



NEWS RELEASE

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Sanibel Island beach ranks top U.S. dog-friendly beach

LEE COUNTY, FL – If the start of summer has you looking for beach destinations where you can enjoy some fun and sun with your four-legged friend, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida welcomes dogs with open paws!

Vetstreet.com, a top animal health and lifestyle website, has named Algiers Beach in Gulfside City Park on Sanibel Island to the top of its list of eight dog-friendly beaches in the U.S. The site notes that there is plenty of space for owners and dogs to get ample exercise or just take a break. The tropical nature of the island and the nearby nature preserve makes this beach even more of an exotic getaway. Picnic areas and barbecue grills are available, and the area offers plenty of pet-friendly restaurants and accommodations, making an extended stay an easy option.

There are a few rules to make sure that two-and four-legged beachgoers get along! Owners must clean up after their pups and they must be on leashes no more than eight feet long.

The welcome mat is always out for pets visiting The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel with names like Dog Beach, Pooch Park, K-9 Corral and Barkingham Park. From a beach designated exclusively for dogs to roam unleashed, to accommodations that pamper pets, to nature parks that allow dogs on leashes, the destination is known for its pet-friendly hospitality. The area offers dog-friendly accommodations for visitors who can't leave home without their family pooch. From Florida state parks and the renowned J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island, to Lee County parks and the popular Dog Beach, the area is a perfect destination for visitors and their pets to enjoy some vacation time together.

Accommodations: Dogs are welcome here

Many area accommodations from luxury resorts to beach cottages to condos and rental homes welcome pets. Be sure to check with each property for information regarding charges and requirements. Visit <http://www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/stay/> and click "pets" for a complete listing.

Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa in **Bonita Springs** has "hired" two greeters for guests arriving to the resort: two 140-pound Newfoundland dogs named Hoss and Honey Bear. The breed is known for their sweet temperament, gentle nature and kindness to people. Also, the popular *Paws & Palms* program at the hotel is available for dogs less than 50 pounds and

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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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provides a doggie bed, treats, food and water bowls. There is even a doggie room service menu available and a special walking area. Guest rooms include a large patio area. Dogs must have current pet shot records faxed to the hotel prior to arrival for confirmation. Details: 239-444-1234 or www.coconutpoint.hyatt.com.

The cottages at the **Gasparilla Inn & Club, Boca Grande** welcome pets and provide ample space inside and long walking paths, wide sandy beaches outside. The Inn even has its own gulf-front “doggie park” with green grass and plenty of other island furry friends to play with. Details: 941-964-4520 or www.gasparillainn.com.

Lee County Parks

When it's time for some fun and exercise, dogs (and their owners) have lots of great choices, including their own beach. For information on all of the Lee County parks offering facilities for dogs, visit www.leeparks.org or call 239-533-7275. It's a dog's life at the well-known **Dog Beach**, at the south end of Lovers Key and north of Bonita Beach, which has been a waterfront wonderland for dogs since 2001. This popular and beautiful beach setting allows dogs to romp in Gulf waters unleashed from sunrise to sunset. It is the only beach in the destination that allows dogs to be unleashed and requires owners to be over 15 and adhere to a two-dog limit. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult. Call 239-949-4615.

For visitors heading to Sanibel and Captiva islands, **Causeway Island Park** offers a 10-acre area for dogs on a leash. The location is divided by the causeway as it goes over the two spoil islands built to link the mainland to Sanibel Island. Call 239-765-6794. The newest Lee County dog park, **Paws 4 Duty**, is located in Veterans Park in Lehigh Acres. With two shaded, large, off-leash areas; one for large dogs and the other for small, shy dogs or puppies that need a smaller space, the park features water and shower stations as well as waste removal stations and public restrooms for pet owners nearby.

Attractions

J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island welcomes dogs (on a leash no longer than six feet) on **Wildlife Drive**, the refuge's public access road. Visit www.fws.gov/dingdarling or call 239-472-1100.

Most of the area's **Florida state parks** welcome dogs on leashes. They are not allowed on beaches or on playgrounds but may be on hiking trails. These include two of the area's most beautiful parks: **Cayo Costa State Park** 941-964-0375 and **Lovers Key State Park** 239-463-4588. For a complete listing, visit www.floridastateparks.org.

Dog-friendly shopping!

Coconut Point in Estero is an open-air shopping center with water stations and plastic bag stations. Some restaurants allow dogs on patios. Check with individual shops and restaurants. Call 239-992-9966 or visit <http://www.simon.com/mall/coconut-point>. **Bell Tower Shops in**

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Fort Myers host a monthly "Yappy Hour" that benefits the local Humane Society. The center allows pets at some outdoor restaurants. Call 239-489-1221 or visit <http://www.thebelltowershops.com>.

For more information on planning a vacation to The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel, visit www.FortMyers-Sanibel.com.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida includes: Sanibel & Captiva islands, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer islands, North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres. Dog-related images available upon request.*