



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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What's new from Fort Myers - Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods

Valentine's Day fun, art show, new dining and attractions

LEE COUNTY, Fla. (U.S.A.) – Fort Myers' Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods in Southwest Florida continues to provide new experiences for returning guests and first-time visitors. Whether you're looking for great year-round weather or shell-drenched beaches along the sparkling Gulf of Mexico, VisitFortMyers.com is your source for the most up-to-date vacation information.

Sweet ways to make Valentine's Day special

When it comes to romance, Fort Myers and surrounding area offers all the ingredients for a perfect Valentine's Day getaway. A few to include in your plans:

Vow renewals at Lovers Key State Park

This special event fills up fast. The popular vow renewals return for the 11th year on Feb. 14. Couples may select from two time slots, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., for the renewal ceremony at the gazebo on the beach. Each couple will receive a picnic basket that includes champagne and desserts. Cost is \$150 per couple. Reservations are required and there is a 50-couple limit for each time slot. friendsofloversonkey.org/event/vow-renewal-at-lovers-key-state-park

Sweet indulgences

Valentine's Day provides a good excuse to indulge in the guilty pleasure of chocolate and sweet treats. There is no shortage of choices where you can pick up these yummy treats for yourself or your Valentine:

Norman Love Confections, Fort Myers and Estero

239-561-7215

normanloveconfections.com/holiday-gifts.html

Make your valentine swoon with the sweet gesture of hand-crafted chocolates featured in Norman Love Confections' 2022 Valentine's Day Collection. The limited-edition collection features 10 heart-shaped dark, white and milk chocolates, including Raspberry Rose, Berry Smoothie, Passion Orange, Pinot Noir, Grandma's Chocolate Cake, Grand Orange, Tahitian Vanilla, Coffee Latte, Red Hot Cinnamon and Caramelia.

The 2022 Valentine's Collection is available for purchase from Jan. 31- Feb. 4 at normanloveconfections.com or in Norman Love Confections' chocolate salons in Fort Myers and Estero.

My Sweet Art, Cape Coral

239-458-7646

my-sweet-art.com

French pastry chef Yveline Mauclerc creates pastries that are well worth the calories. Whether it's a chocolate croissant, lemon tart, salted caramel chocolate tart, Napoleon, éclair or macaron, she makes them. The café also offers lunch, Sunday brunch and cooking classes.

Noela Chocolate & Confections, Cape Coral

239-SWEETLY (793-3859)

noelachocolate.com

Find an assortment of chocolates with flavors such as almond amaretto, Florida Key lime, mango, turbano cherry, blueberry rumshine, honey caramel and mandarin orange. Also find chocolate covered strawberries, chocolate bacon and boxes with wine and chocolate paired for tastings.

Amore Italian Market & Bakery, Cape Coral

239-800-3938

amoreswfl.com

Enjoy the flavors of Italy with a dizzying assortment of cannoli, Napoleons, fruit tarts, cookies, cheesecakes, cream puffs, eclairs, lobster tails (the pastry kind), cream puffs and the bakery's signature cannoli cake. They also serve New York-style hoagies, salads and offer catering as well.

Aux Delices, Fort Myers

239-313-7426

This great find is known as Andre's, after its owner, Andre Gratesol, who ran a bakery on McGregor Boulevard for many years. His current spot is a little storefront just off US 41 in south Fort Myers right next to Harold's Restaurant. The chef/owner was born, raised in France and trained there. Pastries, croissants, Napoleons, fruit tarts and everything else you'd expect in a French bakery are here. There's no website so you have to go in (before 3 p.m., when he closes) and order from what's fresh in the case that day.

DeRomo's Gourmet Market, Bonita Springs

239-325-3583

deromos.com

It's a restaurant, café, pizzeria, wine and cheese store and an Italian bakery featuring a cornucopia of freshly baked breads, pastries, cannoli, Napoleons, tiramisu, cream puffs, eclairs, biscotti, raspberry tarts and Nonna's famous cheesecakes. A coffee bar offers a full range of coffees, espressos, lattes, teas and more to wash down those freshly baked goodies.

Adventures in Paradise: sunset dolphin cruise

Feb. 14 at 5:15 p.m.

239-472-8443

adventureinparadiseinc.com/cruises/holiday-cruises/valentines-day-cruise

Valentine's Day Sunset Dolphin Cruise includes complimentary soft drinks, bottled water and a special treat. Listen to tropical music as you cruise the tranquil waters along the coastline of Sanibel. Experience of birds flocking to their evening roost, watch dolphins play in the wake, sightsee and enjoy narration by a knowledgeable captain.

