

Visitors celebrate annual festivals and events on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in 2011

LEE COUNTY, FL – In addition to great weather, shell-drenched beaches and the sparkling Gulf of Mexico, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida is the setting for many nationally recognized festivals and special events each year.

Running January through April 2011, Pine Island's **Creative Coast Weekends** bring the fishing village and artist enclave of Matlacha alive with all things art. On the second weekend of each month, special events, gallery openings, classes and entertainment welcome the entire family.

During February, Fort Myers celebrates the birthday of its most famous historical resident: Thomas Edison. His winter home on the Caloosahatchee River is one of the ten most visited homes in the U.S. and it is fitting that as the inventor of the light bulb, he is honored with a month-long celebration, the **Edison Festival of Lights**, in its 73rd year.

It should come as no surprise that Sanibel Island, known worldwide for its great shelling, has been welcoming visitors for 74 years to the **Sanibel Shell Fair and Show**. Each March, locals and visitors celebrate with displays, crafts and entertainment.

Also in March, the **Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival & Parade** pays homage to the area's harvest of sweet, pink Gulf shrimp. This event has been around for 53 years and boils up more than 1,000 pounds of shrimp for 40,000 visitors!

There is even a festival that celebrates the mango! For two days in mid-July, it's all about the Pine Island mango as fans go crazy for anything made from the delectable fruit at the quirky **MangoMania Tropical Fruit Fair**.

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In October, the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island hosts its 22nd weeklong birding and eco-festival, "**Ding**" **Darling Days**. In conjunction with National Wildlife Refuge week, the popular festival includes tours, food, wildlife presentations and many family activities.

Also in October, paddlers love the **Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival**, now in its sixth year. Along the Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail, events include activities that help

participants achieve a “carbon neutral” vacation experience with tips to bring home. The festival includes free clinics and demonstrations, speakers’ series, waterfront hospitality events and chances to win prizes.

Many visitors plan their vacation in November so they will not miss the world-famous **American Sandsculpting Championship Festival** that has taken place on Fort Myers Beach for 24 years. This popular competition includes sculptors from all over the world and draws thousands of visitors during the five-day event.

In addition to the festivals and events listed below, visitors planning a vacation to Florida’s unspoiled island sanctuary should visit www.FortMyersSanibel.com for a list of events that take place all year. Some of the many not-to-be-missed celebrations include:

Creative Coast Weekends

Matlacha, Bokeelia, St. James City

Jan. 14-15, Feb. 11-12, March 11-12, April 8-9, 2011

239-283-0888

www.floridascreativecoast.com

It is all about art in this quaint fishing community and beyond! Enjoy special events, gallery openings, classes and entertainment for the entire family.

73rd Edison Festival of Light Stadium Show, Grand Parade & Fireworks

Fort Myers

Feb. 19, 2011

Parade starts at 7 p.m. Edison Stadium and continues north on Cleveland Avenue to Edwards Drive.

239-334-2999

www.edisonfestival.org

During February, Fort Myers celebrates the birthday of its most illustrious historical figure, Thomas A. Edison, in befitting fashion. Edison, who built a home on the banks of the

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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 celebration. Celebrating 73 years, the month of February is filled with special events. Visit website for details.

Spring Training 2011, Fort Myers

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel is the spring training home of the Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins. And what could be better than beautiful spring days that offer a chance to watch great baseball? The destination makes it easy for fans to take advantage of all that it has

to offer along with great deals for spring training. For a complete listing of packages, special rates and information on planning a spring training vacation at Florida's unspoiled island sanctuary, visit www.FortMyersSanibel.com.

For schedules and ticket information:

Boston Red Sox Spring Training

March 2011

City of Palms Park, Fort Myers

For tickets and package information go to www.redsox.com or call 239-334-4700 or 877-RED-SOXX.

Minnesota Twins Spring Training

March 2011

Hammond Stadium, Fort Myers

Call 800-33-TWINS or go to www.twinsbaseball.com for schedule and ticket information.

74th Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island

March 4-6, 2011

Sanibel Community House, 2173 Periwinkle Way

239-472-2155

www.sanibelcommunityhouse.net

Sanibel Island, named the best shelling beach in the U.S. and one of the best in the world, hosts shelling enthusiasts who gather each year for the shell fair that draws visitors from around the globe. One of the most unique events in the country, it began on a porch with just a few islanders and has evolved into today's event that includes demonstrations, shell displays, crafts, prizes, food and entertainment. Serious shellers compete for prizes while visitors shop and enjoy these treasures that include award-winning Sailor's Valentines...popular in the 1800s when sailors brought them home to their sweethearts. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. Admission: \$3 donation is requested to indoor shell show. Fair is free.

