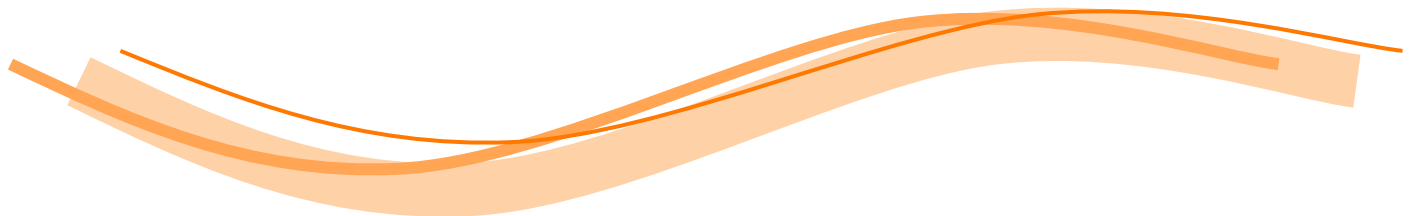




**BEACHES OF FORT
MYERS & SANIBEL,
FLORIDA**





<p>FORT MYERS & SANIBEL</p>	<p>The Florida of days long past, with unspoiled white sand beaches, exotic wildlife and lush subtropical foliage, still can be found in the Fort Myers and Sanibel Island area in the south west region of the state.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>There's a variety of accommodations to fit any budget and abundant recreational activities and adventures, including unique nature and history-based tours and activities (including renowned shell collecting), golfing, biking, incredible fishing, shopping, spa experiences, and much more.</p> <p>There are new reasons for visitors to come and visit, whether for the first time or for a return visit. In addition to recent upgrades to many accommodations, there's a new birding trail and a new paddling trail. Sixteen sites in the Fort Myers and Sanibel area were added to the Great Florida Birding Trail with the recent inauguration of the South Florida Birding Trail. And the Great Calusa Blueway treats paddling enthusiasts to nearly 160kms of clearly marked waterways and trails that guarantee wildlife viewing at its best.</p> <p>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 water based recreation from kayaking to boating to fishing.</p> <p>And there's lots to see and do! Visit the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum. Learn about the ocean at the Sanibel Sea School. The "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, part of the largest mangrove ecosystem in the United States, is home to wildlife and many migratory birds. And discover tropical gardens, historic buildings, and museums at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates.</p>
<p>Location</p>	<p>Southwest Florida's Gulf Coast, between Naples and Sarasota (Lee County, between Collier and Charlotte counties).</p>
<p>Geography</p>	<p>The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida includes: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita</p>

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	Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer islands, North Fort Myers, and Lehigh Acres.
Name	It is believed that Spanish pirate Jose Gaspar 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 Captivos) was so named because Gaspar kept his ransomed female prisoners there. 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.
Population	Approximately 515,000 people live year-round in Lee County and 58,000 live in Fort Myers city.
Language	English
Currency	US Dollar – which is currently over parity with the Canadian Dollar, so there's great value in the States right now for Canadians! (Sept 2012)
Tipping	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. Occasionally gratuities are automatically added to restaurant checks, but not usually.
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 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</p>

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	Days - Upper 27 C to 32 C Nights - 20 C to 25 C
Today's weather	Fort Myers is 33C and sunny with showers on 15 th Sept 2012
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.

GETTING AROUND	
Getting There	<p>It's easy to fly to Fort Myers and Sanibel. There is a direct/non-stop air service to Fort Myers from Toronto on Air Canada - and a direct/non-stop air service to Fort Myers from Toronto on Westjet. WestJet will also inaugurate Saturday flights between Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) and Ottawa Macdonald-Cartier International Airport (YOW) on Dec. 22, 2012. The seasonal service will count as RSW's first nonstop route to Canada's capital. www.westjet.com .</p> <p>Book with Ultimate Golf Vacations - a Toronto based company with a dedicated team of golf travel specialists, committed to providing you with the "ultimate" vacation experience. They can organize all aspects of a golfing vacation in Fort Myers.</p>
Cities	<p>Fort Myers 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." 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 . The Fort Myers Riverfront Development Plan is underway that will add a new dimension to the waterfront of the Downtown Fort Myers River District by reconnecting the historic district to the Caloosahatchee River. The \$150 million plan includes: the water basin feature; a 200-room convention hotel; 100,000 square feet of retail and restaurant uses; two parking decks; a four-acre addition to the existing 10-acre Centennial Park that will also include a riverfront amphitheater; expansion of the existing public yacht basin; and an 80,000-square-foot</p>

