



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

J.N. "Ding" Darling Days, fishing tournament, Hobie 16 World Championships, birding and more outdoor fun!

LEE COUNTY, FL (U.S.A.)— In addition to great, year-round weather, shell-drenched beaches and the sparkling Gulf of Mexico, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida continues to provide new outdoor experiences for visitors to Florida's unspoiled island destination. For the latest vacation information, visit FortMyersSanibel.com

Island Hopper Songwriter Fest returns

The sixth annual **Island Hopper Songwriter Fest** returns **Sept. 20-29, 2019**. The popular event brings music back to the beach with free shows at intimate venues on Captiva Island and Fort Myers Beach and in downtown Fort Myers.

The festival takes place over 10 days and offers a range of star-studded performances. It kicks off on Captiva Island Sept. 20-22; moves to downtown Fort Myers Sept. 23-26; and ends at Fort Myers Beach Sept. 27-29.

Past performers include Midland, Parmalee, Thompson Square and Grammy Award winner Maren Morris. The sixth annual event will continue to give fans the opportunity to meet the talented artists who write songs for country superstars including Tim McGraw, Miranda Lambert, Jason Aldean and Tricia Yearwood.

Island Hopper is produced by the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau, iHeartMedia, Cat Country 107.1 and BMI, the largest music rights organization in the U.S. For more information visit islandhopperfest.com or [click here](#) to access the media tool kit. Follow the festival hashtag #islandhopperfest as well as the event's [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) feeds.

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Sanibel & Captiva Islands Fort Myers Beach Fort Myers Bonita Springs Estero Cape Coral Pine Island Boca Grande & Outer Islands North Fort Myers Lehigh Acres

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Plan ahead: Hobie 16 World Championships in 2019

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

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

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

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

Turtle nesting season

Each summer, loggerhead sea turtles travel hundreds of miles, to return to our Florida coastline beaches. Most adult loggerheads nest every year, laying several clutches of eggs. Turtle nesting and hatching season runs May 1 and lasts through Oct. 31. Unfortunately due to human actions, coastal development, loss of habitat, pollution, artificial lights, shrimp nets or boating related accidents, sea turtles are facing extinction. Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau and Turtle Time, Inc. are committed to protecting our endangered marine turtles. Help protect our sea turtles by following a few basic turtle-friendly rules. For a complete list of rules and more sea turtle information, visit turtletime.org

Sanibel Island celebrates status as *Bicycle Friendly Community*

Sanibel Island is celebrating its recently elevated Gold Status as a *Bicycle Friendly Community*. The League of American Bicyclists raised the previous Silver Status to Gold Status in recognition of recent extensions and improvements to its 26-mile Shared Use Path. It is one of only two communities in Florida to have achieved top status. The wide, paved trail covers the island from one end to the other along Periwinkle Way and Sanibel-Captiva Road, and also takes interesting turns along Gulf Drive and Rabbit Road. The newest extension connects Sanibel-Captiva Road's path to Bowman's Beach. mysanibel.com

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Grab your binoculars!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Attractions

Mound House Eco Tours, Fort Myers Beach

The renovated house on Estero Bay serves as a museum showcasing Calusa artifacts and exhibits. And if you have ever wondered about exactly what is inside a shell mound, there is a huge cutaway of a mound that you will find fascinating.

Depending upon the time of year, visitors may enjoy guided eco-tours. moundhouse.org

The **Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum** on Sanibel Island conducts daily beach walks with a marine biologist leaving from the Island Inn (also on Sanibel Island) at 9 a.m.

Reservations are required. shellmuseum.org/beach-walk-register

Learn about your shells

A new app launched by the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum on Sanibel Island helps shellers instantly identify more than 65 shells found on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. Created by the nation's leading shell experts at the museum, the app allows shellers to snap a photo with a cell phone and the app provides a shell guide with images and descriptions of each shell. shellmuseum.org/shell-app

Events

The **31st annual J.N. "Ding" Darling Day on Sanibel Island** takes place October 20, 2019. Check website for schedule. dingdarlingdays.com

9th annual "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tourney on Sanibel Island is scheduled for May 22, 2020. To celebrate the history of the first documented tarpon caught on a rod-and-reel in "Ding" Darling's Tarpon Bay in 1885, Doc Ford's and the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge have partnered to host the catch, care, and release tournament. Registration is \$500 per team of four, 100 percent of which goes back to the anglers in cash awards. Proceeds support the wildlife and conservation efforts at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. dingdarlingtarpontourney.org

For the latest information on the area's many accommodation choices, events and activities, visit www.FortMyers-Sanibel.com.

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Editor's note: *The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in Southwest Florida includes: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer Islands, North Fort Myers and Lehigh Acres. For media assistance, visit www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/media-central/*