



AllWays Traveller

Sanibel and Captiva, Florida

Wave goodbye to the world for a while

There is, in all honesty, not a great deal to do on Sanibel and Captiva.

But then that's the whole point - and the great joy - of taking a break on these two, linked Floridian islands.

As I drove across the causeway from Fort Myers to Sanibel, an osprey soared in front of me, cormorants and gulls were plunging into the waters on either side of me and a more hectic way of life was drifting away.

I was warned I would be 'waving good bye to the world for a while'.

Within a couple of hours settling in on Sanibel I realised just how true this was.

The sub-tropical climate and laid back ambiance of the place makes for a wonderful stress busting break.

www.fortmyerssanibel.com

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Lazy days in shorts and tee's

by Ashley Gibbins

The barrier islands of Sanibel and Captiva is connect ed to the mainland by a three-mile-long causeway that stretches from the southwestern reaches of Fort Myers out across San Carlos Bay.

More than half of the two islands are preserved as wildlife refuges with the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation responsible for curbing uncontrolled commercial growth and development.



Sand pipers, don't you just love 'em.

So damned quick and sharp focused, they dart frantically - but with real purpose - along the beach as wave after wave breaks and recedes to reveal the next batch of, what I guess are, tasty morsels.

I was full of admiration as I watched one non-stop little fellow on a Sanibel beach.



But emulation was the last thing on my mind as I sloshed through those same warm waters into another stunning sunset.

No, I had quickly aligned myself with the pelicans. Now these are savvy birds who seem to spend much of their days chilling out on a convenient pier post or small bobbing boat with just the occasional lazy flight to search out a fish lunch or dinner.

Add a cold beer or margarita on the rocks to this routine and it was me to a 'T'.

When to go



Being located in southern Florida, Sanibel and Captiva have a sub-tropical climate with temperatures from 60°F (16°C) in midwinter to around 90°F (32.2°C) in high summer.

January through April is the peak tourist season on the island although October to December will also be delightful.



The summer heat and humidity, which has been recorded as high as 100°F, is cooled by the ocean breeze and by the inevitable daily afternoon and evening showers.



Touring on two wheels

Biking it is by far the best way to get around. And remember, this is Sanibel and Captiva.



We are not talking mountain biking - particularly with the highest point on the island 9 feet above sea level. One gear and two speeds - ambling and meandering – will get you wherever you want to go - in good time and fine fettle.

A natural haven

The 6,000 acre JN 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge was named to celebrate Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist and pioneer environmentalist Jay Norwood Darling.

The refuge features bird and animal watching spots, walking, bike and canoe trails and a 4-mile scenic drive and guided tours.

www.dingdarling.fws.gov

How to get there



By air

Southwest Florida International Airport, in Fort Myers, is located approximately 45 minutes from Sanibel Island.

The airport links with gateways including Miami, Atlanta, Chicago and New York.

By road

I-75 connects directly to I-10 and is the major highway for Sanibel and Captiva. Miami is 2.5 hours away, Tampa 2 hours and Olando 3.5 hours.

Car rental

All car rental companies operate in Florida.

Dollar, which has competitive rates and always provides a cracking service.

www.dollar.com

Where to stay

Sanibel and Captiva offer the choice of small inns, Gulf-front resorts and beachside cottages.



The Gulf Breeze Cottages on the Gulf of Mexico in Sanibel offer no-frills, self-catering accommodation that suits the ambience of the island.

www.gbreeze.com

For a full list of accommodation visit :
www.fortmyers-sanibel.com

A private patch of luxury



The pristine, private island of Useppa was first developed in the 1920's, by publishing magnate Bernard Collier.

Collier established the place as a tarpin fishing Mecca for the rich and famous with regular visitors including Rockefeller, Dupont, Edison and Henry Ford dynasties.



Useppa remains an exclusive community, with Collier's mansion home now the Collier Inn and restaurant. The only way non-members can get to the island is via one of the daily trips with Captiva Cruises.

Up close and personal



Adventures in Paradise allows you to paddle effortlessly, by canoe or kayak, around Connie Mack Island, by Larry's Lagoon and through Gator Creek to Stingray Bay and Sharks Bay.

Here's the chance to spot Florida's wildlife including osprey's, egrets, herons, spoonbills, pelicans, manatee, dolphin, river otters, gators, mangrove crabs, and jumping mullet.

Out among the dolphins



Taking a boat trip is another fine way to appreciate to beauty of this area.

Captiva Cruises runs a range of cruises including daily trips to the coastal islands of Cabbage Key and Useppa.

All trips bring you into close contact with the areas dolphin community, who seem to take great delight in performing around and under the boats.

www.captivacruises.com

When the sun goes down



When the day is done it's going to be usual dining? That's fine as there's any number of eclectic restaurants on the islands.

While the local restaurant guide is particularly informative, I can recommend Sanibel's Twilight Café, Doc Fords and Mamma Doc's.

Sea shells on the sea shore



The beaches around Sanibel are some of the best in this world for shelling.

For the many amateur collectors this involves strolling ankle deep through the warm, clear waters and gazing down for the shells that have drifted close to or on shore.

If you want to know more about shells, the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum claims to be the most comprehensive museum in the Western Hemisphere devoted solely to shells.

More than 30 exhibits display shells from around the world, with special focus on shells of Sanibel and Captiva islands and southwest Florida.

www.shellmuseum.org

Nightlife

On Captiva the Andy Rosse Lane area is the hub of this Island with a number of eclectic restaurants.

A short walk from here gets you to the Gulf of Mexico and the always popular Mucky Duck pub.

Finally, for live entertainment it has to be the Jacaranda. The 'Jac' serves fine food and has live music every night of the week. It is also the place the locals head for to strut their stuff, which is a good sign.

.. and when the sun rises

As the sun rises on another perfect day, everyone seems to head to the Lighthouse Café for breakfast. The café claims to serve the best breakfasts in the world. Not sure I would go that far but they are good.

An a great way to start another day doing nothing.

More information :

www.fortmyerssanibel.com
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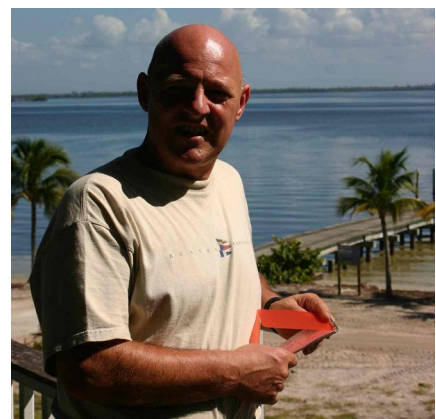
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The International Travel Writers Alliance

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