

Accolades 2017

Boca Grande

Gasparilla Inn Named No.1 by Florida By Travel + Leisure

Nov. 3, 2017

For the second year in a row, The Gasparilla Inn & Club has been selected as the No. 1 Resort in Florida by *Travel + Leisure* magazine, and was also named the No. 3 Resort in Florida by *Condé Nast Traveler's* 2017 Readers' Choice Awards. *Condé Nast Traveler's* Readers' Choice Awards and *Travel + Leisure* World's Best Awards are determined primarily by the magazines' print and digital subscribers as well as other travelers who choose to cast a vote based upon their experiences within the last year. The *Travel + Leisure* awards were announced in the August 2017 issue. The *Condé Nast Traveler* awards were posted online this week and will appear in the November 2017 issue.

Gasparilla Inn & Club

World's Best Tarpon Fishing Destinations

June 2017

A tarpon mecca since the early 1900s, Boca Grande Pass, with its 60-foot depths, harbors a large concentration of silver kings from April through July, when fish start to thin out. The pass is primarily a live-bait fishery, but the adjacent Gulf beaches are prime areas to sight-fish — with either flies, lures or baits — for tarpon cruising over light sand bottom in packs and often large schools. East of the pass, Charlotte Harbor, and connecting Pine Island Sound, also play host to many tarpon that frequent deeper shorelines, channels and basins, which, in addition to the mouths of the Myakka, Peace and Caloosahatchee rivers, offer hot live-bait action for big fish (some exceeding 150 pounds) through mid-fall.

Boca Grande

The Preppiest Wedding Locations Around the World

May 9, 2017

Why: Because your Grandmothers both have beach cottages on Gasparilla Island and your wedding cake of choice is a key lime pie from Newlin's

Traditions: Many couples who marry at the Gasparilla Inn & Club have been spring-breaking under the yellow-and-white-striped beach umbrellas since they were babes. They therefore like to incorporate club rituals into their wedding weekend, reports Corey Anglin, Special events Manager for the Inn, "notably our Bingo Night in The Inn's Living Room, which is a riot!"

Gasparilla Inn & Club

Cabbage Key

Home-Style Bites: The Top Mom-and-Pop Restaurants in the Country

A throwback to a bygone era in Florida, this restaurant sits on an island accessible only by boat. Often referred to as the “bar with money on the walls” the open-air space does, indeed, have dollar bills hanging from the ceilings and the walls, including many bills signed by notable people. Jimmy Buffett sang fondly of their cheeseburger in Cheeseburger in Paradise, but many diners flock for their mahi-mahi and famous frozen Key lime pie.

Cabbage Key Inn & Restaurant

Caloosahatchee River

6 Waterfront Wedding Venues, Perfect for Summer (And No, They Aren’t on the Beach)

June 10, 2017

The peninsula of Florida offers myriad waterfront options, but you really can't beat The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village. Located on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River amid 400 miles of Southwest Florida's navigable canals and waterways, it promises to provide a nautical backdrop featuring widespread waterfront views of untouched aquatic wildlife and yachts and sailboats docked at the Tarpon Point Marina

Tarpon Point Marina

Captiva/Useppa

22 Best U.S. Islands

Located off Florida’s Gulf Coast, the sister islands of Sanibel and Captiva offer travelers a tranquil, tropical escape year-round. The beautiful, shell-strewn beaches on both islands rank among the top destinations for shelling, and provide the perfect landscape to sit back, relax and watch the sun set. The island’s pristine, turquoise blue waters are also great for offshore fishing, snorkeling and scuba diving.

Captiva Island, Sanibel Island

8 Top Honeymoon Spots in America You Never Knew were so Romantic

Nov. 3, 2017

Get away from it all on pretty Captiva Island, filling your days with romantic shoreline cruises, lingering beach walks, and unforgettable sunsets from your cottage or beach house rental. It’s also perfectly placed for exploring the outdoorsy delights of adjacent Sanibel Island.

