



Detailed Information on Sanibel and Captiva Islands

Our History

Sanibel and Captiva islands were formed by the prevailing currents in the Gulf of Mexico about 6,000 years ago. The islands began as one but have been frequently separated by the storms that affect the whole of the Gulf. Blind Pass between the two islands was closed as recently as two years ago and has to be maintained regularly to ensure the free passage of water between Bay and Gulf. The first humans in the general area were the Calusa, who arrived about 2,500 years ago. They were a significant Indian tribe who came to dominate a large part of Southwest Florida through trade via an elaborate system of canals and waterways built by them.

The first modern settlement on Sanibel was established by the Florida Peninsular Land Company in 1832. The Company began marketing Sanibel as a planned community that would "become the garden of Florida". A few pioneers began planting sugar cane, pineapple, pumpkins, melons, corn, sisal and hemp (both used in the making of rope, hammocks and nets). Many arrivals on Sanibel turned to farming, in particular tomato growing. With a nine month growing season, October to June, tomatoes became a huge export from Sanibel. By boat and train they were taken to cities throughout the East. Unfortunately a hurricane in 1926 covered the island with salt water and destroyed the soil for farming.

In the thirties, sport fishing became popular and to some extent replaced farming. Some of the greatest Tarpon fishing is just off shore from Sanibel. By the early 1900's Sanibel was on its way to being a prime destination for vacationers: wealthy families from the North East. The island became known as a wholesome, family place. This was a very proper era when ladies wore dresses and gentleman wore jackets and tie even strolling on the beach.

In 1928 a ferry service began to and from the mainland. It carried not only visitors but their horseless carriages which were often seen driving on the beaches. Henry Ford and Thomas Edison visited the island regularly looking for new plant species and shells for study and identification.

In May 1963 a causeway linking Sanibel and Captiva to the mainland was opened. The resulting explosion of growth led to islanders incorporating the City of Sanibel in order to control development in the interests of wildlife, the natural beauty of the island and residents. The original causeway was replaced in 2007; and features a "flyover" span tall enough for sailboats to pass under, replacing the old bridge's bascule drawbridge span.

Sanibel today retains the charm and natural beauty that has always characterized the island and makes it a unique tourist destination. A backdrop of nature's unspoiled and enduring

creations frames the quaint amenities of the hotels and resorts along the Gulf coast. They provide the comfortable accommodation and easy access to the island's attractions enjoyed annually by visitors and residents.

The Beaches

Sanibel is one of the few barrier islands with an east-west orientation: most are north-south. Hence, the island is gifted with great sandy beaches, facing due south and south west for 22 miles along the Gulf of Mexico. The beaches are ungroomed and nature roams freely along them, hence the abundance of bird and other small wild life creatures who inhabit the lush shoreline vegetation. Up to 200 yards wide at low tide, the beaches also offer unrivalled space for families, walkers and fishermen to enjoy a climate that welcomes them to the pleasures of sun, sand and sea throughout the year.

Shelling

Sanibel and Captiva islands have earned their reputation as the Shell Capital of the World. Large parts of both islands are made out of shells. When dug, backyards yield conch, whelk, scallop and clam shells, often perfectly intact.

The islands rank top for shelling because of geography. Sanibel Island bends east and these east-west alignments acts like a shovel scooping up seashells that Gulf currents import from the Caribbean and further south. The resulting abundance and variety draws people from all over the world. Every March, they gather to compare and appreciate shell collections and shell art at the annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show. Throughout the year, shell shops sell seashells and by the thousands. Shells are the dominant motif in island decor and boutique gifts.

Nature and Wildlife

Our islands provide a nature vacation for the entire family like no other - from the avid nature lover to the budding naturalist. More than half the islands are a wildlife sanctuary and are protected for wildlife and nature.

The largest is Sanibel's very own J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, which covers more than 5,000-acres of wildlife and is home to numerous exotic birds, raccoons, otter, alligators and other wildlife. The refuge features delightful footpaths, winding canoe trails and a five-mile scenic drive, all of which are lush with seagrape, wax and salt myrtles, red mangrove, cabbage or Sabal palms and other native plant varieties. You can take a wildlife tour, either by car or by bike, which is a five mile, one-way scenic road which runs along the bay side of Sanibel. Alternatively, you can take an informational tram tour through the refuge.

