



ACCOLADES 2018

[Florida's Best Parks and Beaches for \\$6 fun](#)

J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Lovers Key State Park

Less than 25 miles from Southwest Florida's International Airport, Lover's Key State Park beckons visitors across inland waterway bridges and across boardwalks to a sugary 2.5-mile beach that's great for shelling, birding, dolphin watching and checking out gnarly skeletons of old trees. Pack a picnic supper and stay for stellar sunsets over the Gulf. A bait shop also sells snacks and rents kayaks and canoes for paddling the mangrove-protected estuary. \$8/vehicle.

J. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island

This refuge on Sanibel Island has long been a national hot spot for birders who come for the four-mile Wildlife Drive (closed on Fridays) and short hikes to mangroves and shallow pools where flocks of wading birds such as ibis, spoonbills, herons and egrets gather to hunt for dinner during low tide. Get the day's updates and maps at the visitor center or check out the Discover Ding App to play trivia and get tips along the Wildlife Drive. The eBirds app keeps visitors in the loop on recent bird sightings here and elsewhere. Rarer sightings include otters and bobcats. \$5/vehicle.

Tip: Nature lovers should leave time for Sanibel Island's famed shelling beaches and Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum.

[The 20 Best Christmas Towns in Florida](#)

It just might be Santa's favorite beach! Join community members and visitors alike in Captiva Island for the annual Luminary Festival & Holiday Stroll. Enjoy the sights and sounds of the season including a live nativity scene and photos with jolly old St. Nick.

The annual Captiva Holiday Village features a funky golf cart parade down Captiva Drive hosted by South Seas Island Resort. And check out the lively Sunset Tree Lighting Celebration at Tween Waters Island Resort & Spa.

Captiva Island

[17 Best Weekend Getaways in Florida from each of the State's Regions](#)

Fort Myers Beach

[The Best Winter Getaways for Families](#)

Captiva Island, South Seas Island Resort

[15 Most Romantic Getaways in Florida for Couples – From the Beach to the City](#)

Fort Myers Beach, Lovers Key State Park, Point Ybel Brewing

Tripsavvy: [The Best Winter Getaways for Families](#)

(Nov.16, 2018)

Take advantage of winter getaway rates at the fabulous South Seas Island Resort on Florida's Captiva Island, and you'll snag low rates. South Seas Island sits on a spectacular 330-acre wildlife preserve, with much to explore and many exotic creatures, hidden secrets, and delights to discover.

They'll send you out on a scavenger hunt of sorts. Uncover their 15 Points of Discovery. Grab your camera, a ScoutAbout map, and embark on an island adventure. Discover leaping dolphins, lovable manatees, captivating sunsets over the Gulf of Mexico, and so much more. They have a special surprise when you finish finding all 15 points of interest.

South Seas Island Resort

Tripadvisor Rentals: [15 MOST ROMANTIC GETAWAYS IN FLORIDA FOR COUPLES—FROM THE BEACH TO THE CITY](#)

(Nov. 12, 2018)

With magnificent oceanside views, crystal-clear water, and miles of beach, Fort Myers' Lovers Key State Park is the perfect destination for a charming and relaxing couples vacation. Get a taste of the town's thriving local craft brew and distillery scene at List Distillery or Point Ybel Brewing Company, or watch the sunset and local fisherman on Fort Myers Pier. You could also choose between a sunset cruise, dolphin-watching cruise, or kayak tour if you want to get out on the water.

Fort Myers Beach

Lodging: [TripAdvisor Names the "Most Excellent" Hotel Chains](#)

(Oct. 26, 2018)

TripAdvisor this week announced the "Most Excellent" hotel chains that have the highest percentage of TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence recipients globally. Now in its eighth year, the Certificate of Excellence is given to accommodations, as well as other travel businesses, that deliver great service and consistently achieve high traveler reviews on TripAdvisor.

Drury Hotels Company

Conde Nast Traveler: [Top Resorts in Florida: Readers' Choice Awards 2018](#)

Fort Myers Beach (Oct. 9, 2018)

Set up on a sandy strip off Florida's Fort Myers, the Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina is ideally situated for some splashy family fun. It's as much a paradise for kids as it is for tired parents, with three heated pools, arts and crafts activities (tie-dye: all of the fun, without the kitchen-destroying mess), and a daily Kidds Kampp, where you can let someone else manage the mischief for a while. Take that time to try a sailing lesson or a WaveRunner ride, with a couple cold drinks sandwiched between. Hitch your yacht to the 41-slip private marina while you grab a drink at Bongo's Bar and Grill, a good-time shack where

bongos are reborn as barstools and fake palm fronds flap in the cross-breeze, then head to Jack's Farm to Fork, for formal digs and local, fresh eats.

Pink Shell

Orlando Business Journal: [These Florida Cities Named Best Places to Retire](#)

Fort Myers (Oct. 10, 2018)

Those hoping to retire in Florida have some great options, according to a new national ranking of the 100 best retirement cities in the nation. According to *U.S. News & World Report's* 2019 Best Places to Retire list, unveiled today, seven cities in the Sunshine State are among the Top 25 best places to retire in the country.

Fort Myers

Wallet Hub: [Fastest-Growing Cities in America](#)

Oct. 1, 2018

Experts might not agree on the "best" or the "right" recipe for rapid economic growth, but some cities know the key ingredients for long-term prosperity better than others. Patterns emerge within those cities, allowing us to identify what factors contribute to a lasting cycle of growth. The South currently seems to be an attractive place to move, as the U.S. Census Bureau reports eight of the 15 cities with the largest population gains in 2017 were located in this region.

