



**Celebrate
Sarasota**

Art. Culture. Entertainment.

Welcome to Sarasota

It has been described as the capital of Florida's Cultural Coast™, the Circus Capital of the World, a community where art and nature meet. Welcome to Sarasota County, the coastal jewel perched on the Gulf of Mexico, about 50 miles south of Tampa.

BY NANCY OAKLEY

O

ne of the key attractions of Sarasota County has been, well, its keys — six barrier islands that lie between the Sarasota Bay and the Gulf. With 35 miles of wide, white beaches, it's little wonder they attract visitors from around the world. Perhaps the most popular among them is Siesta Key, whose powdery beaches of ground quartz were ranked No. 1 in the United States by coastal scientist Stephen Leatherman, a.k.a. "Dr. Beach." Siesta is arguably *the* place to watch the sun set into an impressionist palette of gold, orange, and pink. Not to be forgotten, Longboat Key offers a cosmopolitan atmosphere, where beachfront communities, resorts, and top-notch dining abound, while Casey Key is a quiet enclave of multi-

million-dollar homes. Nature lovers appreciate the trails and pine forest on Lido Key and the remoteness of Manasota Key, and divers delight in the abundance of shark's tooth fossils off the stretch of Venice Beach.

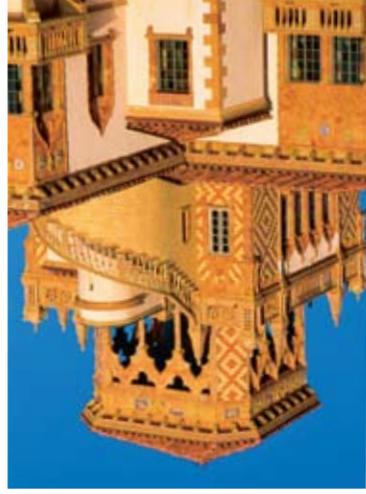
Venice is one of many areas in Sarasota County that has some of the world's best saltwater fishing. Of course, the inland areas offer large populations of trout and other freshwater fish. The Myakka River provides a front seat to observing wildlife, such as alligators and ospreys, from an airboat. The Oscar Scherer State Park is a favorite of hikers and campers, and Mote Marine Laboratory's aquarium tours give up-close glimpses of dolphins, manatees, and more.



Sunset over Siesta Key Beach, named #1 beach in the nation; below, from left: Players Theatre performers KJ Hatfield and Chris Caswell, biking at Siesta Beach, and Fuzion Dance Artists.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SARASOTA CVB, PLAYERS THEATRE PHOTO BY TED WASE





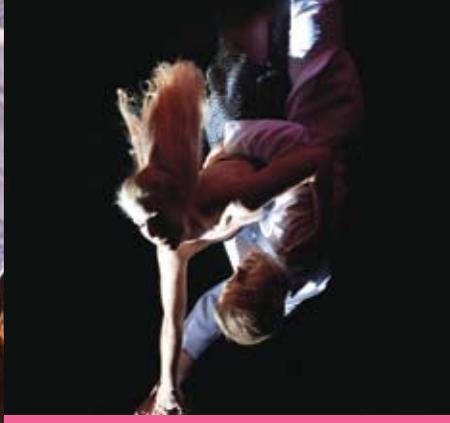
Clockwise from top left: kayaking in Sarasota Bay, Sarasota Bay Front sign, and Ca' d'Zan, John and Mable Ringling's Venetian-inspired villa

As if its natural beauty weren't enough, Sarasota County claims a cultural life parallel to any major community. Rich in history, the area has 90-some sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including its vibrant downtowns, bustling with shops and restaurants — all within a stone's throw of the waterfront. As for the arts, the city of Sarasota is home to Florida's oldest continuing orchestra (Sarasota Orchestra), the oldest theater company (Asolo Repertory Theatre), and the Gulf Coast of Florida's first professional ballet company (Sarasota Ballet) and opera company (Sarasota Opera). Plus, Sarasota boasts dozens of theater companies, including the revered Florida Studio Theatre, as well as festivals for film and chamber music. The North Port area boasts an impressive Ukrainian population and Performing Arts Center. Then there's Art Center Sarasota, where visitors can take classes or attend exhibitions, and numerous galleries, which thrive thanks to the creative spirit from the Ringling College of Art &

Design. And the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, whose namesakes first transformed the sleepy town into a mecca for the arts, adds to that creative spirit.

John Ringling of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, and his wife Mable built a permanent home in Sarasota in 1926 — Ca' d'Zan, a Venetian-inspired villa. A year later, Ringling moved the winter headquarters of his circus to Sarasota, bringing an influx of artists and performers. After his death in 1936, Ringling willed his mansion and staggering collection of baroque paintings and other artworks to the state of Florida. Today, residents and visitors are the beneficiaries of his generosity, whether admiring the interiors of Ca' d'Zan, the scores of Rubens and Van Dycks in the art museum, or the memorabilia at the Tibbals Learning Center and Circus Museum. But the legacy of the big top doesn't stop there: In 1997 husband and wife Pedro Reis and Dolly Jacobs, both veteran performers, created Circus Sarasota, a nonprofit that offers dazzling performances in a one-ring European-style circus as well as numerous education and outreach initiatives.

Outreach lies at the heart of the city's arts community. Sarasota Orchestra and Sarasota Opera include a Youth Orchestra and a Youth Opera respectively, while the Asolo, Venice, and Players theaters also have educational programs to inspire budding playwrights and actors. And the Sarasota Ballet has Dance — The Next Generation, an arts-oriented at-risk youth retention program now in its 16th year. So pervasive is the arts community's commitment to education that the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts recently chose Sarasota as its partner for Any Given Child, a program that establishes long-range arts curriculum for public schools. No doubt, the community will remain the capital of Florida's Cultural Coast™ for years to come.



THE FINEST ARTS IN LIVING COLOR.



Nowhere will you find art and culture more colorful than in Sarasota. From the red velvet curtains of the famed Sarasota Opera House to the gold baroque frames of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, we're home to a one-of-a-kind cultural scene. Visit the artists' colony at Towles Court, or Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall with its legendary seashell design. Dine at one of our many Zagat-rated restaurants, or explore the culinary, art and cultural festivals taking place nearly every week of the year. You'll see why we're known as Florida's Cultural Coast.®

Go Beyond the Beaches.®

Visit sarasotafl.org/fine-arts or call 1.888.510.9591

Siesta Beach #1 in the USA!