Captiva Island

18 Prettiest Waterfront Wedding Venues for Your Big Day

May 9, 2017

Tie the knot at this secluded marina on the Caloosahatchee River. Oh, and if you're feeling a unique, dramatic helicopter entrance, they've got that too.

The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village

Cayo Costa

15 Incredible American Campsites That Should Be On Your Bucket List

Another car-less accessible camping experience, this island paradise features nine miles of beaches alongside the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. A swimmer's, snorkeler's, and scuba diver's paradise, there are plenty of opportunities to hang with the manatees, porpoises, and sea turtles. Nature trails and bike rentals will give landlubbers plenty to enjoy, while tent camping by the beach offers a quiet and chill outdoorsy experience. Get to Cayo Costa Primitive Campground by boarding a boat at one of the five places that offer passenger service to the island: Punta Gorda, Pine Island, Fort Myers, Sanibel Island, or Captiva Island. Once docked, you need to travel a mile to the campground that features showers and toilets. You can surely do this part by foot, but you'll likely be lugging lots of stuff, so catch the tram that will shuttle you between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Cayo Costa

Fort Myers Beach

Fort Myers Beach Best Western Plus Beach Resort Recognized with Brand's Highest Honor

This resort is the only hotel in Florida to receive this award, and one of 41 out of 2,100 in North America

Nov. 29, 2017

The Best Western Plus Beach Resort on Fort Myers Beach was recognized with the brand's highest honor, the M.K. Guertin Award at Best Western® Hotels and Resorts' 2017 North American Convention held recently in Nashville, Tennessee. The award was presented to Tim Malbon, managing general partner of The Best Western Plus Beach Resort, in front of approximately 2,500 Best Western hoteliers and staff.

Best Western Plus Beach Resort

12 Best Florida Summer Vacations on a Budget

Aug. 7, 2017

Boasting the perfect combination of sun-kissed beaches and historic landmarks, Fort Myers is an ideal destination for vacation-goers not looking to spend a fortune. History enthusiasts will revel in the chance to explore the Thomas Edison and Henry Ford winter estates, the kids will love a visit to the interactive exhibits at the Imaginarium Science Center, while visitors of all ages will enjoy a day of digging their toes in the pristine sands of Lovers Key State Park. If you visit during manatee season, make sure to stop by the Lee County Manatee Park for a day of seeing Florida's famous gentle giants, while the Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium is a year-round attraction where you can see bald eagles, alligators, hawks, and owls.

Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium, Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Imaginarium Science Center

The Top 7 Dog-Friendly Beaches in the Country

Located at the southern end of Lovers Key, dog owners often fall head over heels for Fort Meyers Dog Beach. Here, there's a cool doggie shower station and free parking. Part of Lee County's Parks and Recreation Department, the off-the-leash beach is open from 7 a.m. to dusk every day and maintained by a valuable group of volunteers. Note: There is no fishing is allowed in the dog play areas.

Fort Myers Dog Beach

Sanibel Island

2018 Winner of The Knot Best of Weddings Award

Nov. 15, 2017

Casa Ybel Resort and its Thistle Lodge Beachfront Restaurant are thrilled to announce that we have been selected as a 2018 winner of The Knot Best of Weddings award! The Knot is the #1 trusted wedding media and service company, providing today's to-be-weds with comprehensive wedding planning information, tools, and resources.

The Knot's annual Best of Weddings awards honor the best- and most-rated wedding professionals, as reviewed by real couples on TheKnot.com. Only two percent of local wedding professionals receive this prestigious award!

We are so proud of our amazing team, and their commitment to providing an exceptional level of service to all of our couples. We would like to thank all of our brides and grooms who took the time to write incredibly touching reviews—and made us want to host their weddings all over again! We feel humbled and honored for the opportunity to be a part of so many special celebrations, and look forward to many more in the years to come!