Some cities thrive even through hard economic times while others struggle. To determine where the fastest local economic growth has occurred in the U.S., WalletHub compared 515 cities of varying population sizes based on 15 key measures of both growth and decline over a period of seven years. Our data set ranges from population growth to unemployment rate decrease to growth in regional GDP per capita. Read on for our findings, expert insight from a panel of researchers and a full description of our methodology.

Cape Coral, Fort Myers

Thrillist Travel: [The Best Beaches in Florida](#)

[Ft. Myers Beach & Sanibel \(Sept. 25, 2018\)](#)

Ft. Myers was probably more known for home foreclosures than its beach in the late 2000s, but head out to the shore and you'll see why so many people overspent on mortgages to live here. It's all the fine powdery sand and calm green waters of the Gulf of Mexico, with a funky collection of beach bars and clubs set right across the street. You never hear much about it, but the spring break scene is also among the best in Florida, and never gets too sweaty or too packed like some better-known destinations.

Where you're staying: The Lani Kai Island Resort. If you've been, you know. This iconic, Hawaiian-themed spot is ground zero for every big weekend in Ft. Myers Beach, where parties on oceanfront balconies lead out onto sheer bedlam on the sand. Also, they've got a rooftop bar and a club on the ground floor. But if you want peace and quiet, perhaps look elsewhere.

Cheap, Sanibel is not. But like so many things, you get what you pay for, so this serene stretch of sand in southwest Florida is worth the splurge to visit. The beaches here are some of the best for shelling in the world, and instead of throngs of tourists to contend with you'll only have pelicans and sea gulls. You won't find many chains here either, as the high-priced clientele prefer smaller, charming local spots like the funky Keylime Bistro and the storied Traditions' dining room.

Where you're staying: Seaside Inn. The most authentically Floridian of the luxe lodging options on Sanibel Island are these cottages set right on the shore. They're big and airy with full kitchens, plus the staff brings you a fresh breakfast basket every day.

Lani Kai Island Resort, Keylime Bistro, Traditions, Seaside Inn

Mom does Travel: [The Best Places to Take a Vacation in Florida](#)

Captiva (Sept. 20, 2018)

Tourists looking for a luxurious vacation in Florida should consider visiting Captiva Island. Several resorts and villas line the sugar white sandy coastlines. Most visitors tend to spend their waking hours on the sun lounger or in the beachside bars. But it's not just about exclusivity. Dozens of restaurants and a thriving bar scene provide a more entertaining evening. When you arrive on the island, you'll instantly fall in love with the peace and serenity in an otherwise crowded state.

TripAdvisor: 15 Best Small Beach Town Getaways in America

Sanibel (Aug. 21, 2018)

25 miles south of Fort Myers lies Sanibel Island, a small beach town perfect for families, nature lovers, and beach bums. Spend an afternoon combing the white sandy beaches for seaglass and shells, or travel downtown for an afternoon shopping and dining at one of the island's many restaurants. No surprise, the seafood is beyond delicious! Boat tours around the island can take you deep sea fishing or dolphin spotting. Look out for vibrant pink flamingos and other native birds at the J.N. Darling National Wildlife Refuge, where you can also kayak, fish, and enjoy a picnic lunch. Sanibel Island offers beachfront rental properties galore, so you'll never have to stray too far from the shore.

J.N. Ding Darling Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island

CBS: [The Best Islands in America](#)

Sanibel (Aug. 21, 2018)

Floating Near: Fort Myers, Florida

Famous For: Serious seashells by the seashore

Fun Times Ahead: 82nd Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show (March 7-9, 2019)

Foraging for shells on a long, shell-strewn beach. It's a mindless activity reserved for kids, right?

Not on the conch- and cockle-carpeted shores of Sanibel Island.

The island's boomerang-shaped, east-west orientation (most are north-south and miss the biggest shell payloads) makes Sanibel more than just another sedate Florida Gulf community with sweet sunsets, smooth bike paths and spoonbill-stuffed wildlife refuges.

A world-class shell magnet, the sands of Sanibel are strewn with amazingly intact whelks, junonias, coquinas and murexes—and folks of all ages hunched over looking for them. Doing the well-known “Sanibel Stoop.”

From the beach, it's a quick commute to the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum and myriad craft shops to admire just how many ingenious little figurines can be made from nothing but shells.

Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum, Sanibel Island

VacationIdea: [25 Best Florida Breweries](#)

Fort Myers (July 24, 2018)

Point Ybel Brewing Company is Fort Myers' premiere craft brewery, located near Sanibel Island and Fort Myers Beach. The brewery specializes in pale ale and IPA styles, featuring year-round brews such as its Endless Summer Pale Ale, Lateral Line Lager, Causeway Haze New England-style IPA, and Pierre Lafitte American Wild Ale. Its taproom, named Hurricane Hole, is open to the public seven days a week, offering live music performances by regional and national artists, trivia nights, and a variety of happy hour specials. Guest taps from other local and regional craft breweries are also showcased at the taproom, including cider offerings.