Spice up Valentine's Day with a date night at Kitchen Social

Feb. 11-14

239-560-4255

kitchensocial.com

Take part in a couples' hands-on cooking class at Kitchen Social in Fort Myers. Valentine's Day is celebrated Feb. 11-14 and will feature a series of themed classes with delectable offerings that include Creamy Lobster with Homemade pasta, Bourbon Makes it Better, Valentine's Surf and Turf, Bacon It Till You Make It and French Kiss Filet Mignon. Reserve now for a special treat. Check website for times.

Waterfront romance: Valentine Getaway at the Luminary Hotel & Co, Fort Myers

Feb. 10-14

1-833-918-1512

luminaryhotel.com/events/valentines-day-romantic-getaway-package

Available Feb. 10-14, enjoy a romantic escape at Luminary Hotel & Co. that includes overnight accommodations, a welcome bottle of bubbly and a petite box of Norman Love chocolates. Plus, breakfast for two at Ella Mae's Diner and complimentary valet parking.

Edison and Ford Winter Estates offers Cocktail Chemistry Class, Fort Myers

Feb. 14

EdisonFordwinterestates.org

Edison and Ford Winter Estates is partnering with Wicked Dolphin Rum Distillery to offer couples a special Valentine's Day Cocktail Chemistry Class. Rum experts from Wicked Dolphin Rum Distillery will teach the class in the River Pavilion, along the Caloosahatchee River at the Estates. Participants may also take a romantic stroll along the river, while listening to live music by David Rojas. The cost per couple is \$180 for non-members, or \$160 for Edison Ford members. Advance registration is required online by Feb. 7.

Dueling Pianos, Alliance for the Arts festival grounds, Fort Myers

Feb. 14

artinlee.org/event/sharethelove

This Valentine's Day, share the love under the stars and enjoy an interactive outdoor dueling piano concert with a catered buffet dinner benefiting two organizations: the Alliance for the Arts and Our Mother's Home. Tickets are \$50 per person and include dinner, dessert, entertainment and a champagne toast. Gates open at 5 p.m., show run 6–9 p.m. on the Alliance for the Arts festival grounds.

Sunset Kayak Tour at Mound House, Fort Myers Beach

Feb. 4 and 12

moundhouse.org

Catch a breathtaking sunset, explore the tidal creeks and winding mangrove tunnels that extend

into the hidden backwaters of Estero Bay while experiencing the estuary's abundant wildlife in the quiet of twilight. The Mound House provides all paddling and safety equipment, with social distancing in place on land. Cost is \$45-per-person with advance registrations necessary.

Valentine's Day Murder Mystery Dinner, Deromos, Bonita Springs

Feb. 14

239-333-3991

deromos.com/product/valentines-day-murder-mystery-dinner-in-deromos-la-fontana-banquet-room-02-14-2022

Solve a murder mystery and enjoy dinner in Deromos La Fontana banquet room. Cost: \$150 per person and includes dinner, show and more.

Wildlife Sunset Cruise, Captiva Cruises, Captiva Island

Feb. 14 (and other dates)

239-472-5300

captivacruises.com/cruises/#sunset

Relax and enjoy wildlife in Pine Island Sound as the sun sets over the Gulf of Mexico. The 90-minute cruise leaves from McCarthy's Marina at 5 p.m. Check website for price information.

Sailor's Valentines, Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum, Sanibel Island

It doesn't get more romantic than these great works of shell art. Popular from 1830-1890, these treasures were brought back home to a special someone when a sailor returned from a voyage at sea. Today, an original sailor's valentine is a prized possession. Each has a unique beauty and design that's impossible to replicate. For inspiration, the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum, has a collection of authentic 19th-century pieces. And visit our site at visitfortmyers.com/visit/editorial/sailors-valentine for downloadable patterns to color at home and give to a special Valentine. shellmuseum.org

Sunsets and romance

In an area famous for its spectacular sunsets, there is a great location wherever you are in the Fort Myers and surrounding areas. A few favorites:

Tarpon Lodge, Pine Island Sound

tarponlodge.com

Riverside Park, Fort Myers, Caloosahatchee River

cityftmyers.com/facilities/facility/details/Riverside-Park-33

Northshore Park, North Fort Myers, Caloosahatchee River

leegov.com/parks/parks/northshore

Mucky Duck, Captiva Island, Gulf of Mexico

muckyduck.com

Dog Beach, Bonita Springs, outside Lovers Key State Park

leegov.com/parks/beaches/dogbeach

Bunche Beach, Fort Myers, San Carlos Bay
leegov.com/parks/beaches/bunche

Don't miss these upcoming annual events

ArtFest Fort Myers, downtown River District

This three-day festival, Feb. 4-6, offers one-of-a-kind artwork, food, family-friendly fun, entertainment along the waterfront. This annual, juried show brings hundreds of pieces of original, high-quality art created by more than 200 participating artists from around the country. For a list of artists and a show guide, visit artfestfortmyers.com

The 23rd Annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival will feature more than 20 acclaimed and bestselling authors from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 5. The festival will be hosted on the downtown Fort Myers Regional Library campus located at 2450 First St., Fort Myers.