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	<p>addition to the current Harborside Event Center. www.myriverdistrict.com/waterfront .</p>
Distances	<p>Fort Myers is 250 km west of Miami – about 2.5 hours driving time – and a similar distance south of Orlando.</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. Fares begin at \$109 round trip with eight days advance purchase and tickets can be purchased one-way or roundtrip. Departs from Salty Sam’s Marina, Fort Myers Beach, at 8:30 a.m. and arrives in Key West at 12:30 p.m. Return trip departs Key West at 6 p.m. and returns to Fort Myers at 9:45 p.m. 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. Rates are \$23 for adults same day, \$29 for adults overnight and \$17 for children under 8 years. Reservations are required.</p> <p>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 will offer 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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LIFESTYLES	
<p>Kids</p>	<p>The ultimate sandcastle These intricate sculptures at the 22nd Annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival Nov. 5-9, 2008, 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> <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.</p> <p>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 71 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.</p> <p>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. In 2007, more than 2 million visitors from around the world flocked to southwest Florida to sample this shelling paradise. The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel yields some 400 species of multi-coloured seashells, from the commonplace scallop and clam to</p>

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	<p>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.</p> <p>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, 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>It is a perfect, magical day for a wedding in this unspoiled island sanctuary. 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</p>

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	<p>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. 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. Or exchange vows at sunset on a private island with all the details arranged by the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa.</p> <p>The choices are endless depending upon the size and budget of the wedding. There are world-class resorts, restaurants, services and facilities that cater to weddings of all sizes and types. From a simple sunset ceremony on the beach to a formal wedding with a reception in a luxury resort, the area is a popular destination for memorable weddings.</p>
Seniors	<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>

UNIQUES	<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 dinner to guests and boaters at Milemarker 60 on the Intracoastal Waterway.</p>
Surprising	<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>
History	<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</p>

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	<p>Captiva in 1513. 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 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 the former and current U.S. president, and Florida’s governor) often gather there for the holidays.</p>
Books	Frommer’s Florida 2013
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>The Everglades National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The gorgeous Gulf Coast beaches define vacation experiences here – among the very best beaches anywhere in North America.</p>

SPORTS ACTIVITIES	<p>Baseball Spring Training 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>
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	<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 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>
Golf	<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>Ultimate Golf Vacations are a dedicated team of golf travel specialists, committed to providing you with the "ultimate" vacation experience. On their website you'll find resort descriptions, facilities and room types, as well as golf course statistics and ratings. Fort Myers area is one of their most popular destinations for golfers. www.ultimategolf.ca</p> <p>With the 2012 Olympics in London over, officials of the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro are planning for the return of golf to the games. After more than a century, golf will return to the Olympics and the Art of the Olympians Museum and Gallery will celebrate this historic occasion with the College of Life Foundation Premiere Olympian Golf Classic Dec. 2-4, 2012. To be played at The Colony Golf & Country Club in Bonita Springs, the tournament will feature Olympians, professional golfers and athletes paired with amateurs in a fundraiser for Art of the Olympians Foundation Inc., the downtown Fort Myers-based museum and gallery. With more than 200 countries participating in the games, the impact of Olympic golf will be felt all over the world, affording many countries that have never had the opportunity a chance to grow the sport. Golf was last played in the 1900 and 1904 games.</p>

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Fishing

Inshore fishing

Inshore fishing supplies great year-round opportunities to catch snook, redfish, spotted seatrout, 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.

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.

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 season is the best time to ensure success at this sport.