Point Ybel Brewing Company

TripAdvisor: [20 Perfect Pet-Friendly Vacation Spots Across America](#)

Fort Myers (July 24, 2018)

Warm, sunny Fort Myers may be just what you're looking for while planning your pet-friendly getaway! Enjoy the sand and surf with your dog in tow at Bonita Beach Dog Park, or go for a scenic walk through trails, lakes, and gardens at Lakes Regional Park. Dine with a view at casual, dog-friendly Bonita Bill's Waterfront Cafe, or indulge at LaMotta's Italian Restaurant and Pizzeria. The boutique Hotel Indigo will comfortably accommodate you and your pet in historic and lively Fort Myers River District

Bonita Beach Dog Park, Lakes Regional Park, Bonita Bill's Waterfront Café, LaMotta's Italian Restaurant, Hotel Indigo

VacationIdea: [25 Best Florida Resorts](#)

Captiva (July 11, 2018)

South Seas Island Resort is located on the grounds of a former key lime plantation and is surrounded by a 330-acre wildlife preserve, immersing visitors in the natural beauty of Captiva Island and providing

convenient access to nearby Fort Myers. 471 guest rooms and suites are available at the resort's Harbourside Hotel, while private condos, villas, and rental cottages are offered at Land's End Village. Three lagoon pools feature private cabanas, two water slides, and miles of sugar sand beachfront, and a luxury spa offers a full treatment menu. Group water sports programs are available, including kayaking and boating tours, and a Sanibel Sea School immerses young visitors in nature-related activities. Onsite restaurants include the Harbourside Bar and Grill, the casual-fare Scoops and Slices, and the gourmet Captiva Provision Company deli. Commuter access to resort areas is provided by a trolley system and golf cart rentals. Address: 5400 Plantation Rd, Captiva, FL 33924, Phone: 239-472-5111

South Seas Island Resort

VacationIdea: [25 Best Airports in the United States](#)
[Fort Myers \(July 11, 2018\)](#)

Located in South Fort Meyers in Lee County, Florida, Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) primarily serves Florida's Gulf Coast including Fort Meyers, Sanibel, Marco Island, Greater Naples, Cape Coral, Charlotte Harbor, the Everglades, and Gulf Islands. Area attractions are a quick drive from the airport. This sleek, modern, state-of-the-art facility received a grand upgrade in 2005. Fifteen airlines fly in and out of RSW with nonstop service to major gateways, and international service to Germany and Canada. There are 36 restaurants, markets, and shops throughout the main terminal and three concourses. Airport services include currency exchange, business center, and visitor information services. Address: 11000 Terminal Access Road, Fort Myers, FL, Phone: 239-590-4800

Southwest Florida International Airport

Travel + Leisure: [The Top 10 Resort Hotels in Florida \(Excluding Miami Beach\)](#)
[July 10, 2018](#)

From the sugar-soft sands of the Emerald Coast to the breezy beaches of the Keys, Florida's 8,426 miles of shoreline make the state a perennial favorite among vacationers. This year, T+L readers expressed their appreciation for the calm, warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico — seven of the Top 10 resort hotels in Florida are on the state's tranquil western coast.

Every year for our World's Best Awards survey, T+L asks readers to weigh in on travel experiences around the globe — to share their opinions on the top hotels, resorts, cities, islands, cruise ships, spas, airlines, and more. Hotels were rated on their facilities, location, service, food, and overall value. Hotels were classified as city or resort based on their locations and amenities.

Gasparilla Inn & Club

VacationIdea: [25 Best Dog-Friendly Beaches in Florida](#)

Located in Fort Myers, between the Lovers Key State Park entrance and the New Pass Bridge, is Dog Beach Park, one of the most beautiful dog beaches in Florida and completely free of charge. Dogs are allowed to run off-leash in the sand and splash in the water while their humans are relaxing in the sand. There is a doggy shower for rinsing sand off, but there are no other facilities and the bathroom is portable. No alcohol or glass containers are permitted on the beach. The owners are responsible for cleaning after their pets. If you want to fish from the shore while your dog is having fun, you need to apply for license. Address: 8800 Estero Blvd, Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931

Dog Beach

Select: [10 Wonderfully Weird Restaurants in America](#)
Captiva (July 2, 2018)

This place has been serving up a taste of Old Florida for 60 years. What makes it special? It's on an island accessible only by boat. The open-air restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner 365 days a year, offering the kind of fare you'd expect: Gulf shrimp, stone crab, mahi mahi and steaks. Its standout feature? Thousands of one-dollar bills signed by past customers, taped to every available surface.

Cabbage Key Inn & Restaurant

Today's Parent: [12 best cities to visit in the USA for families](#)
Sanibel and Fort Myers (June 26, 2018)

Just a 45-minute drive from Fort Meyers airport, crossing the bridge to Sanibel Island is like teleporting to the Caribbean—without the lengthy flight! World-class beaches teeming with shells of every description, breathtaking sunsets, and the expansive J. N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge means there's always something to wow your little ones away from their screens. Put the kids in the Sanibel Sea School (half or full day) for a best-in-class kids camp where your naturalist-in-training will learn how to find sand dollars buried under the sea floor, net-fish in the shallows and maybe even discover a baby octopus.

J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island, Sanibel Sea School

MSN: [The 100 best restaurants in America if you want to eat outside](#)
Bonita springs (June 21, 2018)
Nothing says summertime like eating outdoors.

In honor of the first day of summer on Thursday, OpenTable has released its annual list of the 100 best restaurants in America for al fresco dining in 2018.

Culled from millions of OpenTable reviews, the list includes restaurants in 22 states, each with its own stunning views or cozy surroundings. California and Florida are home to more than half of the restaurants on the list - no surprise there - but there are plenty of representatives on the list for those who don't live near the coast, too.

DeRomo's Gourmet Market & Restaurant - Bonita Springs, Florida

Cheapism: [Best Fishing Spots in All 50 States](#)

Fort Myers Beach (June 19, 2018)

Florida is a shore-fishing state — and Fort Myers Beach has spots that rival any other. Residents can cast for free, and visitors can score a three-day license for \$17. That will give you access to Fort Myers Beach Pier, Punta Rassa, the South End Bridge, Lovers Key State Park, or any of the best Fort Myers Beach spots. Also known for great freshwater fishing, Florida has numerous lakes filled with lunker bass, like massive Lake Okeechobee, where shiners, plastic worms, and rattling crankbaits are highly effective.