Fishing

The pristine waters surrounding Sanibel Island and Captiva Island provide excellent opportunities for fishermen of all skill levels...from the novice to the World Record seeker. Within a hundred miles or so of land the Gulf of Mexico is quite shallow. It also collects

millions of gallons of fresh water daily from the Mississippi. This water is full of nutrients and plant waste and therefore it is an excellent source of food for marine life, hence the abundance of fish and shellfish in its waters. The gulf has no coral reefs here, but there are numerous artificial reefs and shipwrecks for good fishing and diving. The warm waters of the gulf provide great breeding and living grounds for many species of fish including grouper, shark, tripletail, tarpon, redfish, speckled trout, cobia, Spanish mackerel, king mackerel, barracuda, amberjack and numerous kinds of snapper.

Whether offshore, inshore, back bay, pier, beach or wade fishing, fish can be found here year round.

Boating

Boating on the Gulf offers the perfect way to get a different perspective of the islands. Enjoy sighting playful dolphins, manatees, or a magical sunset. Go on a sport fishing trip for a few hours or commission an all-day charter. The pristine waters surrounding our islands provide excellent opportunities for fishermen of all skill levels but are also ideal for a lazy day on the water enjoying the swoop and call of pelicans, ospreys and other seabirds in rich variety.

Restaurants

Restaurateurs and chefs from all over the globe have come to Sanibel and Captiva Islands to add their creative influences to our island melting pot of restaurants. Some of the most delightfully inventive cuisine you'll discover anywhere. No matter your taste, you'll find culinary delights to match every appetite, each reflecting the savory spirit of our tropical paradise. Sanibel and Captiva restaurants are broadly grouped into three categories: family friendly, casual and high end.

Even at the high end, dress requirements on Sanibel and Captiva are, at the most demanding, no more than smart casual.

Accommodation

Sanibel & Captiva Islands have a large variety of accommodations for you to choose from for your vacation. Choose from luxury resorts, hotels, motels, small inns and cottages or enjoy your stay on Sanibel or Captiva in a private home, vacation rental condo or get back to nature while camping locally. You can stay nightly, weekly, bi-weekly or monthly while enjoying our beautiful beaches.

Shopping

Looking for a pharmacy, book store, new swim suit or sunglasses? Our islands offer quaint & friendly shopping with a broad array of retail businesses. For a small island, Sanibel has an abundance of easily accessed shopping centers. Most are located along Periwinkle Way and Palm ridge road. Boutiques, gift shops, hardware stores and supermarkets are all found on the island. On Captiva, residents and visitors alike enjoy browsing along Andy Rosse Lane and in Chadwick Square at the entrance to South Seas Resort.

Biking

Our well-maintained bike paths cover 22 miles of main roads and back roads. Meander through friendly neighborhoods, beneath shady tree canopies, across wooden bridges and along quiet waterways. Biking on Sanibel is fun for the entire family. By bike is the most intimate way to get to know Sanibel Island. The paved bike paths take you almost anywhere you want to go. They lead to shops, restaurants, points of interest, wildlife centers and beaches. Many island resorts, hotels and motels have bicycles for guest use, plus there are bike rental facilities on both islands.

Climate

Our winters are mild (average daytime temperatures in the 70s and 80s) and dry (it rains just enough to keep our islands lush). Summer temperatures, ranging from the high 80s to low 90s, are tempered by cooling sea breezes and brief afternoon showers, followed by more sunshine and glorious sunsets.

Awards

Sanibel and Captiva islands have won many awards over the past ten years, some of the most recent 2011 awards include:

- 2011 Sanibel and Captiva earned top spots in the **Top-10 North America Islands list**: Sanibel Island ranked fourth, while Captiva Island came in at No.6
- **"25 Best Beaches in the United States"** - Sanibel named #5, Captiva named #8, and Sanibel Island...**"#16th in the world"** by TripAdvisor's Travelers' Choice Award 2011.
- Condé Nast Traveler magazine listed *Sanibel* Island for **"Best Kayaking 2011"**
- Captiva Island has been ranked one of the country's **"most romantic beaches"** for two consecutive years by Stephen Leatherman, Ph.D., (a.k.a. Dr. Beach) Florida International University, recognized as the nation's foremost beach authority
- The Travel Channel selected Sanibel as **"Best Shelling Beach."** Among the rare shells collected here are the brown speckled junonia, sculpted lion's paw, coveted golden olive, golden tulip and Scotch bonnet. Live shelling is prohibited on our beaches. November 2010

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For Further Information:

Contact: Stacie Staple or Blanaid Colley
Hillgate Communications
Phone: (239) 472-3400
Email: Stacie@Hillgate.biz or Blanaid@Hillgate.biz