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53rd Annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade, Fort Myers Beach

March 12-13, 2011

239-463-6986

www.fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com

Two days of festivities celebrate Fort Myers Beach's shrimp harvest. Activities for the 53rd annual event will include a 5K Treasure Run, kids run the weekend prior, 10 a.m. parade, and crowning of the Shrimp Queen on Saturday. Craft vendors, the boiled shrimp concession, and other seafood booths set up at Lynn Hall Memorial Park both days.

15th annual MangoMania

Tropical Fruit Fair, Cape Coral/Pine Island

July 30-31, 2011

German-American Social Club
2101 Pine Island Road
239-283-4842

www.mangomaniafl.com

The mango is the star attraction for two days each summer on Pine Island. Go wild for fruit as you sample locally-grown delicacies at this annual affair, an unusual celebration of all the tropical fruit grown on the island, which also includes lychee, carambola, longan, papaya, and "chocolate pudding fruit." Fruit, exotic fruit trees, and fruit-related products are available for purchase. The festival also offers live music, kids' activities and rides. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday. Admission: \$6 for adults; free for 9 and younger.

**26th Annual Oktoberfest, Cape Coral
October 2011**

German-American Club
2101 SW Pine Island Road
Cape Coral
239-283-1400

www.gasc-capecoral.com

Hosted by the German-American Club, this huge celebration includes German culture, food, music and dancing features. Highlights include authentic live entertainment with large musical groups from Germany, along with enough German food and beer to make anyone do the "Chicken Dance." Gates open Friday 4 p.m. to midnight, Saturday noon to midnight, and Sunday noon to 9 p.m. Tickets cost \$5 in advance, \$6 at the gate for ages 13 and older.

**22nd Annual J. N. "Ding" Days, Sanibel Island
October 16-22, 2011**

239-472-1100

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

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more. Birding and kayaking tours, environmental speakers, a nature photography contest, and 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. For detailed schedule, visit website.

**6th Annual Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival, county-wide
Nov. 3-6, 2011**

239-533-7275

www.CalusaBluewayPaddlingFestival.com

Along the 190-mile, marked Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail on waterfront communities in southwest Florida. This signature eco event includes competitive canoe/kayak races, a kayak fishing tournament, paddling clinics and demonstrations, seminars, family activities,

archaeological and environmental events, guided tours, and more. Complete details with contact information and regular updates may be found at www.clausabluewaypaddlingfestival.com.

25th Annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival, Fort Myers Beach

November 9-13, 2011

239-454-7500

www.sandfestival.com

Dolphins, great blue herons, giant computers, entwined lovers and Neptune, god of the seas: The intricate sculptures at the 25th Annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival takes "playing in the sand" to a whole new level in November on Fort Myers Beach. From nothing more than a beach of sand and 300 gallons of water, about 20 master sculptors will create complex works of art. Amateur sculptors are invited to create and learn from the masters during a Sandsculpting 101 workshop on Friday.

29th Annual Taste of the Town, Fort Myers

Nov. 8, 2011

239-277-1197

www.jlfm.org

Sponsored by the Junior League of Fort Myers, this tasty event held downtown in Centennial Park features samplings from more than 40 local restaurants. The largest food and entertainment festival in southwest Florida with more than 15,000 people attending, it also includes live music and more along the Calooshattee River. From 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The 27th Annual Christmas Luminary Trail and Open House, Sanibel and Captiva islands

Dec. 2 and 3, 2011

239-472-1080

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 from 5:30-9 p.m. on Sanibel Island on Dec. 2 and Dec. 3 on Captiva Island. Businesses are decorated for the holidays with 2,000 candles illuminating the island pathways, storefronts and homes.

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35th Annual Holiday Nights at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers

December 2011

239-334-7419

www.efwefla.org

Millions of lights celebrate Thomas Edison's contribution to modern life and the festivity of the season at this annual Lee County tradition enjoyed by more than 30,000 visitors each year. Lights and decorations fill 20 acres of gardens, along with the recently restored Edison buildings and the Estates' historic homes. Holidays at the Estates places historical decorations amidst the orchids, exotic trees and plantings that fill the gardens. Events include artists and craftsmen exhibits and appearances, as well as book signings and demonstrations in the Creative Cottage located in the Ford Caretaker's House.

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, Lehigh Acres. A comprehensive press kit and images are available upon request.