Fort Myers Beach

FodorsTravel: [The 10 Best Sandcastle Competitions in America](#)

Fort Myers Beach (June 19, 2018)

A 10-day event in its 32nd year, the American Sandsculpting Championship Festival is the largest competition of its kind—not only in the state of Florida, but in the entire country. With World Class Master, Advanced Amateur, and Amateur divisions, nearly every level of sculptor can get in on the action. Quick speed sculpting competitions, demonstrations from the pros, and live music round out the festivities. Since it's practically summer all year round in sunny southwest Florida, the 2018 competition will be held from November 16-25.

Fort Myers Beach

Coastal Living: [10 Most Romantic Places in Florida](#)

Fort Myers Beach and Lovers Key (May 1, 2018)

No round-up of romantic places in Florida would be complete without Lovers Key State Park. Rumor has it that back in the early 1900s, only adventure-seeking couples made the effort to get out to the collection of isles including Lover's Key and three other barrier islands off the coast of Bonita Springs: Black Island, Inner, and Long Key. At the turn of the century, the islands were only accessible by boat, but today they are connected by a series of causeways and reachable by car. The best time to visit is during the winter when the seasonal concert series, Songwriters at Sunset, takes place at the beachfront gazebo. Local artists share their original songs and the stories behind them while the sun sinks into the Gulf of Mexico. Bring your own beach chairs and soak up this magical moment on Florida's southwest coast.

Lover Key State Park

25 Best Dog – Friendly Beaches in the USA

Sanibel (May 1, 2018)

Only 25 miles away from Fort Myers, Sanibel Island is a beautiful barrier island dotted with lighthouses and luxurious resorts. The island has a number of beaches to offer, but the most popular with pet owners is Algiers Beach in Gulfside City Park. Dogs must be kept on an 8-foot leash, but there is plenty of space for pets and their owners to move around and get some exercise. An hourly fee is charged for parking, and beach amenities include a shady picnic area, boardwalks that provide easy access to the sand, and public barbecue grills.

Gulfside City Park and Sanibel

Family Travel Magazine: [The Best US Islands for Families](#)

Sanibel (April 10, 2018)

Sanibel Island off the coast of Florida is perfect for a family travel paradise. Located close to Cape Coral and Fort Myers Sanibel offers you pristine white beaches, millions of shells, dolphins, fishing and more. Whether you head to Sanibel for a day or a week there is so much to do. Our favorite things to do are: early morning shelling, fishing off the Sanibel Pier, enjoying the white sand beaches around the island and we always have a meal at the Island Cow. If you are looking for somewhere in the U.S. to visit that feels like the Caribbean, Sanibel is our favorite destination.

Island Cow and Sanibel Island

Conde Nast Traveler: [15 Best Beaches in Florida](#)

Bowman's Beach (April 4, 2018)

Bowman's Beach, Sanibel Island: Easily accessible off the main Sanibel-Captiva Road yet remarkably undeveloped, this family-friendly beach lacks the crowds of neighboring beaches but promises all the pastel-hued sunsets and excellent shelling Sanibel Island is known for.

Bowman's Beach

Coastal Living: [The Best Little Beach Towns to Visit in Spring](#)

Sanibel (April 4, 2018)

Out of the many sunny delights on Sanibel Island, west of Fort Myers on the Gulf of Mexico, one pastime stands out as the most pursued: shelling. It's a preoccupation that's somehow serious and ethereal all at once, and the reward of finding the biggest and best haul is most likely to happen in the early spring season at low tide. There are 250 types of shells to be found here, including Conch, Lightning Whelk, Cockle, Tulip, and Coquina. It's also a pastime with a hefty history: the annual Sanibel Shell

Show competition began nearly 80 years ago, held the first Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of each March, and it's still one of the top shell shows in the country.

Sanibel Island

Select: [10 Wonderfully Weird Restaurants in America](#)

Cabbage Key (April 3, 2018)

Cabbage Key restaurant: This place has been serving up a taste of Old Florida for 60 years. What makes it special? It's on an island accessible only by boat. The open-air restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner 365 days a year, offering the kind of fare you'd expect: Gulf shrimp, stone crab, mahi mahi and steaks. Its standout feature? Thousands of one-dollar bills signed by past customers, taped to every available surface.

Cabbage Key Inn and Restaurant

MSN Travel & Leisure: [The Best Campsite in Everyday State](#)

Cayo Costa State Park, (April 2, 2018)

Florida — Cayo Costa State Park

This barrier island is a true escape, a car-less outpost accessible only by boat with more than nine miles of pristine beach. Spend your days kayaking along the coast, biking inland trails, or scanning for manatees and dolphins, then wave the day tripper's goodbye and [crash in one of 30 primitive campsites](#) where the rhythm of the surf will lull you to sleep.

Cayo Costa State Park

Coastal Living: [10 Happiest and Healthiest Places to Live on the Beach- Ranked!](#)

Cape Coral and Fort Myers (April 2, 2018)

9. Cape Coral-Fort Myers, Florida

Cruising along down the Gulf coast, this quiet and blissful community is rife with sugar-white sand beaches, unspoiled wildlife refuges, and people who report being totally satisfied with basically every aspect of their life.

Cape Coral and Fort Myers

Smart Travel: [10 Best Restaurants in Florida](#)

(April 2, 2018)

Beloved classics and dazzling upstarts share space on the list of best restaurants in Fort Myers. This being Southwest Florida, local seafood is the star across most menus, but you'll find tremendous variety in preparations, influences, and ingredients.

