

Fort Myers, on Florida's Gulf Coast, is known for miles of white sandy beaches, excellent water recreation, and its flora and fauna. Sanibel and Captiva Islands, popular tourist destinations, are nearby. Thomas Edison and Henry Ford were neighbors here, and you can tour both their estates, in addition to Edison's laboratory and gardens. If you are looking for a romantic spot, you can get away in secluded Lovers Key State Park. Families will enjoy the Imaginarium, a kid-oriented science and nature museum. Seafood lovers eat well in the local restaurants, which also offer plenty of vegetarian options. Accommodation choices include beachfront cottages, bed and breakfasts, large resorts or chain hotels. Visitors find that the Fort Myers area has almost limitless opportunities for sightseeing and fun.

Hotels & Lodging

Downtown Fort Myers Hotels

Downtown Fort Myers has many of the city's attractions: the Imaginarium, Edison Ford Winter Estate, and the Southwest Florida Museum of History, as well as arts, entertainment and dining. The Holiday Inn Downtown Historic District puts you in the historic area of downtown and close to the main attractions. Historic Rock Lake Resort offers extra amenities only half a mile from downtown. Best Western Fort Myers Waterfront is on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River and near the spring training grounds of the Red Sox and the Twins. \$63-160

Fort Myers Beach Resorts and B&Bs

The big draw in Fort Myers is the beach, and there are many accommodations that cater to beachgoers. Pink Shell Beach Resort is family friendly, with spacious rooms or villas that have kitchenettes and offer ocean views, some with views of nearby Sanibel and Captiva Islands. Edison Beach House is known to have some of the best service of any Fort Myers Beach hotel. For those who prefer a quieter and smaller location, Manatee Bay Inn is a bed and breakfast that sits between the beach and the bustling Times Square district. \$68-464

Sanibel & Captiva Island Lodging

Nearby Sanibel and Captiva Islands are popular because they provide access to miles of beaches, recreational activities, Sanibel's Old Town, Point Ybel Lighthouse and Captiva's Chapel by the Sea. The Sanibel Sunset Beach Resort is popular for its excellent service and location. Sanibel's Beachview Cottages are another popular choice for the privacy they offer and how friendly they are for families and pets. The South Seas Island Resort on Captiva Island is ideal for any type of traveler and includes lodging in private villas and cottages. \$135-979

Restaurants & Dining

Fresh Seafood

Fort Myers has a variety of seafood restaurants where shrimp and grouper are the local specialties, but you can find almost any seafood you crave. These restaurants are particularly plentiful on the beach, but there are popular choices in town.

Gulfshore Grill is a historic beachfront restaurant that is popular for its seafood, but also serves beef and chicken dishes for those who aren't fans of fish. Gulfshore Grill also features live entertainment every evening beginning at 9pm.

1270 Estero Blvd., Fort Myers Beach, <http://www.gulfshoregrill.com>, (239)765-5440, daily 8am-2am, \$14-39

Matanzas Inn Restaurant is just as legendary for its scenic water views as it is for its conch fritters, shrimp and grouper. They serve steak and chicken, too. Live entertainment is offered in the evenings.

416 Crescent St., Fort Myers Beach, <http://www.matanzasrestaurant.com>, (239)463-3838, daily 11am-10pm, entrees around \$20

The Prawnbroker has often been designated Fort Myers' favorite seafood restaurant. It's also a seafood market. In addition to seafood, they serve pasta dishes, steak and chicken. Reservations recommended.

13451-16 McGregor Blvd, <http://www.prawnbroker.com>, (239)489-2226, Sun-Thu 4pm-9:30pm, Fri & Sat 4pm-10pm, \$11-35

Vegetarian Dining

Fort Myers has two growing seasons, making vegetables, fruit, edible flowers and fresh herbs plentiful year-round. Local menus cater to vegans and vegetarians, as well as to those who go organic.

Sandy Butler Gourmet Market on Fort Myers Beach offers vegetarian takeout options for those who want lunch or dinner on the go. They also have an onsite restaurant that offers small lunch and dinner menus.

17650 San Carlos Blvd., <http://www.sandybutler.com>, (239)482-6765, Restaurant Hours: Lunch 11am-3pm, Dinner 5pm-10pm, Happy Hour 3pm-6pm

Jayne's Victorian Garden offers organic vegetarian and vegan options that include wraps, soups, salads, muffins and cakes. The herbs and edible flowers used in the restaurant are grown by the proprietors. Jayne's also offers takeout boxed lunches.

12901-13 McGregor Blvd. (located in Bridge Plaza), (239)482-2466, Mon-Sat 10am-5:30pm (Sat. hours subject to change, call ahead), meals under \$10

India Palace caters to those whose tastes are both vegetarian and ethnic, although there are options for the carnivores, too. They offer more than 12 meatless dishes as a main course and several vegetarian starter choices.

11605 Cleveland Ave. #20, <http://www.indiapalacefortmyers.com>, (239)939-2323, Tue-Sun 11:30am-2:30pm & 5pm-10pm, \$10-17

Family-Friendly Food

If your kid doesn't like seafood, there are a lot of options in Fort Myers and the surrounding area. These restaurants offer kids' menus and casual dining so you can relax after a day of sightseeing.

R.J. Gator's Florida Grill & Bar is a chain known for its Everglades-themed décor (lots of alligators) and menu that emphasizes Florida specialties (alligator tail is an appetizer). They have chicken and burgers, too.

Florida Gulf Coast Town Ctr., 10029 Gulf Center Dr., Ste. F250, <http://www.rjgators.com>, (239)337-9821, \$11-17

Iguana Mia is very popular for its Mexican food and fun, friendly atmosphere. Their house specialties include chimichangas and tacos dorados, and their margaritas are known to be the best in town. Kids eat free on Sundays.

4329 Cleveland Ave., <http://www.iguanamia.com>, (239)939-5247, \$10-20

The Beached Whale specializes in seafood and barbecue, with a kids' menu featuring chicken fingers, hamburgers, fish and shrimp. You can dine on the rooftop terrace overlooking the Gulf. They offer live music every night.

Fort Myers Beach, 1249 Estero Blvd., <http://www.thebeachedwhale.com>, (239)463-5505, daily 11am-12am, \$11-22

Attractions & Things to Do

Sun Yourself on the Beach

The beaches at Fort Myers are renowned for their white sands and shell varieties (although if you're a shell collector, nearby Sanibel Island is known to have the best). There are numerous opportunities for water sports like kayaking, windsurfing, boating and fishing. Most visitors will find that every beach in the Fort Myers area is unique, with various textures of sand and different atmospheres, so you can find a beach that suits you, whether you want one that's crowded or one that is more secluded.

Visit the Winter Homes of Edison and Ford

Thomas Edison and Henry Ford were friends who wintered together in Florida. Their homes are side-by-side—Edison's Seminole Lodge and Ford's Mangoes—and both are preserved with their 1920's furnishings and décor. You can choose from a few tours, which include the interior of both homes (Edison's is thought to be the most interesting) and gardens, Edison's tropical botanical garden (including over 1,000 varieties of flora from around the world), and his laboratory. The onsite museum houses a Model-T Ford (presented to Edison as a gift from Ford) and a collection of Edison's phonographs.

2350 McGregor Blvd., <http://www.efwefla.org>, (239)334-7419, daily 9am-5:30pm (botanical tours Thu & Sat at 9am), Homes & Gardens Tour \$20, Botanical Tour \$24, Laboratory & Museum \$11

Take the Kids to the Imaginarium

If you need a break from the beach (or if the weather is arranging that for you), head inside to the Imaginarium, an interactive museum that educates children about science and nature. Here you will find exhibits about robots, sports science, meteorology, paleontology and more. The Imaginarium has live animals like lizards, turtles and birds, in addition to touch tanks, where you can pet crabs and mollusks. There is also a movie screen that shows special films every half and hour, including a twice-daily 3-D movie. There is a café in the museum and a picnic area outside.

2000 Cranford Ave., <http://www.cityftmyers.com/imaginarium>, (239)337-3332, Mon-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun 12pm-5pm, \$5 kids (ages 3-12), \$8 adults (13-54), \$7 seniors

Share Water with the Manatees

If you're interested in seeing manatees in their natural habitat and learning more in general about Florida's wildlife, you can book a popular Manatee World cruise. You get on an open-air, manatee-safe boat that seats a total of 44 people. The 90-minute narrated tours operate during peak tourist season, which also happens to be when the largest number of manatees gather in

the Orange River. The cruises take to the water four times daily, and they can get extremely crowded, so it's best to call ahead and make reservations.

5605 Palm Beach Blvd., <http://www.manateeworld.com>, (239)694-4042, Mon-Sat 10am-4pm (closed during the summer)

Enjoy Lovers Key State Park

This state park is a secluded spot between Black Island and Bonita Beach. The unspoiled beaches offer plenty of opportunities for shelling, picnicking and other beach activities, as well as water sports (be aware, however, that the beach has no lifeguards). This is also considered a prime spot for nature lovers to see manatees, dolphins and various birds (including bald eagles). Lovers Key is also popular with hikers and cyclists, who make use of the five miles of trails. Boat and fishing tours are offered, as well as kayak, canoe and bicycle rentals.

Fort Myers Beach, 8700 Estero Blvd., (239)463-4588, daily 8am-sundown, \$5 per vehicle (up to 8 passengers), \$3 single-person vehicle

Insider Tips & Activities

Hike at the Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve

The Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve is a boardwalk trail, slightly over a mile long, that takes you through wetlands featuring a diverse population of flora and fauna. If you want to see alligators in the wild, this is the place to go. It is home to at least 10 endangered plant and animal species. The Slough is a haven for birdwatchers, photographers and artists. Guided walks are available daily from November through April, and every Wednesday morning from May through October. The boardwalk is wheelchair accessible.

7751 Penzance Crossing, <http://www.leeparks.org/sixmile>, (239)432-2004, daily 8am-sunset, free admission (parking \$1 per hour or \$5 maximum)

Shop 'til You Drop at the Shell Factory & Nature Park

If you're a shell collector who doesn't feel like beachcombing, you can come to the Shell Factory for both common and rare seashells, coral, sponges, fossils and nautical-inspired merchandise. For the kids, there is a nature park with a petting zoo and a fun park with an arcade, mini golf and bumper boats. It's Christmas year-round at their Christmas Shop. And if all this shopping and playing works up an appetite, Capt'n Fishbones serves seafood, steaks and pasta, and afterwards you can stop by their fudge shop for dessert.

2787 N. Tamiami Trail, <http://www.shellfactory.com>, (239)995-2141 or (800)282-5805, Shell Factory: daily 9am-8pm, Nature Park: daily 10am-7pm, Capt'n Fishbones: Tue-Sat 11:30am-8pm

Eat a Cheeseburger in Paradise at Cabbage Key

Only a boat, helicopter or seaplane will get you to Cabbage Key, a 100-acre ancient Calusa Indian shell mound, on which sits the historic inn that inspired Jimmy Buffett's "Cheeseburger in Paradise." This was a haunt of Ernest Hemingway as well. The inn was built in 1938 by mystery author and playwright Mary Roberts Rinehart. While you can, of course, stay at the inn, many drop by just to eat one of their cheeseburgers or have a drink in the Dollar Bill Bar (the walls are papered entirely in dollar bills).

Pine Island Sound, <http://www.cabbagekey.com>, (239)283-2278

Entertainment & Nightlife

Bars, Pubs & Lounges

Dwyer's Pub—This Irish pub has two levels: the restaurant/pub level has a stage for live music and a quieter patio; upstairs is the Attic Bar, which attracts a large crowd to its dance floor on weekends. The Attic Bar also has an outdoor beer garden. Dwyer's attracts a variety of patrons who enjoy the casual, friendly atmosphere.

13851 Tamiami Trail, <http://www.dwyers-pub.com>, (239)425-0782, daily 11:30am-2am

Ellington's Jazz Bar & Restaurant—This popular Sanibel Island spot is known as much for its good food and old-school ambience as it is for its nightly live jazz. Ellington's presents a large variety of performers, as the autographs on their white baby grand piano will attest. Even the food, prepared by award-winning chef Amy Visco, has musical names.

Sanibel Island, 937 East Gulf Drive, <http://ellingtonsjazz.com>, (239)472-0494, daily 5pm-11pm

Miller's Ale House—This sports bar is popular with the locals, who flock here to watch games on their 57 televisions. Ale House offers a lunch and dinner menu, but the big attraction is the large variety of beers. While kids are welcome here, too, Ale House's late hours mean that it's a grown-up place at night.

Gulf Coast Town Center, 11065 Gulf Center Dr., <http://www.millersalehouse.com>, (239)461-9334, daily 11am-2am

Dance & Nightclubs

EnVie Lounge—This club is considered to be one of the chicest in town, with a young, trendy clientele. EnVie has a suede-swathed lounge, and their dance floor is where some of Florida's most prominent DJs spin house, R&B, European dance and urban music. There is also a VIP Lounge that overlooks the main area (many international celebrities have hung out here).

2213 Main St., <http://www.enviedowntown.com>, (239)337-0909, Wed-Fri 5pm-2am, Sat 9pm-2am, cover \$5-8

Ricochet Nightclub—This club is famous for its coin night (any coin buys you a drink on Tuesday nights from 7pm-10pm), and its laidback, country-western atmosphere attracts a mix of people, some of whom come to hear occasional big name acts like Keith Urban and Trick Pony. Every Friday night is Ladies' Night, with free drinks from 7pm to midnight.

3853-B Cleveland Ave., <http://www.ricochetnightclub.com>, (239)277-5700, cover charge varies

Warnings & Advisories

Watch Out for the Weather

Summer months in Fort Myers have the most precipitation, so if you plan to come during the off-season (October through April is peak tourist season in the Fort Myers area), be prepared for rain. Average rainfall is anywhere between 8-10 inches per month during the summer. Much of that rain comes with thunderstorms. Make sure to keep checking the forecasts just before and during your travel (don't forget to pack that umbrella or rain slicker!), and don't plan any long-term outdoor activities on days that have forecasted precipitation.

Beware of Love Bugs

Every year, tourists complain about the swarms of love bugs that invade Fort Myers. The peak season for love bugs is around the first half of June. They are harmless, in that they won't bite or sting, but they can be very annoying, particularly for drivers. These bugs can cause serious damage to your vehicle—to the paint job as well as the radiator. If you are driving in the area during love bug season, you may have to stop several times to wash your windshield. A screen for your radiator will protect it from getting clogged.

Beach Tips

Stingrays are a concern between May and October when they bury themselves under the sand at the water's edge. To avoid a painful stingray attack, shuffle your feet as you move through the water, so they will be alerted of your presence. If you go shelling, be aware that collection of any live shells, starfish or sea dollars can subject you to a large fine or a jail sentence. Also, be sure to bring a biodegradable bag to properly dispose of litter and cigarette butts.