Free and for all-ages, this popular annual outdoor event gives fans the opportunity to meet a diverse lineup of bestselling authors, participate in contests, activities and discover the latest in books and technology. In addition to author appearances and autograph sessions, there will be food truck vendors, storytelling programs, arts and crafts, youth writing contests and a free book for every child and teenager.

The complete list of authors can be found on the festival's new mobile app "SWFL ReadFest" at the App Store, Google Play or by visiting the festival website at ReadFest.org

Island Hopper 2022

Plan ahead and mark your calendar for Island Hopper 2022, returning for its eighth year. A 10-day music festival featuring performances by some of the country's greatest singer-songwriters, the festival takes place in three areas, with the first weekend kicking off on Captiva Island, Sept. 16-18, then moving to downtown Fort Myers, Sept. 19- 22, and ending with a weekend on Fort Myers Beach, Sept. 23-25. Most shows are free with the exception of a few ticketed experiences, like our headliner shows. Stay up-to-date on festival news with the Island Hopper app or follow on social media. islandhopperfest.com

Accommodations news

The soon-to-open Fairfield Inn & Suites Bonita Springs and the newly renovated The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village received Convention South Magazine's Top New or Renovated Awards for 2022. These properties made this elite list of the Top 54 new or renovated meeting sites and destinations in the South.

New dining

Popular family-owned **Jonesez BBQ**, just opened its first, standalone, takeout restaurant in Fort Myers at 13438 Palm Beach Boulevard, Fort Myers. Open 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Wednesdays-Sundays, the new location offers pork spareribs, grilled chicken, pulled pork and pulled chicken and side items are on the menu. jonesezbbq.com

Bamboo Pan Asian Kitchen has opened on Sanibel Island, serving up Asian-inspired cuisine with fresh, high-quality ingredients in a fun and casual atmosphere. bamboosanibel.com

Family-owned, **Vichino's Cafe & Wine Bar** opened in Bonita Springs. Including a coffee shop and wine bar with fresh baked goods made in-house. vichinos.com

Also in Bonita Springs, **El Basque** wine and tapas bar serving Basque Country cuisine from northern Spain and southern France recently opened at Prado in Bonita Springs. Serving lunch, brunch and dinner. elbasque.com

Airport news

New air service at Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW)

Air Transat: Montreal (YUL), weekly, seasonal service

Eurowings Discover: Frankfurt, Germany (FRA), weekly, year-round service starts March 28

New flights at RSW

Sun Country: Duluth, Minn. (DLH), weekly; Green Bay, Wis. (GRB), weekly; Milwaukee (MKE), weekly; Rochester, Minn. (RST), weekly starts Feb. 3

United Airlines: Los Angeles (LAX), daily; San Francisco (SFO), daily

News from Punta Gorda Airport (PGD)

Allegiant service from Akron, Ohio (CAK), begins March 2

Attractions news

Celebrate Thomas Edison's 175th birthday, Fort Myers

The public is invited to celebrate Thomas Edison's 175th birthday at 10 a.m. Feb. 11 at the Edison and Ford Winter Estates. The party is a free public event and includes birthday cake. For more information, visit edisonfordwinterstates.org

Wellness Week at J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

It's the perfect pairing: as part of its 40th anniversary celebration this year and to connect individuals with the natural world, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) presents Wellness Week: Mind. Body. Heart. Feb. 7-12. In partnership with Tarpon Bay Explorers and the Sanibel Rec Center's Heart Healthy Month, Wellness Week kicks off with a ribbon cutting for the new self-guided Mindfulness Trail at the Bailey Tract.

Other highlights include Refuge Bootcamp, a ranger-led bike tour of Wildlife Drive, sunrise yoga at the beach, guest expert speakers on healing through nature, discounts on paddling tours, and guided mindfulness walks. Visit dingwellness.com for details and to pre-register for all activities.

STEMLab opens at Miromar Outlets, Estero

STEMLab, a new and imaginative space located at Miromar Outlets in Estero, celebrates its grand opening at 6 p.m. Feb. 17 with science shows, activities, refreshments and prizes Inspired by the IMAG History & Science Center of Fort Myers, STEMLab is fun for kids of all ages with hands-on activities and interactive exhibits including SOS Explorer (Science on a Sphere),

Google Earth Wall, Animated Augmented-Reality Sandbox, DrawAlive Studio, Hurricane Simulator, and more. theimag.org

Celebrity birders to headline ‘Ding’ Darling 2022 free lecture series

The 18th annual “Ding” Darling Lecture Series will bring seven authors and wildlife and art experts to Sanibel Island, Feb. 4-March 25, including highly acclaimed birding guide gurus David Allen Sibley and Richard Crossley. Lectures will cover topics from bald eagles to ornithotherapy and nature art. Five of the lectures this year are again scheduled at the Community House on Sanibel Island. The venue for the other two will be later determined.

Seating for the free series is limited on a first-come basis. About 200 socially distanced seats will be available and guests are required to wear face masks and have their temperature taken before entering. For a flyer and schedule of lectures, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/lecture-and-film-series

Explore Manatee Park

Visitors are invited to a free tour of the **Manatee Park** butterfly garden and habitats at 9 a.m. Sundays through March 27. Visitors will enjoy walking the ADA accessible paths through the restored native plant habitats and butterfly gardens. A volunteer naturalist will lead the tour. Manatee Park is a non-captive refuge for the threatened Florida manatee. Optimum viewing is now through March. Free tour with paid parking. leegov.com/parks/parks/manateepark

Have fun and save with Fort Myers Sun Saver Passport

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel has launched a free mobile savings passport giving users access to exclusive deals on attractions, restaurants and experiences throughout the destination.

To participate:

- Sign up at explore.visitfortmyers.com
- The passport will be delivered to your mobile phone via text.
- Redeem it on your mobile phone at participating businesses.
- Visit the website for a complete list of attractions, restaurants and experiences.

Tripadvisor names Fort Myers Beach #5 in Best of the Best Awards

Tripadvisor announced the 2022 Travelers’ Choice® Best of the Best Awards for Destinations and Fort Myers Beach has been named the #5 Best of the Best Trending Destination in the U.S.

What they said: “Located on Florida's Gulf Coast, Fort Myers offers its own great beaches as well as being surrounded by some 100 barrier and coastal islands to explore.”

Read more at tripadvisor.com/TravelersChoice-Destinations-cTrending-g191

2022 festivals and events

ArtFest Fort Myers, downtown River District

Feb. 4-6

artfestfortmyers.com

Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers

Feb. 19
edisonfestival.org

Boca Grande Film Festival

Feb 23-25
friendsofbocagrande.org/events/boca-grande-film-festival

Spring training 2022 **check MLB lockout status*

Boston Red Sox spring training
18 home games
Begins Feb. 25 against the Northeastern University Huskies
Ends March 29
JetBlue Park, Fort Myers
mlb.com/redsox/tickets/spring-training

Minnesota Twins spring training
17 home games
Begins Feb. 25 against Minnesota Golden Gophers
Ends March 28
Lee County Sports Complex, Fort Myers
mlb.com/twins/tickets/spring-training

85th Annual Sanibel Shell Festival, Sanibel Island

March 3-5
sanibelcommunityhouse.net/p/84/shell-festival

23rd Annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival, Fort Myers

March 5
readfest.org

ECHO Global Food and Farm Festival, North Fort Myers

March 10-12
echonet.org/events/global-food-and-farm-festival

64th Annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival, Fort Myers Beach

March 12
fortmyersbeach.org/events/fort-myers-beach-shrimp-festival

33rd Annual "Ding" Darling Day, Lakes Park, Fort Myers

Conservation Carnival
April 24, 2022
dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/ding-darling-days

2th Annual Fort Myers Film Festival

May 18-22
fortmyersfilmfestival.com

10th Annual “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament, Sanibel Island

May 13

dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/tarpon-tournament-1

24th Annual MangoMania Tropical Fruit Festival, Pine Island

July TBD

<http://mangomaniafl.net>

Island Hopper Songwriter Fest

Sept. 16-25

IslandHopperFest.com

Fort Myers Beach International Film Festival

September TBD

fmbfilmfest.com

Roar Offshore, Fort Myers Beach

October TBD

roaroffshore.com

37th Annual Oktoberfest, Cape Coral

October TBD

capecoraloktoberfest.com

Lee County Alliance of the Arts 5th Annual Arts on Tap, Fort Myers

November TBD

Artinlee.org/ontap

38th Annual Cape Coral Festival of the Arts, Cape Coral

January 2023

capecoralfestival.com

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Editor’s note: Fort Myers and surrounding areas includes Fort Myers Beach, Sanibel & Captiva islands, Boca Grande & Outer Islands, Pine Island, Matlacha, Cape Coral, North Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Alva, Buckingham and Lehigh Acres. For media assistance, VisitFortMyers.com/media-central