Azure Restaurant, Blue Pointe Oyster Bar & Seafood Grille, Cibo, Cru, Harold's Restaurant, Izzy's Fish & Oyster, McGregor Café, Roadhouse Café, The Standard, Twisted Vine Bistro

Smart Travel: [10 Best Fort Myers Beach Resorts](#)

Fort Myers, Lovers Key, Sanibel and Captiva (April 2, 2018)

The West Coast of Florida is famous for its sugar-spun, shell-filled beaches. Fort Myers Beach, on Estero Island, offers just this sort of iconic beaches with a variety of luxury resorts. Fort Myers Beach resorts deliver beach vacations that don't skimp on amenities.

Best Western Plus Beach Resort, Cornerstone Beach Resort, DiamondHead Beach Resort and Spa, Gullwing Beach Resort, Lovers Key Resort, The Neptune Resort, The Outrigger Beach Resort, Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina, Pointe Estero Beach Resort, Wyndham Garden Fort Myers Beach

BEST: [The 50 Most Beautiful Beaches for a Sunny Getaway](#)

Sanibel (March 30)

Sometimes you just need a sunny beach and a frosty drink ASAP. We totally get it. What's that feeling we're envisioning with beautiful waterfront views and the sand between our toes? That's right: It's called RELAXATION. Here are some of the best beaches to book a vacation to right now.

Sanibel Island is a low-key spot on Florida's west coast that's known for its beautiful shells. People come from all over to do the "Sanibel stoop," which is what island dwellers call combing the beaches for one-of-a-kind nautical finds.

Sanibel Island, Sundial Beach Resort and Spa, West Wind Inn

Odyssey: [7 Best Breakfast Spots in Southwest Florida](#)

Fort Myers (March 21, 2018)

The best breakfast spots in Southwest Florida. I try to write what I'm passionate about and this week I am getting down to the basics and writing about what makes my heart happy — food. More specifically, breakfast!

They say breakfast is the most important meal of the day and is arguably the best meal of the day as well. Next time you wake up hungry (I'll be honest, I wake up hungry every day) skip the normal IHOP chain and try one of my favorite breakfast spots in SWFL. Your stomach will thank you later.

Amy's Over Easy, Bennett's Fresh Roast, Bonita Brunch, Marti's Family Dining, McGregor Café, Munch Box, Sunflower Café

SWAYY: [33 Tastemakers Shaping the Future of Culinary Arts](#)

Bonita & Sanibel (March 19, 2018)

Kristina San Filippo is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and a passionate believer in the farm-to-table movement. Her Purple Spoon Culinary Center in Bonita Springs, FL, is a meeting place for local farmers, culinary enthusiasts, and community members looking to learn about sustainable growing methods, and a cooking method that starts (and ends) with fresh, local ingredients. Purple Spoon also offers cooking classes, farm-to-table dinners, farmers markets, and community dinners, in which mingling and talking with new acquaintances is highly encouraged. (Photo credit to John Gilchrist & Neubek Photography)

On the shell-lined island of Sanibel off Florida's southwest coast, Sweet Melissa's is a chef-run bastion of refined creole cuisine. After opting out of law school to pursue cooking full time, executive chef and owner Melissa Talmage worked at some of the best restaurants in New York and New Orleans before opening her own place on Sanibel in 2009. Beloved by locals and tourists alike, dishes like conch and grouper ceviche, and poached-fig foie gras beignet, are a welcome burst of southern flavor among the hordes of key lime pies. (Photo credit to Andrew Tate at Paradise Creative)

Purple Spoon and Sweet Melissa's Café

VIVA Lifestyles & Travel: [The World's Best Hotels in Every U.S. State, Mapped](#)

Boca Grande (Feb. 25, 2018)

Now I love a hotel stay as much as the next person, but time after time I've checked in with high hopes and left feeling — *well* — a little underwhelmed. This may have something to do with me leaving travel plans to the last minute, but having spoken to several hotel bookers, I know it's a common story.

10. Florida - The Gasparilla Inn & Club

The Gasparilla Inn & Club

MSN: [The Most Romantic Honeymoon Spots in America](#)

Captiva Island (Feb. 22, 2018)

Captiva Island, Florida: South Beach may be overflowing with nightclubs and swanky lounges, but not everyone shares its party-till-the-sun-comes-up mentality. Situated off Florida's Gulf Coast, near Fort Myers, is Captiva Island, a place that's more 'wasting away in Margaritaville' than 'bienvenido a Miami.' Miles of serene, white-sand beaches are scattered with shells and dotted with towering palm trees. Captiva Island's unspoiled, natural landscape is complemented by its laid-back vibe and quirky charm, making for a fairytale seaside getaway. The preferred mode of transport is bicycle. And, instead of high-

rise hotels, Captiva Island has quaint inns and old-fashioned beach cottages for rent. If you're looking for a breath of fresh (salty) air after all the wedding craziness, this coastal gem is for you.

Captiva Island

MSN: [The 25 Beach Beaches in the U.S.](#)

Ft, Myers Beach (Feb. 21, 2018)

14. Fort Myers Beach

"The beach is clean and there are a number of stops for a cold drink. I prefer the clean, sandy beach over Sanibel that is covered with sea grass and sea weed." - TripAdvisor [review](#)

Fort Myers Beach

Culture Trip: [The 10 Most Beautiful Towns in Florida](#)

Boca Grande (Feb. 20, 2018)

Each year, Florida plays host to over 80 million tourists, most of whom flock to the theme parks of Orlando and beaches of Miami. However, outside these tourist hot spots lie breathtaking natural beauty, unique townships and rural communities. Here is a list of Florida's 10 most picturesque towns and villages.