Casa Ybel

Sanibel Island Named Best Beaches for Shelling

Every week from Memorial Day through Labor Day, our readers are voting for the best spots of the summer—and this week’s winner for the Best Shelling Beach is [Sanibel Island, Florida!](#)

This Gulf island is located just offshore of Fort Myers on Florida’s southwest coast. Seashells (more than 250 varieties of seashells, in fact) cover the beaches here, and Sanibel is also home to The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum and an annual shell fair and show. With so much shelling-specific attractions, it’s no surprise that shell lovers of all levels flock to Sanibel Island (and its sister island, Captiva), but Sanibel also offers a wealth of attractions beyond its famed shelling.

Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum, J.N. Ding Darling

20 Amazing Family Beaches You Need to Visit this Summer

Sanibel Island's famous white sand beach is complemented by swimming in the warm Gulf, where it's easy for little kids to practice their strokes since there's no shore break or undertow. Thanks to the destination's geography and the east-west orientation of the water, the waves catch incoming shells of all shapes, varieties, and colors. They arrive daily by the hundreds of thousands, mostly fully intact, making for a fabulous, free, treasure hunt every day. Pack light so you'll have plenty of room in your suitcase for nature's souvenirs

Sanibel Island

5 Islands to Escape to This Summer

April 28, 2017

Sanibel is known worldwide for its awesome shelling beaches. Due to Sanibel Island’s unique geographical orientation, lying East to West instead of North to South, it acts as a scoop and gathers seashells along it’s beaches. My theory is go during summer months and escape the crowds. Rumor has it Bowman’s Beach is best for beachcombing.

9 Places made for kids on the beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

May 10, 2017

ATTENTION PARENTS: You need a vacation. The only problem is that it has to be kid-friendly, educational, not break the bank, and still be something for the entire family. That certainly narrows it down — but luckily one of the places left on this short list is Southwest Florida.

The kids are hankering for a good “Guess what I got to do?” story anyway, so use it as an excuse to walk the soft, white sands on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel and soak in the warm waters of the Gulf. Here are nine places they’ll love — and that you’ll love, too.

Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum, Beach Cottages of Sanibel, J.N. Ding Darling, Mound House, Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina, Red Coconut RV Park, Salty Sam's Pirate Cruise, South Seas Island Resort, Sundial Beach Resort & Spa, Tween Waters Inn Island Resort

5 Under the Radar Places You Should Visit in the USA

May 16, 2017

With so many incredible international destinations, it's easy to forget that you don't actually need to leave good ol' U.S.A to experience new cultures, taste new foods, and see mind-blowing sights!

This year, set your sights on exploring some new places right here at home. To make it easier on you, we put together five of our fave, lesser known (but oh-so-amazing) places you should travel to ASAP.

Sanibel Island, Florida

This super southern spot is the ultimate beach paradise! Between long stretches of pristine shoreline, islands to hop and gorgeous sunsets that'll make your jaw drop, it's basically everything a person could want when it comes to the ultimate tropical getaway. Not sure when the best time to visit might be? Plan for National Seashell Day on June 21. You'll be able to squeeze in a trip to the Bailey Matthews National Shell Museum, the only museum in America completely dedicated to shells.

Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum

40 Must-see Places to Take Your Kids before They're Grown

May 21, 2017

Why you've got to go: For the most amazing seashell experience you've ever had! Gazillions of the wash up on these Gulf coast barrier islands, which are equally famous for their wildlife. Plus, the water is shallow forever, so it's a great place for little guys!

Captiva Island, Sanibel Island

9 Affordable Island Honeymoon Destinations Right Here in the US

June 28, 2017

Surround yourself with swaying palm trees and white sandy beaches on Sanibel Island. Located just off Florida's Gulf Coast and accessible via car, it's an affordable island honeymoon spot with serious appeal. Rent bicycles and cruise along the coastline, browse the local art galleries, or comb the beaches for seashell souvenirs. Just want to relax? Sanibel Island boasts 15 miles of unspoiled beaches, warm water and abundant sunshine. Whether you're all about the romance or looking to experience the area like a native, it won't disappoint!

