malls with designer labels, elegant boutiques and outlet centres with mega savings. For visitors looking for the perfect purchase for a reminder of a vacation in paradise, there are art galleries, museum stores, and quaint seaside shops to fill hours of fun. Antique shops, flea markets, sea shell shops, jewelry stores with inspirations from the sea and more are just waiting to be explored. There is even a salon where chocoholics can refuel and a gallery that will sell you a coconut postcard to send home! An international design centre offers top name showrooms to inspire new home decorating ideas.</p> <p>If you just need a mall for some of your favorite stores, the area has everything from Saks Fifth Avenue to all the major department stores to bookstores and movie theaters (when you need a rest from shopping!).</p> <p>Coconut Point mall, Estero. The recently opened Coconut Point is the place to shop, dine, play and see a movie. An all open Main Street-style shopping destination with Mediterranean Revival-style architecture is designed to fit gracefully with the flavor of southwest Florida. The 135 stores include Dillard's, Barnes & Noble, West Elm, Bed Bath & Beyond, Best Buy, Designer Shoe Warehouse, Golfsmith, Office Max, Old Navy, Party City, PetsMart, Pier One, Ross Dress for Less, Sports Authority, West Coast Surf Shop, Coldwater Creek, Z Gallerie, Old Navy, Sephora and Ulta Cosmetics and a variety of great restaurants. For more information, visit www.simon.com/mall</p> <p>Gulf Coast Town Center, Fort Myers. Also new, this open-air, regional shopping centre includes a Courtyard by Marriott and a Residence Inn by Marriott, along with 120 specialty shops, restaurants and a Regal Cinema 16. Visitors will not want to miss Bass Pro Shops with the area's largest selection of quality outdoor gear, clothing and accessories from top industry names and at value prices. This famous, new outdoor store encompasses a 75,000 –square-foot retail center that includes Islamorada Fish Company Restaurant. Also: equipment for hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing, camping, outdoor cooking and an expansive boat showroom. The outdoor feel is brought indoors through massive log and rock work, large indoor aquariums and water features</p>

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	<p>stocked with native fish species, as well as an extensive collection of museum quality fish and wildlife art. www.GulfCoastTownCenter.com</p> <p>Edison Mall in Fort Myers is newly renovated and showcases more than 160 specialty shops and eateries. Florida department stores Macy's and Dillard's as well as national favorites JC Penney and Sears are anchors. www.simon.com/mall</p> <p>Bell Tower Shops in Fort Myers is filled with upscale shops in a Spanish-style plaza. Major retailers like Saks Fifth Avenue, Banana Republic, Ann Taylor and Williams-Sonoma are just the beginning. Purchases in hand, shoppers can stop in restaurants, then top the day off with a movie at Bell Tower's 20-screen multiplex www.belltowershops.com</p>
<p>Markets</p>	<p>For an eclectic mix of produce, Florida souvenirs, handmade goods, antiques and more, the Fort Myers/Sanibel area includes several fun flea markets. Billing itself as "Southwest Florida's No. 1 Tourist Stop," Fleamaster's Flea Market in Fort Myers may be the granddaddy of them all, with more than 400,000-square-feet of eclectic booths (900 at last count), restaurants and snack counters.</p> <p>Also visit Ortiz Flea Market in Fort Myers and in Bonita Springs, adventurous shoppers can uncover a treasure or two at the Flamingo Island Flea Market.</p>
<p>Nightlife</p>	<p>Cultural Park Theatre Co., Inc. Live theatre with local talent performing in productions of plays and musicals, including both classics and new material. Season runs 12 months a year.</p> <p>BIG ARTS BIG ARTS presents world-renowned music and dance, intimate live theatre, distinguished speakers, arresting art exhibits, fine films, and workshops taught by gifted artists and instructors.</p> <p>Theatre Conspiracy This live theatre and art house movie company offers world, state and southwest Florida premiere plays and art-house movies in its 135-seat theatre.</p>
<p>Casinos</p>	<p>The Big "M" Casino Aboard a luxurious 186 foot gaming yacht, visitors enjoy blackjack, roulette, Let-It-Ride, 3 card poker and the slots, including Wheel of Fortune, Video Poker and more. Unlimited buffet on all cruises, plus, bingo on all 10:15 a.m. cruises or live entertainment on Friday, Saturday and Sunday 6 p.m. cruises. Sails year-round from Moss Marine. www.bigMcasino.com</p>