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 oscars. 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.

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.

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	<p>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> <p>There are a couple of fishing tournaments of note: 23rd Caloosa Catch and Release Tournament, Fort Myers Beach Nov. 2-3, 2012 Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina www.caloosacatchandrelease.com</p> <p>2012 Calusa Blueway Fishing Tournament Nov. 3, 2012 www.calusabluewaypaddlingfestival.com Becoming the premier tournament in southwest Florida, the catch-and-release fishing tournament is expected to draw 75 anglers to Lee County waterways as part of the Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival. The winner will receive a Hobie Mirage Pro Angler 12 fishing kayak, courtesy of Hobie and Estero River Outfitters. Cash prizes will also be available. Tournament proceeds benefit the Florida Society for Ethical Ecotourism.</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, we pride ourselves on providing courteous, professional service along with low rental rates.</p> <p>http://www.finnimores.com</p>
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 2. 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</p>

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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. 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.

CULTURE	<p>Heather Henson, daughter of Muppets master, the late Jim Henson, will bring her troupe of puppeteers, musicians, and kite-flyers to perform and interact two days during the 25th Annual “Ding” Darling Days, Oct. 14-20, 2012, at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island. The troupe fashions life-sized endangered species and other wildlife puppets out of recycled materials for their improv performances. www.dingdarlingdays.com .</p> <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 received a \$650,000 State of Florida Cultural Facilities Grant for the historic building that has been transformed into an art center. The funds will go towards construction and restoration of the upper floors which will be used for art classes and music lessons, as well as additional meeting and gallery space. The stately building and its surrounding site are 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. www.sbdac.com</p>
Music	<p>Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall The Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall presents a schedule of</p>

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	<p>national Broadway productions, prominent entertainers, dance performances, popular ensembles and classical music concerts year-round. www.bbmannpah.com</p>
<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</p>	<p>There are many annual events and festivals in this area:</p> <p>23rd Annual J.N. "Ding" Darling Days, Sanibel Island Oct. 14-20, 2012 www.dingdarlingdays.com "Ding" Darling Days include a week of eco-activities with free refuge tram tours, live wildlife presentations, kids activities, Federal Duck Stamp artist presentation, art day, family day and more. Birding and kayaking tours, environmental speakers, a nature photography contest, and the Junior Duck Stamp Awards will fill the week with environmental activities for all ages. The festival celebrates the birthday of the refuge's namesake, conservationist and Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist Jay N. "Ding" Darling. The event kicks off with Family Fun Day on Oct. 14.</p> <p>27th Annual Oktoberfest, Cape Coral Oct. 19-21, Oct. 26-28, 2012 German-American Club www.gasc-capecoral.com Hosted by the German-American Club, this huge celebration includes German culture, food, music and dancing. Highlights include authentic</p>

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live entertainment with large musical groups from Germany, along with enough German food and beer to make anyone do the "Chicken Dance." Call or check website for schedule and ticket information.

7th Annual Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival

Nov. 1-4, 2012

www.CalusaBluewayPaddlingFestival.com

Named a Top 20 Event by the Southeast Tourism Society, the festival showcases the 190-mile Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail, which helps Stand-up paddle boarders, kayakers and canoeists explore southwest Florida waterfront communities. This signature eco event includes a family fun race, a kayak fishing tournament, paddling clinics and demonstrations, seminars, wildlife activities, archaeological events, guided tours, and more.

26th Annual American Sandsculpting Championship and Beach Festival, Fort Myers Beach

Weekends of Nov. 16-25, 2012

www.sandsculptingfestival.com

The 2012 American Sandsculpting Championship and Beach Festival continues its tradition as one of the most popular, family-friendly events in Florida, attracting an estimated crowd of 50,000 attendees over the entire 10-day event. With name entertainment, this island-wide festival has been named one of 20 recommended events for November in the southeastern United States by the Southeast Tourism Society. Now in its 26th year, the event owes much of its success to the area's abundant natural resources, particularly the soft, sugar-white sands of Fort Myers Beach, which are considered the best in the world for sand sculpting events. This year's festival will feature 16 of the world's best master sculptors along with Florida State and amateur sculptors. These performing artists will unite on Fort Myers Beach to create their imaginatively stunning works of art.

30th Annual Taste of the Town, Fort Myers

Nov. 4, 2012

www.jlfm.org

Sponsored by the Junior League of Fort Myers, this tasty event held in downtown Fort Myers' Centennial Park features samplings from more than 40 local restaurants. The popular food and entertainment festival attracts more than 15,000 people and includes live music and more along the Caloosahatchee River.

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Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival, Cape Coral

Nov. 9-11, 2012

www.cocofest.com

Sun Splash Family Water Park

The Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival celebrates coconuts, multi-cultural food, boating, fishing and wildlife. The festival will feature a national musical act, gymnastic entertainment, carnival rides, water-ski shows, tropical food, contests, coconut crafts, fireworks, and more. Visit site for schedule.

Taste of the Islands, Sanibel Island

Nov. 11, 2012

www.crowclinic.org

Taste of the Islands is back for its 31st year to celebrate three Sanibel signatures – community, cuisine and the wildlife organization CROW (Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife). Set to the tune of live bands, local restaurants will descend on Sanibel Community Park with their most decadent delicacies from 12:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. and duke it out to earn top honors for their dishes from judges and the crowd.

28th Annual Christmas Luminary Trail and Open House,

Sanibel/Captiva islands

Dec. 7 and 8, 2012

www.sanibel-captiva.org

This popular event draws visitors from all over the world as they join local residents to celebrate the season. Three miles of luminary candles line Periwinkle Way 5:30 – 9 p.m. on Sanibel Island on Dec. 7 and Dec. 8 on Captiva Island. Businesses are decorated for the holidays with 2,000 candles illuminating the island pathways, storefronts and homes. Named a Southeast Tourism Society (STS)

37th Annual Holiday Nights at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers

Dec.1-30, 2012

www.edisonfordwinterestates.org

One of the area's most popular highlights of the holiday season! During this time of year, the homes and gardens of Thomas and Mina Edison and Henry and Clara Ford are decorated and visitors have the option of a self-guided tour or a guided tour with an Estates historian. The traditional event also includes entertainment by school and community groups, culinary demonstrations, book signings, appearances by artists, and the "Children's Tree Trail," a forest of trees decorated by Lee County students. The Edison Ford Museum and Edison Botanic Research Lab will also be open.

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New this year: Edison Ford Legacy Shoppe located in the Edison Caretaker's House will feature replica items from the Edison and Ford collection, including a reproduction of the Edison talking doll. The doll is an invention of Thomas Edison and is available for purchase. Named a Southeast Tourism Society (STS) Top 20 Events List for October - December 2012. See website for admission and details.

Captiva Holiday Village, Captiva Island

Nov. 23- Dec. 8, 2012

www.captivaholidayvillage.com

The two-week Captiva Holiday Village launches its 2012 spectacular the Friday after Thanksgiving with fireworks, tree lightings, holiday readings and musical performances. Now in its third year, Captiva Holiday Village is sponsored by hoteliers, merchants, attraction owners and restaurateurs of Captiva Island.

Each themed weekend will be a fun-filled extravaganza of sight and sound, set against the backdrop of the Gulf of Mexico. Visitors will enjoy decorated golf cart and lighted boat parades to Junkanoo and fire dancers, live music and a Marching Mullet Parade.

75th Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers

Feb. 16, 2013

Parade starts at 7 p.m. at Edison Stadium and continues to the Fort Myers Downtown River District.

www.edisonfestival.org

During February, Fort Myers celebrates the birthday of its most illustrious historical resident, Thomas A. Edison, in befitting fashion. Edison, who built a home on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River and spent 46 winters there, invented the light bulb. 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 75 years, the month of February is filled with special events.