Sweet Melissa's

10 Beach Towns That Offer So Much More for Families

Your pint-size seashell collector will go out of her mind on any of the beaches in this town. "Hundreds of thousands of seashells arrive daily from the Gulf of Mexico, and most are fully intact," says Pam Rambo,

founder of ILoveShelling.com. There are more than 300 different kinds; you can pick up a laminated shelling guide in local gift shops to help your kids ID the most common ones. The seashell selection is even better following a summertime storm or in November and December, explains Rambo. Since you'll need to clean the seashells (buy bleach to reduce the odor), you're better off staying at one of the many condo rentals in town or a resort like South Seas Island Resort (from \$229 per night; all rates are for rooms that sleep four). In nearby Captiva, South Seas offers beach condos with kitchens plus shelling excursions with the on-site Sanibel Sea School.

Sanibel Sea School, South Seas Island Resort

Top U.S. Beaches

Florida beaches are just beautiful altogether – one is more beautiful than the next! However, when it's time to narrow down the options for which is the best Florida beach in America, there's no doubt that Sanibel & Captiva Island take the cake. Situated on the Gulf side of Florida right off the coast of Fort Myers are Sanibel & Captiva. If you want to travel with your family or just a romantic getaway for you and your significant other, this is a perfect destination to visit.

Captiva Island, Sanibel Island

9 Secret Beaches Worth Making the Trip For

Aug. 7, 2017

Looking for the perfect shell to add to your collection? Bowman's Beach, on Florida's sleepy Sanibel Island, is where to find pristine whelks, cockles, and conches in every size and hue. But there's something here for everyone. Sun worshippers can pull up their towels on powdery swaths of sand, while sailors can make use of the gentle waves and tailwinds. More of an angler? Charter a boat or rent a rod to catch tarpon, grouper, and the photogenic crevalle jack, for your mantel or for dinner.

Bowman's Beach

15 Stunning Island Vacations You Can Take Without A Passport

Aug. 17, 2017

Two of Florida's most hidden treasures, the sister islands of Sanibel and Captiva feel like Caribbean transplants. There are no high-rise buildings (just modest houses for rent) and no chain restaurants (expect small, family-owned shops and eateries). It happens to be a prime spot for collecting seashells and a theater for Instagram-worthy sunsets.

Captiva Island, Sanibel Island

Find your perfect escape this fall and winter with 7 great travel destinations

Aug. 10, 2017

Of course you'll go shelling. Sanibel is 3 miles off the Florida coast near Fort Myers, a smile-shaped east-west island blessed with white-sand beaches and an underwater shelf that readily accepts the gulf currents' treasures, namely more than 400 varieties of shells.

Serious shellers plan trips around low tide and head out before dawn with headlamps, but even casual hunters can easily accumulate bucketsful of conches and scallops and the most perfect little intact sand dollars, too. The head-down, shell-searching posture is so common on beaches here that it has its own name, the Sanibel Stoop.

Another Sanibel draw is the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Part of the world's largest undeveloped mangrove system, it's a haven for 250-some species of migratory birds (as well as alligators and other wildlife). Start with the free Visitor & Education Center and 4-mile scenic drive. Three hiking-trail spurs and tours, through the refuge's official outfitter Tarpon Bay Explorers, get you as close a view of things as you're comfortable with, whether from a tour bus window or stand-up paddleboard among the mangroves.

Where to stay: The Island Inn is classic Sanibel. On top of a 122-year history, it has 49 cottages, rooms and suites, including 12 upgraded ones debuting in January, all overlooking 550 feet of private beachfront. islandinnsanibel.com

True story: It's law in Sanibel that nothing can be built taller than the tallest palm tree. There aren't any stoplights, either.

Island Inn, J.N. Ding Darling, Tarpon Bay Explorers

The Best Beach Bars in America

Mix the ambience of a traditional English pub with the informality of a Caribbean beach bar and you've got the Mucky Duck, a Captiva Island restaurant, bar, and inn where you can wade ashore from your boat for fish and chips and a cold beer on draft. Regulars plan island visits around sundown at the Duck: check the calendar on the website for sunset times every day of the year.

Mucky Duck