Boca Grande is an affluent community located on Florida's west coast, known for its charming downtown, white sand beaches and world-class tarpon fishing. It was also named one of the Best Coastal Small Towns by USA Today. Stroll over to the landmark Gasparilla Inn and Club, which was built in 1911 and has maintained its charm through authentic renovations. Take a boat ride out to the barrier island of Cayo Costa, where secluded beaches are abundant. The Boca Grande Lighthouse Museum offers a beautifully scenic historical tour where you can hear about the all the changes the town has been through over the decades.

Boca Granda, Cayo Costa, Gasparilla Inn and Club

MSN: [Florida's Top 15 Beaches](#)

Sanibel (Feb. 20, 2018)

Another great beach destination for escaping the crowds is Sanibel Island off the southwestern coast of Florida. The east-west orientation and curved shape of this barrier island make the shores of Sanibel home to an abundance of intact seashells and sand dollars. It's also perfect for biking, watching sea turtles nest and fishing.

Sanibel Island

Trips to Discover: [12 Best Family Summer Getaways in Florida](#)

Sanibel and Lovers Key (Feb. 16, 2018)

School is officially out and so is the sunshine in Florida, which means it's time to plan your family vacation. While Orlando is the typical suggestion for a family vacation in Florida, in the summer we suggest you trek away from the crowds and enjoy the state's array of picturesque state parks, unspoiled beaches and outdoor adventures. Boasting kid-friendly museums, nature treks and natural wonders, visit one of these best summer getaways in Florida for families.

Beautiful barrier islands and Gulf Coast gems, Captiva & Sanibel Islands are a great place to take the entire family in summer. Embrace the laid-back lifestyle and soak up the stunning scenery, where you can spend your days collecting colorful shells that have washed up on its kid-friendly shores. Ride a bike through J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, go on a high-speed catamaran cruise or escape for a day of exploring Lovers Key State Park.

J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Lovers Key State Park

Ciao Bambino: [10 Best Family Spring Break destinations for 2018](#)
[Sanibel and Captiva \(Feb. 10, 2018\)](#)

Even when kids are out of school for spring break, these destinations still boast enriching experiences that encourage them to learn, grow and make family memories. Consider Sedona's red rock country, the beaches of Florida and the Caribbean, or Sicily for a different perspective on Italy. And don't overlook destinations that seem a little farther afield — both Japan and South America are within a 10-hour flight (or less), depending on where you live!

Off Florida's southern Gulf coast, this pair of islands boast powdery sand, more than 250 bird species, shells galore and 25 miles of bike paths.

Captiva Island, Sanibel Island

MSN: [The Best Chocolate Shop in Every State for 2018](#)
[Fort Myers, \(Feb. 13, 2018\)](#)

There are a lot of reasons to visit Florida, but Norman Love Confections in Fort Myers is right up there with Disney World and the beach. The chocolates here are pure art, with expert marbling and brilliant colors in each and every bonbon, and the taste is similarly world-class.

Norman Love Confections

MSN: [The Best Vacation Spots in Every U.S. State](#)
[Sanibel \(Feb. 8, 2018\)](#)

In a state full of Oceanside vacation towns, Sanibel (off Florida's peninsula on the Gulf of Mexico) is a paradise above the rest. Its white beaches are swept with some of the most beautiful patterned

seashells you can find in the country, and the crystal waters are perfect for boating, fishing and snorkeling.

Sanibel Island

Travel Channel: [7 Best Budget-Friendly Spring Break Spots](#)

Sanibel (Feb. 2018)

A great spring-break vacation doesn't need to break the bank. Whether you're exploring a cool city or lounging on the beach, you can beat the winter blues with a budget spring break.

Spring break falls during Sanibel Island's high season from February to April when the weather is perfect and shelling along the sandy shores is at its best. Rent a bike and explore the 22 miles of bike paths and you'll not only save on gas, but explore the island's beaches and parks more easily.

Sanibel Island

Travel Channel: [Best Pet-Friendly Beaches](#)

Dog Beach (Feb. 2018)

Can dogs get sunburned? Are doggie sunglasses a yuppie perversion or genuinely helpful? Are all pooches natural swimmers? These are the kinds of questions that keep beach-loving dog owners up at night. (In case you were wondering, the answers are: definitely, genuinely helpful, and not necessarily.) Check with your vet or a website such as DogFriendly.com for more info on keeping your pet safe on the shore and in the water.

Dog Beach, Fort Myers Beach, Florida

At Dog Beach, a county park specially designated for dogs and their owners, dogs can roam leash-free from dawn to dusk. There's even a Kayak With Canine program so you and your furry pal can paddle off into the sunset together. There are no restroom facilities for humans, and no running water for either species, so come prepared.

Dog Beach

Travel Channel: [10 Terrific U.S. Beach Festivals to Check Out](#)

Captiva, Sanibel, Down Town Ft. Myers (Feb. 2018)

For those who think the beach is boring, plan your coastal getaway around a sand castle contest, multi-day concert, kite-flying extravaganza or even a mullet tossing competition (yes, you read that right).

Come hear the next hottest act at Island Hopper Songwriter Fest in September. Various venues and beaches in Fort Myers and Captiva Island showcase up-and-coming performers and those just taking a break from touring with national acts. Think Jimmy Buffett in Nashville with Florida sand and perfect sunsets

Island Hopper Songwriter Music Fest

Tripping: [7 Best Weekend Getaways from St. Petersburg](#)

Sanibel (Feb. 2018)

1. Opt for some peace and quiet in a serene beach environment when you make Sanibel Island your vacation destination for the weekend. This charming city, located two and a half hours from St. Petersburg, is home to white sandy beaches and avid locals harvesting shells on a daily basis. Meet the locals when you pick up some fresh veggies and fruit at the Sanibel Island Farmer's Market before touring The Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum. See nature at its finest when strolling through the J.N. 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge before dining at the kid-friendly Island Cow Restaurant.

Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum, Island Cow, J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge

Travel Market: [25 Best pet-Friendly Vacations in America](#)

Fort Myers and Sanibel (Jan. 23, 2018)

If you're a dog owner, there's no doubt you consider your furry companion part of the family. But when it comes to taking a trip, he/she can make things a little tricky. Fear not! Here are our top pet-friendly vacations across America where your pooch pals are just as welcome as you are.

Sanibel Island is a cheerful vacation spot for pets and owners. Gulfside Beach, also known as Algiers Beach, is a good doggy destination, with calm, shallow waters to gallop through and sands strewn with beautiful seashells. Like all of the local beaches, dogs are very welcome, but you should keep them on the leash. Be sure to drop into the Island Paws pet shop for nutritious treats and high-quality toys.

We love Fort Myers for its great shopping, fishing, and beaches. Bring Fido to Barkingham Dog Park or Woof-a-Hatchee Dog Park, both fenced and off-leash parks with watering stations and separate areas for big and small dogs. Two of the more fascinating attractions in the area are the Edison and Ford Winter Estates. Though not dog-friendly, we'd be remiss to leave them unmentioned. These neighboring properties were the winter homes of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, and you can still explore the laboratory, homes, and gardens. With a pet-friendly rental, it'll be no problem to leave your dog at the house while you experience these and other great Fort Myers attractions. Just be sure to bring them a treat when you return!

[9 best family beach vacation destinations for families](#)

Sanibel and Captiva (Jan. 20, 2018)

Sure, we all love a good spa resort or ski trip, but if the relentless winter has worn you down, know that there are balmy breezes, sandy beaches, and palm trees awaiting you in Florida. February's rounding the bend and spring is not quite ready to make an appearance; I can't think of a better time to the south for a fun family vacation—maybe for the kids' spring break from school. As a mother of two little ones living

in Florida, I know the best spots for families on both coasts. Check out my favorite beach destinations for little and big (that means you!) kids alike.

Where to play: There are so many beaches that feel private and secluded on Sanibel and Captiva Islands, located right outside of Fort Myers. My favorite spot to take the kids is near the Sanibel Lighthouse where the waves are calm and the shells are plentiful. Rent bikes for a day to explore the entire island, making sure to stop at the J.N. Ding Darling Wildlife Center. Our family's favorite beach to watch the sunset is at the Mucky Duck in Captiva. The Sanibel Sea School is an interactive way to get the kids involved in marine ecosystems while having fun.

Where to stay: The South Seas Island Resort will be the luxurious island escape of your dreams. This expansive resort has everything you need on property for the entire family to have an excellent beach vacation.

Ding Darling, Mucky Duck, South Seas Island Resort

Trip Savvy: [The top 10 hotels for Valentine's Day in 2018](#)

Fort Myers (Jan. 17, 2018)

While a Valentine's Day bouquet of long-stemmed red roses and a box of exquisite chocolates can certainly set the stage for romance, nothing's quite as swoon-worthy as a trip custom-made for two. Lucky for you, fine hotels and resorts create special packages that are good for an overnight stay, a long weekend, or even more time to enjoy romance on and around Valentine's Day. The following packages and places are truly exceptional, thanks to resorts that are truly luxurious, packages with amenities that couples will love, or a location that is perfect for lovers. Note that some of the following are offered exclusively during February; others are available year-round.

Around February every year, beach cravings peak. Couples who head south to Fort Myers on Florida's Gulf Coast can get their fill of vitamin D at Pink Shell Beach Resort. The resort's romance package includes accommodations, a 50-minute couple's massage, champagne, and chocolate-covered strawberries. What's most delightful is dinner on the beach, which is also included. Plan to return in the morning, when the ocean deposits nature's bounty on the shore for shell collectors. With more than 100 barrier and coastal islands, couples ought to explore the area by water. Hop a water taxi or rent a boat and sail to one of the destination's many outer islands to enact your own deserted-isle fantasy.

P.S.: If you're in the area on February 14, the annual group vow renewal on Fort Myers Beach will take place.

Pink Shell Beach Resort

[The best places to travel to in the U.S. in February](#)

Fort Myers (Jan. 14, 2018)

Despite the sugar highs and romantic dinners for two of Valentine's Day, February can be the hardest of winter months. The excitement of the first winter snow has long faded, but there's still a month to go before spring begins. This month marks the home stretch — that last slog through snow-filled sidewalks and wind chill that make us want to hide under the covers.

It's peak birdwatching season in south Florida, and the sightings are best along a secluded coastline near Fort Myers. Known for its relaxed way of life, Sanibel — sixty percent of which is protected for wildlife — offers a wealth of stunning natural scenery (not to mention pristine turquoise beaches). Birdwatchers should head to J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge to spot rare Purple Gallinules or Roseate Spoonbills. Up for more wildlife? February is also the peak time for seeing manatees, hundreds of whom show up to enjoy the Gulf's warm waters.

Coastal Living: 20 best places to live on the coast in 2018

Captiva (January 2018)

Ready for your dream life to begin? These amazing locations, from little beach towns to humming coastal cities, from sweet domestic islands to expat escapes, are ready for you. If you are a seashell fanatic, then welcome to your Gulf Coast mecca. This pale-sand barrier island just west of Fort Myers holds—along with its big sister, Sanibel Island—the best shell hunting and gathering anywhere (within regulations, of course). In fact, if you are a nature fanatic, you may never want to leave this five-mile isle known for its quirky neighborhood feel. With just one main road running corkscrew-like along its length, Captiva's wild wetland gifts reveal themselves from the deck of a paddleboard, the cockpit of a kayak, or the seat of a canoe. And while the island is home to an opulent collection of homes along its "Gold Coast" at the southern end, the official Captiva uniform is absolutely shorts and flip-flops.