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CUISINE	Leave your diet sheets at home – you will not need them here!
Food	<p>Between the cities of Fort Myers, Cape Coral and Bonita Springs, and the islands including Fort Myers Beach, Sanibel and Captiva, there are restaurants to suit any budget or mood. So whether you're seeking fare for the entire family from a nationally recognized chain or a romantic meal for two in a unique setting, you'll have no trouble finding it. Best of all, even the most elegant restaurants tend to have relaxed dress codes and will accommodate more casual attire. Some of the most informal establishments even welcome patrons in swim wear!</p> <p>Due to the abundance of fresh local fish, shrimp and clams, seafood is the centrepiece of many restaurant menus.</p>
Wine	<p>Eden Vineyards Winery Wine connoisseurs sample award-winning wines from the southernmost vineyard and winery in the continental United States. Visitors may join conducted tastings for a fee of \$2.50 for the 30- to 40-minute sessions, which continue throughout the day until 3:30 p.m. The winery is located in a natural Florida setting, reminding visitors of the area's subtropical beauty. Hours: 11 to 4 daily. Location: 16kms east of I-75, exit 141 www.edenwinery.com</p>
Restaurants	<p>Roy's, in The Promenade in Bonita Springs, was one of the first in the area to offer Euro-Asian cuisine which recreates the flavors of Hawaii and the Pacific Rim in an open, display kitchen. Menu highlights include grilled miso-cruste butterfish, Mongolian-style short ribs and seared Ono or Opakapaka (harvested from Hawaiian waters).</p> <p>Diners seeking more traditional seafood in a decidedly more casual setting may prefer The Timbers and its adjoining Sanibel Grill sports bar on Sanibel Island. Popular items include its trademark Crunchy Grouper or Crunchy Shrimp, smoked fish, and an extensive array of beef and fresh seafood selections. There is also a children's menu.</p> <p>Ironically, The Timbers' original location is now occupied by Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille, so named for the main character in proprietor Randy Wayne White's island-themed adventure novels. Although it's also a sports bar, the restaurant is famous for its gourmet finger food, fresh seafood entrees and extensive drink menu.</p> <p>Also on the island, The Jacaranda strikes a rare balance between island casual and fine dining. Original seafood dishes, steak, wine and live entertainment in the lounge all have contributed to its long-standing reputation as one of the area's premier restaurants.</p> <p>Back on the mainland, sophisticated, contemporary Blue Pointe</p>

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Oyster Bar & Seafood Grill serves everything from Maine scallops and imported cold-water oysters to more than a dozen types of fish such as black grouper, salmon and walleye. It is located in the Bell Tower Shops in Fort Myers, which is gaining a reputation as a dining destination. Besides Blue Pointe, fine-dining restaurants include Bistro 41, Bacchus & Co. and Cru, as well as a variety of establishments offering burgers, pizza, pasta, coffee and ice-cream.

Seafood isn't the only reason for the popularity of many restaurants around The Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel. For example, as the name suggests, the **Sanibel Steakhouse** started locally and is so big with beef lovers it has expanded to locations in Fort Myers, Bonita Springs and Naples.

Furthermore, ambience is what draws many people to some of the area's more unusual restaurants, including the one at **The Cabbage Key Inn**, north of Captiva and Useppa islands. Reportedly, Jimmy Buffett was inspired to write the hit, "Cheeseburger in Paradise" after eating one of the inn's huge and juicy burgers. The restaurant is almost as famous for its screen-enclosed dining room, whose walls are plastered with thousands of signed dollar bills from patrons.

