



THE BEACHES OF
**FORT MYERS
AND SANIBEL**

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

Welcomes four-legged visitors and their people

LEE COUNTY, FL – If the thought of going on vacation without your furry best friend seems like no vacation at all, consider a getaway to the sun-drenched sub-tropical wonderland known as The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in Southwest Florida, where dogs are welcomed with open paws!

Sanibel Island is ranked among the top dog-friendly vacation destinations in the United States by bringfido.com. The site lists pet-friendly hotels, events, restaurants, parks and beaches.

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 an even more appealing getaway for humans and their furry pets. 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 pet. 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 an ideal destination for visitors and their pets to enjoy some vacation time together.

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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 www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/stay/ and click "pets on leash allowed" for a complete listing in the amenities drop down menu. However, keep in mind that some hotel chains charge a fee for pets and may have restrictions on breeds and weight so it is important to always read the fine print. You can also visit [bringfido](http://bringfido.com) to find pet-friendly hotels in the Fort Myers area or [TripAdvisor](http://TripAdvisor.com) to find pet-friendly hotels on Sanibel.

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 Lee County parks offering facilities for dogs, visit www.leeparks.org or call 239-533-7275. Pooches who love a beach party will adore 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 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. Owners must be older than 15 and adhere to a two-dog limit. Children younger than 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 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

Bark on the Ark

It's a dog day on the water. Enjoy a river cruise for playtime on the beach at Picnic Island with your dog. Water, tennis balls, dog treats and waste bags are included for the canines. \$44 per person, reservations at 239-919-2965 or PureFl.com. (8-11:30 a.m. *third Saturday of the month, Pure Florida's Edison Explorer docks at The Marina at Edison Ford, 2360 W. 1st St., Fort Myers*)

Dog Beach near Lovers Key State Park

This is the only shoreline in the area – and one of only a handful in the state – where dogs can roam without a leash. Located just outside Lovers Key State Park, this secluded beach allows pups of all sizes to frolic in the sand and shallow waters of the Gulf. Be sure to check the tide report before you head here though to avoid going during a high tide.

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Dog Bones Cafe

Behind Cap'n Fishbones at the Shell Factory, 2787 N. Tamiami Trail, North Fort Myers, 239-995-2141, shellfactory.com, there's **Dog Bones Café**, where dogs can wander off leash and play with other visiting pups. There's a dog park with an agility course and doggy fountain and, at 9:30 a.m. Sundays, there's Doggy Church. Dogs are permitted throughout the attraction except for the main restaurant and nature park.

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

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.

Island Paws

Island Paws offers quality health and nutrition, gourmet treats, and unique gifts. It is their pleasure to be able to share their love of pets with so many people. They believe that pets are a part of the family. They deserve our love and understanding, and a scratch on the belly whenever time allows! (, 630 Tarpon Bay Road, Sanibel, 239-395-1464)

Fishing Buddy Charters

[Fishing Buddy Charters](#) is dog friendly! Fish the fruitful backwaters of Estero Bay, Sanibel Island and Pine Island Sound. Depending on the time of year, you'll catch popular Snook, Red Fish, Grouper, Tarpon and Trout and Trout species. They are plenty of other fish in the sea life Flounder, Pompano, Mackerel and more! They also offer sightseeing tours of the habitats of a vast of local wildlife.

DipidyDawg Gourmet Dog Bakery & Boutique, Estero

A specialty pet store offering an organic bakery, pet grooming, pet supplies, natural and holistic foods, dog fashions, spa products, pet toys harnesses, collars, totes and more. (21301 S. Tamiami Trail, Estero, 239-949-9885)

Paw-radise Dog Bakery

Offers a large variety of U.S.-made holistic lines of cat and dog foods, treats, and of course fresh-baked cookies. Does your best friend have allergies? Visit the hypoallergenic section of the store. (, 21470 S. Tamiami Trail, Estero, 239-948-2287)

Dog-friendly shopping

Coconut Point in Estero is an open-air shopping center with water stations and plastic bag stations. Even though most stores are pet-friendly, double check to see what stores allow your pets inside. Some restaurants allow dogs on patios. (23106 Fashion Drive, Estero, 239-992-9966, or visit www.simon.com/mall/coconut-point)

Bell Tower Shops in Fort Myers host a monthly "Yappy Hour" from 6:00pm to 8:00pm on the second Friday of each month that benefits the Gulf Coast Humane Society. The center allows pets at some outdoor restaurants. (Daniels Parkway & US 41 Fort Myers, 239-489-1221 or visit www.thebelltowershops.com)

Miromar Outlets shopping center offers a large selection of stores with covered walkways. This mall is outdoors and welcomes pets into most stores and restaurants. Miromar offers water bowls for pets throughout the mall and some stores even give treats to well-behaved pets. The mall requires all pets to be on a leash. (10801 Corkscrew Rd, Estero, 239-948-3766 or visit www.miromaroutlets.com)

River District Events

The newest downtown Fort Myers event, **Pet Walk**, takes place on every fourth Friday of the month from October to May. Owners can bring their friendly pooches to socialize and explore the historic river district starting at 6:00pm at the Butterfly Estates. Call 1-885-RDA-EVENTS (732-3836) or visit www.riverdistrictevents.com/

Four-legged diners welcome!

Restaurants in the area that welcome dogs include: **McGregor Café, Bistro 41, Blue Pointe Oyster Bar, Ford's Garage and Salty Papa's Shrimp House** in Fort Myers; **Big Blue Brewing, Cork Soakers** (Doggy Daze 1-5 p.m. the first Saturday of the month) and **Rumrunners** in Cape Coral; **Bonita Bill's, Pinchers Crab Shack and Survey Cafe** in Bonita Springs. Sanibel and Captiva also have many choices for dining with your pup, including **George & Wendy's Sanibel Seafood Grille, Keylime Bistro, Pinocchio's Original Italian Ice Cream, The Island Cow, Cantina Captiva, RC Otter's Island Eats, Sanibel Deli & Coffee Factory, The Pecking Order Fried Chicken, Cip's Place, Mucky Duck Restaurant, Schnapper's Hots, Over Easy Café, Blue Giraffe Island Dining, Geppetto's Beach Foodies, and the Green Flash Restaurant.** You can also visit [bringfido](http://bringfido.com) or [fortmyers-sanibel](http://fortmyers-sanibel.com) websites to find more restaurants that welcome your canine companions.

Starbucks' secret doggy delight

Go to any Starbucks and order something for yourself and you can also order a Puppucino, a frothy cup of whipped cream from the store's secret menu just for canines. Your dog will love you and so will your wallet because it's free.

Some basic tips for taking your dog out to dine and play:

- *It's always best to call ahead and ensure that your dog will be welcome.
- *Find out what the restaurant offers – bowls with water? Treats or food? If not, plan to bring your own.
- *Take a small blanket for your pet to lie on. Florida sidewalks can get very warm and, although many restaurants have shaded areas, the ground can be uncomfortable, especially for older pets.
- *If you'll be in the sun for a long time, bring sunscreen for you and your dog. Dog noses burn easily, as do hairless dogs and those with light-colored or thinner coats.
- *If you plan to be on a boat with your dog, make sure it has a doggy life vest.
- *Make sure your dog is up to date on vaccinations before allowing it to encounter other dogs.

*Keep the contact information of a 24/7 veterinary clinic with you at all times. While it is rare, accidents (and dog disputes) sometimes happen and it's best to be prepared. In Lee County, there's Florida Veterinary Referral Center and 24 Hour Emergency Hospital in Estero, (239) 992-8878; Specialized Veterinary Services in Fort Myers, (239) 947-0588; and Viscaya-Prado Veterinary Hospital in Cape Coral (239) 574-2868.