Your One Thing: Built in 1903 as a schoolhouse, Captiva's Chapel by the Sea holds weekly interdenominational services, as well as an achingly beautiful candlelit Christmas Eve service.

The best remote beach destinations for people who hate crowds

Bowman's Beach, Cayo Costa, and Lovers Key (Jan. 10, 2018)

While plenty of people love visiting the beach, one of the top complaints you'll hear from reluctant beachgoers is simply this: They hate the crowds. The most beautiful beaches in the United States are hardly a secret — which can lead to overcrowding and frustration when you just want to stake out a good place on the sand that's not a million miles from the water. The annoyances of an overpopulated beach make even the most patient person lose their cool. Loud radios, screaming babies, smokers, inconsiderate individuals stepping on your beach blanket with sandy feet — the list goes on and on.

Sanibel Island in Florida is well-known and well-loved, so you might have to share the sand with other eager sun worshippers when you visit. But for a little solo time, just trek the extra quarter mile to Bowman's Beach, a secluded paradise that's rumored to have some of the best shelling spots in the entire country. You can bring your dog, and the sand is soft. What are you waiting for?

You'll need a boat or a helicopter to access these 9 miles of beaches, pine forests, and mangrove swamps. Stroll along the beach, and catch a glimpse of neighboring dolphin pods. You can also swim or go snorkeling, camp out, kayak, do some fishing, or hike the many nature trails at Cayo Costa State Park. It's all in store for you. And best of all, you won't have to share your spot with many people.

Legend has it that once upon a time, Lovers Key was only accessible by boat, and romantically inclined couples were the only ones brave enough to seek it out — hence the name. Now, it's still almost as secluded and a haven for wildlife and quiet beach seekers alike. From shelling to sunbathing, there's something for everyone at this lovely stretch of white sand.

Architectural Digest: [The 9 most stunning islands off U.S. shores](#)

Gasparilla Island (Jan. 2, 2018)

The Florida Keys may be more famous, but that just means this barrier island off the Gulf Coast remains a secret hideaway for insiders. It's been a low-key luxury vacation spot since J. P. Morgan and the Vanderbilts started visiting in the pre-Prohibition days. Check into the Gasparilla Inn for a taste of that Jazz Age life.

Trip Advisor: [30 top USA cities to visit in 2018](#)

Cape Coral (Jan. 2, 2018)

Looking for a picture-perfect Florida city vacation? Try this laid-back boating community known as "The Cape," with miles of canals to explore and stunning sunrises to be seen over the Caloosahatchee River. There's also the Sun Splash Family Water Park, golfing, tennis, and easy access to pretty Sanibel Island and the surrounding Gulf beaches.

Traveling Mom: [11 best places to travel in the Eastern U.S. in 2018](#)

Captiva (Jan. 1, 2018)

Just off the Gulf coast of Florida, you'll find two beautiful islands surrounded by some of the most beautiful beaches in the U.S. These islands are a great option if you want to avoid busy theme parks and spring break crowds. While Sanibel and Captiva Islands may have a more relaxed atmosphere, there is far more to do than sunbathing and sipping umbrella drinks. These islands provide excellent activity choices for families looking for a bit of adventure while on vacation. On these islands, you'll want to ditch the car, to walk, bike, parasail, and much more! Jenn Mitchell, Fitness TravelingMom, and her family go back year after year.

TravelingMom Tip: For a great place to watch the sunset and grab a good family meal, check out the Mucky Duck at the end of Captiva Island.

[The Best \(& Least Crowded\) Beaches in the US](#)

Boca Grande

I Love Dogs: [10 Best Dog-friendly Beach in the U.S.](#)

The dog days of summer take on a whole new meaning when you have a pup that loves the beach as much as you do. There are holes to dig and waves to chase, and whether your pup prefers to sunbathe on the sand or swim in the salty water, a beach trip is fun for everyone involved. The issue is, not every beach allows your favorite four-legged beach buddy. You'll have to find a dog-friendly beach where your pup is free to kick up sand without getting into trouble. You'll have to do your research to find the dog

beach nearest you, but we've done some of the work for you. Here's a list of the country's top dog-friendly beaches to check out this summer

The emerald waters of southern Florida can be your dog's unrestricted playground at Lovers Key Dog Beach. Located south of Fort Myers, Lovers Key State Park is on a barrier island that in the past was only accessible via boat. Thanks to a new bridge, the remote slice of paradise is now only a short drive away. The dog beach on Lovers Key is a hidden gem that, while susceptible to the tide, allows dogs to explore nature untethered. A generous donor installed doggie rinse stations for your convenience, and parking is always free. It can be tricky to find, so the city suggests visiting the dog beach website for directions instead of relying on your GPS.

Lovers Key Dog Beach

[Top-Rated Vacation Destinations In North America](#)

Welcome to our second-annual list of the 50 top-rated destinations! These beloved best vacation spots were chosen by verified Expedia reviewers throughout 2017 and rose to the top of over 4,600 reviewed cities. New places grace the list this year, but tried-and-true winners make their returns, too. Each of these cities received at least 600 reviews and are listed in order of highest-reviewed out of 5—the top ranging from 4.55 to 4.02 stars.

Not to be too outdone by its southerly state-mate, Sanibel clinches the No. 15 spot in its first appearance. Visitors fall in love with the place for many reasons. Go shelling on the beach, fill up on fresh seafood at joints like the super-fun Bubble Room, and spend peaceful time at J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

Bubble Room, J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge