

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 2010

CONTACTS: Nancy Hamilton, Lee Rose, Katie Meckley (239)338-3500

For Valentine's Day: A romantic escape to The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

LEE COUNTY, FL – The sparkling beauty of The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel has all the ingredients for a romantic Valentine's Day getaway on southwest Florida's Gulf Coast. With spectacular sunsets, white sand beaches that stretch as far as the eye can see, sparkling waters and unspoiled natural beauty, the area is as romantic as it gets!

Love connections for Valentine's Day!

Love is always in the air at **Lovers Key State Park**, but even more so on Valentine's Day. Couples are invited to come to the park for a special vow renewal ceremony at the wedding gazebo on the beach from 4:30 to 7 p.m. Each couple will receive a photo taken at sunset, champagne and sweet treats served to music as everyone enjoys the sunset and a quiet walk on the beach. Pre-registration (\$30 per couple) will be required by Feb. 5, 2010, so that all couples will be entered into a drawing for a free Valentine's night stay at Lovers Key Resort (www.loverskey.com). The drawing will be held on Feb. 6. Vow renewal ceremony is limited to 25 couples. For details, call 239-463-4588 or visit www.floridastateparks.org/loverskey.

Lovers Key State Park has been named among the "Top 10 Romantic Retreats" by *Coastal Living* magazine and earned a spot on The Travel Channel's "Florida's Top 10 beaches." Located between Fort Myers Beach and Bonita Beach, Lovers Key was only accessible by boat for many years and legend has it that lovers traveled to the island so they could enjoy its secluded beach. Today, it is one of four barrier islands that make up the state park.

-MORE-

Valentine's Day Getaways at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 2

With its pristine beaches and outstanding wildlife viewing, Lovers Key provides couples a true castaway experience. Visitors can ride the trolley or walk the boardwalks over tidal lagoons to a recently renourished, white sand beach. Guests can ride a bike, hike through the woods, see gentle manatees, kayak through inner waters, fish or have a picnic on the beach. With its 2.5 miles of powder white beach along the Gulf of Mexico and its scenic, secluded gazebo perched above the waters, Lovers Key is also a popular wedding destination.

According to *Coastal Living* magazine, it "is popular, but it still offers secluded nooks and stretches of beach where Valentines can get away from it all."

Sweet treats made with "love"

For a "love" connection this holiday, Norman Love Confections in Fort Myers specializes in handmade, all-natural confections that dazzle both the eye and the palate. This year's Valentine delights include white chocolate raspberry, passion fruit, vanilla latte, Tahitian caramel and much more.

Visitors may stop by the Chocolate Salon in Fort Myers to purchase chocolates or to enjoy pastries, gourmet coffees, lattes and smoothies. For details: (239)573-0088 or visit www.normanloveconfections.com.

Think romance with a tropical twist

Go island hopping. Kick back. Relax. Fall asleep in a hammock to the rhythm of island breezes. Indulge in a sunset cocktail. Count the dolphins. Escape to a deserted island. Rent a kayak. Book a romantic dinner cruise. Browse charming boutiques and galleries. Walk on shell covered beaches. Sleep late. Do nothing.

Couples' getaways and vacation packages are available for all interests. Check out a few ways to escape for a romantic vacation.

-MORE-

RECONNECT

Leave all your cares behind.

Start a shell collection. Relax away the hours. Watch exotic wildlife. Learn why Anne Morrow Lindbergh was inspired to write her best-selling book, *Gift from the Sea*, while visiting **Captiva Island**.

Sleep on an uninhabited island

Book a really rustic cabin or pitch a tent at **Cayo Costa State Park**. Sleep under the stars and walk on unspoiled shell-lined beaches along this deserted island.

Another romantic beach

Many are enthralled by the charms of this area each year and it is no wonder. **Captiva Island** has been ranked as one of the most romantic beaches in the country. Relax in the sun. Watch dolphins frolic. Enjoy award-winning sunsets!

Dine in a Victorian mansion

Watch the sun set surrounded by the historic elegance of the award-winning **Thistle Lodge Restaurant** on **Sanibel Island**.

Escape all ties to the mainland!

Let **Captiva Cruises** whisk you away to an outer island for lunch on **Cabbage Key** or **Useppa Island**. Sunset serenade cruises are also available to capture the beautiful Gulf of Mexico sunsets!

For a really romantic evening...

Take a starlight dinner cruise on the 100-foot luxury yacht, **Sanibel Princess** at **Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa**.

Watch the best sunset view

The Mucky Duck at the north end of **Captiva Island** is a favorite with visitors and locals who claim it has the best sunset views in the area. Aside from British dishes like steak and sausage pie and fish 'n' chips, the menu also boasts Florida favorites including grouper sandwiches and Key lime pie.

Paddle on the wild side

Meander through a lush mangrove forest. See white pelicans, roseate spoonbills, manatees, wood storks, bald eagles, ospreys, herons...all in their natural habitat. Many endangered species call this area home.

-MORE-

Valentine's Day Getaways at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 4

See the sunrise by kayak

Follow in the wake of early explorers. Take a sunrise paddle. Tunnel through mangroves. Travel through the heart of **Buck Island**, site of an early Calusa Indian fishing village. Watch dolphins play. Experience the beauty of natural Florida as your day begins.

DIVERSIONS

It's just silly!

But great fun! Don't miss a dinner at the **Bubble Room** on **Captiva Island**. Electric trains run amok, there are miles of Christmas lights and a tree, 2,000 movie star photos, Superman in a phone booth. Waiters and waitresses are dressed as bubble scouts. There is more, but it has to be seen to be believed. Super sized portions and huge desserts are legendary.