ATTRACTIONS	
Beaches	<p>The destination's 950 kms of shoreline features 80 kms of dreamy, white sand beaches.</p> <p>Each of the beaches has a character of its own – a product of what happens when man lets nature run its course. For families, that means beaches with soft white sands and gentle waves. For nature lovers, the unspoiled beaches are perfect for scavenging shells or viewing flora and fauna. For couples, maybe an isolated spot on a picturesque island where the focus can rightfully remain on each other. These and many other choices are spread over the 80 kms of publicly accessible</p>

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	<p>coastline. The adventure is finding the perfect beach for you.</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 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

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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 \$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

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	<p>birding and manatee watches offer something for everyone.</p> <p>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 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. 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. 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. 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>

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	www.leeparks.org .
Gardens	<p>Everglades Wonder Gardens 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 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>
Historical Sites	<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 who lived there. 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 15 miles, 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. 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</p>

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	<p>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> <p>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. A combined tour ticket for both the Edison and Ford estates is \$16 for adults and \$8.50 for children ages 6 to 12. Children under 6 are admitted free of charge. Boat rides in replicas of Edison’s own electric boat are available weekdays for an additional \$7.</p> <p>www.edison-ford-estate.com</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
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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</p>

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	<p>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 center 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 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>
Markets	For an eclectic mix of produce, Florida souvenirs, handmade goods, antiques and more, the Fort Myers/Sanibel area includes several fun

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	<p>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>
Nightlife	<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>
Casinos	<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. Cost: \$10 per person to board (must be over 21) www.bigMcasino.com</p>

CUISINE	
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</p>

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	<p>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 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. Location: 16kms east of I-75, exit 141</p> <p>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-crusted 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 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Furthermore, ambience is what draws many people to some of the</p>

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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, 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).

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

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	<p>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	
Brochures	Email: vcb@leegov.com Tel: 800-237-6444 for Fort Myers and Sanibel Tel; 800-465-3034 for Ultimate Golf Vacations
Websites	www.fortmyers-sanibel.com www.ultimategolf.ca

HOTEL PRIZE PARTNER	Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa. Address: 5001 Coconut Road, Bonita Springs, Florida, USA 34134 Tel: +1 239 444 1234 Website: www.coconutpoint.hyatt.com .
Location	Located on 26 acres overlooking breathtaking Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve south of Fort Myers, this hotel has recently been honoured with Florida Green Lodgings Three Palm eco-friendly certification. It offers limitless recreation, personalized service and attention to detail at every turn and the 454 guestrooms have views of the Bay and gardens.
Facilities	Stillwater Spa / championship Raptor Bay golf course Multiple pools / tennis / climbing wall / hot tubs 24 hour StayFit gym / on-site recreation planning company Cold-plunge waterfall / bicycle and kayak rentals Hertz / shops / DVD library / babysitting Complimentary shuttle to golf and beach
Accommodation	454 guestrooms with views of the Bay and gardens Hyatt Grand Bed™ / iHome stereo with iPod® docking station Deluxe bath with Portico bath products Regency Club and stylish suites

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Spa	Recharge with indulgent treatments at Stillwater Spa , enjoy the 5000 sq. ft. swimming pool and waterslides, play tennis on one of the resort's 4 Har-tru courts, or simply soak up the rays on the resort's private beach on Big Hickory Island. Epicurean delights await you at the Tanglewood and Tarpon Bay restaurants.
Restaurants	Tanglewood restaurant Tarpon Bay restaurant with live weekend entertainment Kofe Nut coffee bar / Corkscrew poolside dining Mangroves Bar / Belvedere Room

AIRLINE PRIZE PARTNER	WestJet www.westjet.com
Flight details	Daily flights from Toronto Pearson directly to Fort Myers WestJet will also inaugurate Saturday flights between Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) and Ottawa Macdonald-Cartier International Airport (YOW) on Dec. 22, 2012.

CURRENT DEALS	<p>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.</p> <p>WestJet currently (September 2012) has some great deals on flights from Toronto to Fort Myers, starting at just \$139 one way plus \$91 taxes for a total of \$230. Check out: http://www.westjet.com/quest/en/deals/seat-sale.shtml</p>
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