On a slightly smaller scale, similar décor is featured at the ultra-casual **Barnacle Phil's** on the barrier island of North Captiva. There, everything but the signature black beans and rice is brought to picnic tables in plastic baskets. Ample indoor and outdoor seating as well as dock space make the restaurant especially popular among boaters. To the north, **The Pink Elephant** on Gasparilla Island is also accessible by boat. It is part of the world-renowned Gasparilla Inn which was established in 1911. The Pink Elephant serves continental cuisine with a "Floribbean" flair.

Another highly original spot is **The Bubble Room** on Captiva Island. The unusual layout of this rambling three-story restaurant provides the ideal backdrop for its gold mine of nostalgic décor from the 1930s, '40s and '50s. Its nationally recognized menu features such whimsically named dishes as "Duck Ellington" and "Gone With the Fin," as well as what may be the largest portion of prime rib available in the area. However, some people go there just for the inimitable red velvet cake, Key lime pie and other oversized homemade desserts.

Naturally, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel are home to some of the world's most picturesque, waterfront restaurants. For many years, **The Mad Hatter** at Blind Pass on Sanibel and **The Mucky Duck** on Captiva Island have provided peerless sunset views and eclectic,

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	<p>award-winning menus. Other fine-dining restaurants with stunning views of the Gulf and local waterways include: Windows on the Water at the Sundial Beach Resort (on Sanibel), The Promenade Café at Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa (just east of the Sanibel Causeway at Punta Rassa), The Lighthouse Restaurant (overlooking the Port Comfort Marina in south Fort Myers), The Channel Mark (on San Carlos Bay, just east of Fort Myers Beach) and Vincenzo's on the Bay (Bonita Springs).</p> <p>For fine waterfront food in a less refined atmosphere, check out Joe's Crab Shack, overlooking the Caloosahatchee River in downtown Fort Myers. Deliberately tacky décor, extended happy hours and dancing waiters set the stage for a delightful seafood lunch or dinner against a boisterous backdrop. In proximity, and yet on the other end of the dining spectrum, is The Veranda. The converted home (actually, two turn-of-the-century residences) is a downtown landmark and features a beautifully landscaped, open-air courtyard and a varied menu with Southern accents.</p> <p>Angelina's Ristorante in Bonita Springs received the Wine Spectator Best of Award of Excellence, the magazine's second-highest honor bestowed upon only 878 restaurants nationwide. Local winners of the magazine's Award of Excellence include Bayfront Bistro and Shoals on Fort Myers Beach, Blue Water Bistro and Ruth's Chris Steakhouse in Estero, Chops City Grill in Bonita Springs, Keylime Bistro on Captiva Island, Sunshine Grille on Captiva Island and in Fort Myers, and the Pink Elephant and The Temptation Restaurant in Boca Grande. www.winespectator.com .</p>
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MORE INFO	
Websites	<p>Website: www.fortmyers-sanibel.com Phone: 1-800-237-6444 Email for more information: vcb@leegov.com Connect with Fort Myers and Sanibel on facebook: https://www.facebook.com/FtMyersSanibel Follow Fort Myers and Sanibel on Twitter: https://twitter.com/FtMyersSanibel Pinterest: https://www.pinterest.com/ftmyerssanibel/</p>

CURRENT DEALS	<p>Air Canada Vacations have a deal for air and hotel packages to Fort Myers. If you book your trip by the end of October 2017 you can save \$300 per couple on travel to Florida through to April 30, 2018. ACV offers over 16 properties, ranging from 3 to 4 stars and covering</p>
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most styles of accommodation, from inns, hotels and condos to luxurious resorts.

The Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel website features a range of deals that can be found at <http://www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/deals>
These range from accommodations to cruise discounts. Currently. As at October 2017, there are 48 deals listed here!

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