Indulge

Give yourselves a treat and book a spa package at **Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa**. For some real romance, try the **Caloosa Experience**, a couple's favorite.

Mingle with the Vanderbilts

From **Jensens's Marina** on **Captiva Island**, take a water shuttle to picture perfect **Boca Grande**. Pedal down Banyan Street and visit the old **Gasparilla Inn**, a favorite from the Vanderbilts to the Bush family! Have a waterside lunch at **Harpers**. Be sure to visit the historic lighthouse.

Paddle the trails of the Great Calusa Blueway

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel offer hundreds of paddling opportunities for beginners and experts alike. **The Great Calusa Blueway Paddling Trail** is comprised of 190 miles of marked waterways and trails along the Gulf of Mexico coast. Explore calm waters. See spectacular birding. Experience dolphin in the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve. Take in Mound Key State Archaeological Site, believed to have been the capital of the Calusa Indian nation some 2,000 years ago.

Peek inside two of the area's famous estate homes

Visit the beautiful homes (**Edison & Ford Winter Estates**) of famous next-door neighbors, Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. Located on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River in Fort Myers, tour botanical gardens, Edison's laboratory and a museum with the world's largest collection of his inventions and memorabilia. The Estates are also a popular site for memorable weddings.

Have Some Fun

Mail a coconut (yes...mail!) with a message back home from the **Lovegrove Gallery & Gardens on Pine Island**. Pick out your favorite message: "We are never coming home!"

-MORE-

Valentine's Day Getaways at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 5

Push some pedals!

Rent bikes and explore 23 miles of paved bike paths on **Sanibel Island**. There are even bikes for two! Meander through shopping areas, past beautiful gulf homes, tour through diverse parts of the island. Quaint shops and restaurants provide fun rest stops. Wheelchair bikes are available.

What is a romantic getaway without some shopping?

Stroll along **Captiva's** picture-perfect **Andy Rosse Lane** and its eclectic galleries. Stop in the pastel-colored **Seaweed Gallery**, a whimsical place filled with work from both up-and-coming and established artists. Mediums include paintings, furniture, jewelry, glass and pottery. Nearby is **Jungle Drums**, "The Ultimate Wildlife Gallery," which showcases works in bronze, glass, clay, mixed media, resin, wood and others. Be sure to check out the hand-painted Adirondack chairs - they'd make a great reminder of Captiva's laid-back lifestyle. And if you seek something unusual, visit the colorful galleries of **Matlacha** and **Pine Island**.

Share a Cheeseburger in Paradise

Head for this beautiful tropical island and leave a dollar at **Cabbage Key's** historic restaurant and inn, where the walls are covered with thousands of signed dollar bills (a tradition that began when a thirsty fisherman left a bill taped to the wall to make sure he would have a cold drink during his next visit). Built atop a Calusa Indian shell mound, the island has cottages for rent but don't look for telephones or TVs!

ROMANCE PACKAGES

Be sure to visit www.FortMyersSanibel.com for a full list of accommodations from quaint cottages to colorful inns to upscale Gulf resorts with special romance packages:

The Gasparilla Inn & Club, Boca Grande Grande Romance Package

Guests enjoy a romantic escape and spend time together in this beautiful, peaceful environment. The getaway includes a complimentary bottle of vintage champagne, chocolate-covered strawberries and lavish accommodations. Couples can choose from a wide variety of activities while escaping the stress of everyday life. Rates: begin at \$424 per room, per day. Available Feb. 11 – April 4, 2010. For details and reservations: (941)964-4520 or www.gasparillainn.com.

Holiday Inn Ft. Myers Airport at Town Center, Fort Myers Love is in the Air Romance Package

Celebrate with a romantic getaway that includes two nights in water view king room, private dinner prepared by a chef around the firepot, roasted marshmallows and chocolate smores, champagne cheeses and cigars. Rates begin at \$299. Available Feb. 13 - 14. For information and reservations: (239)561-1550 or www.hiftmyersairport.com.

-MORE-

Valentine's Day Getaways at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 6

Murder Mystery Train, Fort Myers

Sweetheart Express

A strolling violinist completes a romantic evening aboard the Murder Mystery Dinner Train. Come celebrate this festive holiday with onboard dinner and impress your special someone. Departure times are 6:30 p.m. on Feb. 12 and 13, 5:30 p.m. on Feb. 14. Tickets are \$65 to \$75. For details and reservations: (239)275-8487 or www.semgulf.com.

Holiday Inn Express & Suites Forum

Rendezvous at the Forum Package

Package includes one night stay in Jacuzzi suite, complimentary breakfast buffet, a bottle of champagne and Norman Love Chocolates. Available through May 1, 2010. For details and reservations: (239)936-0410 or www.hiexpress.com/forum.

Courtyard by Marriott at Gulf Coast Town Center

Valentine's Day Package

Package includes overnight stay in a king room, breakfast for two in the Courtyard Cafe, complimentary drink in the Courtyard lounge and \$50 gift certificate for dinner at PF Changs OR Carrabba's Italian Grill. Rate begins at \$159 per night. Available Feb. 12-14, 2010. Reservations must be booked no later than Feb. 5, 2010. For details and reservations: (239)332-4747 or www.courtyardfortmyers.com.

For more information on planning a romantic vacation to Florida's unspoiled island sanctuary, visit www.FortMyersSanibel.com.

-30-

Editor's Note: Related images are available upon request.

