

TRAVEL

Southwest Florida offers multitude of diversions

BY NORMA SCHONWETTER
SPECIAL WRITER

Best known as the place where Ponce de Leon visited in the 16th century looking for the fountain of youth, Southwest Florida is a most versatile vacation spot. There are a multitude of attractions for winter as well as summer. It's a location that lends itself to families, honeymooners and couples, popular with golfers and tennis players year round. From a back water charter of from the pier with rented equipment, this area is a fisherman's paradise. Nature lovers will marvel at close-up views of pelicans, egrets, blue herons, ibis, roseate spoonbills and much more. For music lovers there's the beautiful Philharmonic Center for the Arts in Naples.

Naples, located on the Gulf of Mexico, offers 41 miles of beaches at its front door, the Everglades at its back and magnificent sunsets to feast your eyes on. In between are museums, amusement parks, zoological preserves and Caribbean gardens with tropical plants.

Naples has been growing in leaps and bounds and is now second in growth to Las Vegas. The city of Naples is in Collier County, which is larger than the state of Rhode Island. The permanent population is 175,000, swelling



Sunset view: On the Lee Island Coast the sun outlines swaying palms.

to 340,000 January through March. Naples is becoming the Palm Beach of Florida's west coast, with trendy boutiques and Fifth Avenue corridor.

At Everglades National Park, located 30 minutes east of Naples, one can see dolphin, manatees, bald eagles, wading birds and alligators. Miami is less than two hours away and Orlando is a four hour drive.

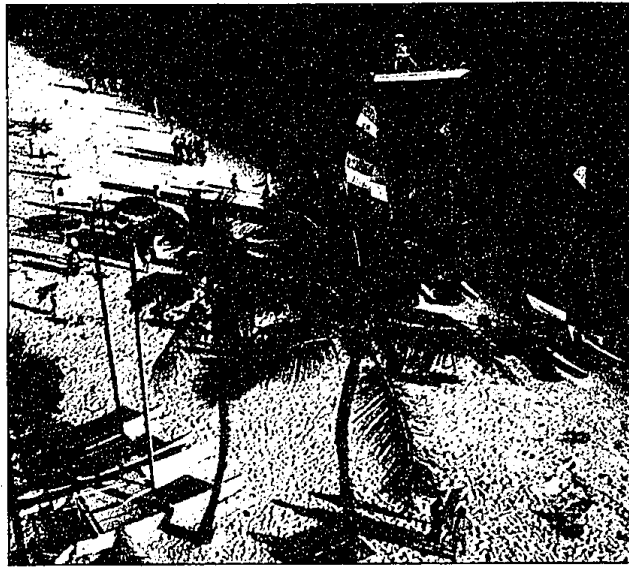
The Lee Island Coast is known as Florida's Tropical Island Getaway. The best known areas are Sanibel and Captiva Islands, connected to the mainland by a three-mile long causeway and to each other by a bridge. Sanibel Island, known for its shelling beaches, the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge and shell museum, is 45 minutes from Naples or Fort Myers. Fifty-foot high shell mounds created by the Calusa Indians (about 1629) can be viewed here. The first Calusa Indians are believed to have arrived 10,000 years ago. It is believed that when Ponce de Leon discovered the west coast of Florida in 1513, he named it Coast of Seashells.

This is a resort island with abundant bird life. The favorite mode of transportation is bicycling.

Baseball fans can take the whole family out to the ball game throughout spring and summer in this area, which is the spring training headquarters to two major league teams, the Minnesota Twins and Boston Red Sox.

A visit to two of Southwest Florida's Four-Diamond resorts offers an opportunity to enjoy the fantastic food of the area, from the interesting gourmet to healthy alternatives. The emphasis is naturally on seafood, however there are sensational pasta and chicken dishes.

The Registry in Naples is a Four-Star, Four Diamond resort which offers a complete daily program for children from 5 to 12. Resort activities include tennis programs, three nearby golf courses, fitness and spa facilities. It is a self-contained resort with 474 luxurious rooms on 23 gulf-front acres, known for its casual elegance, luxurious



Sunny beach: The beaches of south Florida offer sailing, swimming and sunbathing.

accommodations and exceptional eight restaurants.

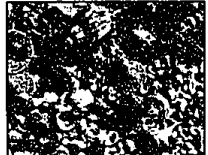
A tram to the beachfront travels along a boardwalk, bordered by a mangrove preserve, that's perfect for joggers. The beautiful expanse of white sand beaches offer windsurfing, sailing, canoeing and kayaking.

Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa, a Four-Diamond, 80-acre resort, containing 320 rooms, was voted one of the top 10 U.S. Spas by

Condé Nast Traveler Magazine for the second year. It overlooks Sanibel and Captiva Islands. This is a charming hotel that combines Victorian style and contemporary casualness. It is known for its modern spa and world-class tennis facilities.

The 40,000-square-foot, world-class spa and fitness center, championship tennis facility with 13 courts, was the site of the 1992 Davis Cup tournament.

Enjoy a soothing massage, pampering body wraps and complete beauty and physical fitness services. There are 10 whirlpools, indoor lap and aqueous pool. The spa offers the BETAR bed, a unique apparatus that promotes relaxation by diffusing oil of lavender into the air and mixing specially chosen music to create illusions of floating on a bed of sounds. This is the ultimate in relaxation.



Shell game: Collecting shells is one of the most popular south Florida activities.

GREAT ESCAPES

Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 591-7279.

TELL US YOUR STORY

We want to hear from you! Have you been someplace interesting? Have you had a special adventure? Is there a quiet island you'd like to recommend or a highly promoted place you'd like to warn against? Do you have special tips for other travelers to make their journeys easier? Have you met some interesting people in other countries that you'd like others to know about? We want to share your stories and your color pictures on our travel page. Call Hugh Gallagher at 734-953-2118, or fax him at 734-591-7279 or e-mail him at hgallagher@eo.com.

MICHIGAN SUMMER GUIDE

Travel Michigan has released two publications for summer travel planning - the 1998 Michigan Travel Ideas and the

1998 Michigan Summer Travel Guide.

The 144-page full-color 1998 Michigan Travel Ideas, the annual guide to Michigan travel destinations and attractions, was produced again this year by Travel Michigan and Midwest Living magazine, with support from General Motors and other advertisers. Features cover topics including Great Lakes cruising, golfing and harbor towns.

The 1998 Michigan Summer Travel Guide is 64 pages of useful travel information.

For free copies of the two booklets, call toll-free (888) 778-GREAT (784-7328). As well as taking orders for the free guides, travel advisers are available to assist travelers in planning their vacations and weekend getaways 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday-Friday and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday. Visit Travel Michigan's web site at www.michigan.org

SHAW FESTIVAL

Tickets are now on sale for the 1998 Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. The Shaw season runs from April 15 to Nov. 1. The festival features plays written by George Bernard

Shaw and his contemporaries, covering the long period of Shaw's life, 1856 to 1950.

The festival has three theaters running the plays in repertory. Niagara-on-the-Lake in on Lake Ontario just north of Niagara Falls.

This year's plays at the large Festival Theatre are Shaw's "Major Barbara," April 16 to Nov. 1; Kaufman and Hart's "You Can't Take It With You," May 2 to Nov. 1; and Oscar Wilde's "Lady Windermere's Fan," June 26 to Oct. 31.

At the Court House Theatre, dedicated to more experimental or neglected works, are Christopher Fry's "The Lady's Not for Burning," June 26 to July 9; Shaw's "John Bull's Other Island," July 4 to Sept. 26; and John Galsworthy's "Joy," June 18 to Sept. 27.

At the Royal George Theatre, dedicated to lighter fare including mysteries and musicals, are a new musical featuring music by George and Ira Gershwin, "A Foggy Day," May 3 to Nov. 1 and Edward Percy's mystery "The Shop at Sly Corner," April 15 to Oct. 31.

Ticket prices range from \$32 to \$65 Canadian including taxes. To order tickets, call 1-800-511-SHAW. The Shaw Festival internet site is <http://shawfest.com>.

GIACOMETTI IN MONTREAL

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts will present the works of the great sculptor Alberto Giacometti, June 18 to Oct. 18. This major exhibition will feature sculptures, paintings and drawings from the Fondation Maeght (the most important collection of works assembled during the artist's lifetime) and from various European and North

American collections. Giacometti was born in Switzerland but worked in France from 1927 until his death in 1966. His early works of the 1930s reflect the influence of Surrealism as well as African and Oceanic art. In the 1940s, the human figure gradually emerged in the artist's repertoire and was to become his dominant theme.

IRISH LECTURE

Dr. Terry Barry of Trinity College, Dublin, will present a lecture on "The Coming of the Vikings to Ireland," 8 p.m.

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