

Mound House Outdoor Nature & Education Events: December 2021

By Gary Mooney

thewritestuff25@gmail.com

With the Holiday season in full force and Southwest Florida teeming with seasonals, vacationers, and out-of-town guests, spread some cheer with a trip to the iconic Mound House on Fort Myers Beach! One of Southwest Florida's most-beloved historic attractions, the Mound House traces its roots to the ancient Calusa of over 2,000 years ago. The Town of Fort Myers Beach operates the Mound House as a museum complex and cultural and environmental learning center that offers numerous educational programs each month, including for kids.

The oldest standing structure on Estero Island, the Mound House is open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., though it does close December 23 through 25 & December 30 through January 1 for the Holidays. It is at 451 Connecticut Street with overflow parking at 216 Connecticut. Admission is \$10 for ages 13 & up, \$8 for students with IDs, \$5 ages 6 to 12, and 5 & under free, with Town residents receiving a 50% discount. The Mound House enforces Social Distancing guidelines and recommends that all unvaccinated visitors wear masks. For information, reservations, and a monthly programs schedule, call 239-765-0865 or see www.moundhouse.org.

“Shell Mound Tour”

For all ages every Tuesday through Saturday at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.; no programs on December 23 through 25 & December 30 through January 1 due to the Holidays.

If you dig archaeology, the Mound House's signature program is for you! Tour the one-of-a-kind underground 2,000-year-old Calusa Indian Shell Mound led by the interpretive staff as you explore the site's archaeology to unearth clues about this ancient society. \$5-per-person that does not include Mound House admission; Mound House members free, with Social Distancing guidelines in place.

FREE: “Newton Beach Park Guided Beach Walk”

For all ages every Tuesday and Thursday weather permitting at 9 a.m.; no programs on December 23 & 30 due to the Holidays.

This twice-weekly free outdoor nature program is different every single time, as the “Guided Beach Walks” have a simple premise – walk roughly a half-mile down the beach and back, discussing whatever you find that morning. Meet at the thatched hut closest to the beach, with Social Distancing in place. Bring sunscreen, shoes to get wet, sunglasses, and hat. No reservations necessary; while free, parking is \$3-per-hour, with one hour generally enough. Newton Beach Park is mid-island at 4650 Estero Boulevard.

“Cool Calusa Tools”

For families with children ages 6 & older every December Tuesday, Thursday, & Saturday at 10 a.m.; no programs on December 23, 25, & 30 for the Holidays.

Learn to hunt, fish, and make masks and pottery, just like the Calusa! The Mound House interpretive staff leads this exciting hands-on tour of the Mound House grounds where they demonstrate Calusa tools and artifacts, then help you make Calusa-inspired artwork where your imagination runs wild! \$2-per-person that does not include Mound House admission, with Social Distancing guidelines in place.

“Garden Tour”

For all ages every December Tuesday & Friday at 2 p.m.; no programs on December 24 or 31 due to the Holidays.

Stroll through the Mound House gardens to discover how its unique plants conserve water and protect wildlife, while learning how the Calusa and other Native Americans used them in their daily lives. \$5-per-person that does not include Mound House admission; Mound House members free, with Social Distancing guidelines in place.

“Mangroves by Kayak Tour”

For ages 12 & up every December Wednesday through Saturday at 9 a.m.; no programs December 23 through 25 & December 30 through January 1 for the Holidays.

Explore the winding mangrove creeks and hidden waters of the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve as only a kayaker can on this Environmental Educator-guided tour of the ancient realm of the Calusa! Witness birds, fish, manatee and dolphins as you paddle through the natural beauty of Estero and Hell Peckney Bays in a tandem kayak. All paddling & safety equipment provided, with kayak tours in accordance with Florida Society of Ethical Ecotourism guidelines. \$45-per-person; Mound House members \$15 that includes Mound House admission. Advance reservations necessary at www.moundhouse.org with Social Distancing guidelines in place.

“Archaeology: Can You Dig It?”

For all ages every December Wednesday & Friday at 10 a.m.; no programs on December 24 & 31 due to the Holidays.

Learn what it takes to be an archaeologist! Handle real artifacts and discover how archaeologists study past cultures in a program perfect for families. \$5-per-person that does not include Mound House admission, with Mound House members free.

“Latino History Tour”

For all ages on Wednesday, December 1; Saturday, December 4; Wednesday, December 8; & Wednesday, December 15, all at 2 p.m.

Perfect for Florida history buffs! Learn about the Latino fishing village known as a “Rancho” that existed on the shell mound between the ancient Calusa and Anglo-Pioneer eras. Explore the site’s archaeology and history through unearthed clues about this multicultural society. \$5-per-person that does not include Mound House admission, with Social Distancing guidelines in place.

“Untold Stories Tour”

For adults on Thursdays, December 2, 9 & 16, all at 2 p.m.

The Mound House is the oldest standing structure on Fort Myers Beach, with an intriguing cast of characters who called it home, ranging from farmers to casino owners; scientists to developers! Learn about their individual stories along with a good dose of island history on this guided tour through the Mound House Museum, native gardens, and majestic grounds. Adults \$15; Mound House members free.

“Sunset Kayak Tour”

Ages 12 & up weather permitting on Fridays, December 3, 10, & 17, all at 4 p.m.

People travel from all over the nation and world to marvel at Fort Myers Beach sunsets, but not many get to do so by kayak! In addition to catching a breathtaking sunset, explore the tidal creeks and winding mangrove tunnels that extend into the hidden backwaters of Estero Bay while experiencing the estuary’s abundant wildlife in the quiet of twilight. The Mound House provides all paddling and safety equipment, with Social Distancing in place. \$45-per-person; Mound House members \$15, with advance registrations necessary at www.moundhouse.org.

FREE: Cool Calusa Carvers

For all ages on Tuesdays, December 7 & 21, from 9 a.m. to Noon

Learn more about woodcarving firsthand from a local group of woodcarvers who made some of the Calusa replica artifacts for Mound House exhibits and programs.

Family Shorebird Program

For all ages on Saturday, December 11, at 9 a.m.

Learn about all the different shorebirds that call Fort Myers Beach home on this environmental educator tour! Meet at the thatched hut closest to the beach, with Social Distancing in place. Bring sunscreen, shoes to get wet, sunglasses, and hat. No

reservations necessary; \$5-per-person with Mound House members free and an added \$3-per-hour parking fee. Newton Beach Park is mid-island at 4650 Estero Boulevard.

“Family Fun Kayak Tour”

For ages 6 & up weather permitting on Saturdays, December 11 & 18; and Wednesdays, December 22 & 29, all at 2 p.m.

This specially-designed Environmental Educator-guided kayak tour is perfect fun for families with children ages 6 & up! See birds, dolphins, manatee, and other wildlife while paddling through the Estero Bay mangroves. \$25-per-person ages 13 & up; \$15-per-person ages 6 to 12 that includes Mound House admission. The Mound House provides all padding equipment, with Social Distancing in place. Advance registrations necessary at www.moundhouse.org.