

# Sanibel & Captiva

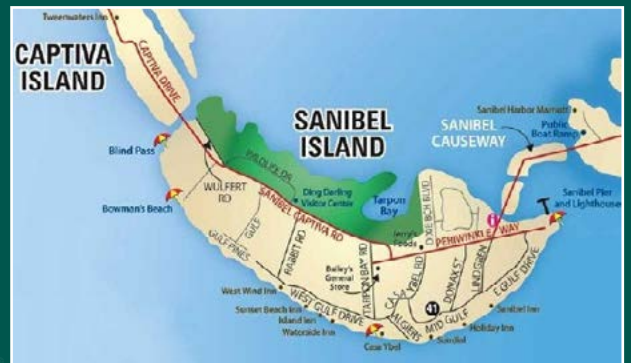
## Discover the Islands

### Sanibel & Captiva

Sanibel Island and Captiva Island represent the pinnacle of what Florida tourism has to offer. With white sandy beaches, world-class resorts, and even a thriving community of permanent residents, the islands are the perfect getaway for travelers from across the world. The islands are one of Florida's greatest hidden gems that truly have something to offer for everyone.

### Where to be

Sanibel | Captiva



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# Where to be

## SANIBEL

Sanibel is substantially larger than Captiva with a total land area of over 17 square miles. The island was gradually built around a lighthouse that was constructed in 1884, and residents quickly realized that the island was a special place that needed to be preserved. Consequently, Sanibel island has developed in a controlled way that has enabled it to retain its natural beauty while still providing plenty of living space for residents and tourists alike.

The island of Sanibel itself was formed in an elongated shape that follows the contours of Florida's coastline. To the west and south, visitors get stunning views of the Gulf of Mexico. Meanwhile, Pine Island Sound to the north offers nature lovers a glimpse of Florida's natural coastline that has been carefully preserved as part of Pine Island Sound Aquatic Preserve. On the other side of the Pine Island Sound, visitors can see St. James City with the skylines of Cape Coral and Fort Myers visible in the distance.

## CAPTIVA

With a land area of just 1.7 square miles, Captiva is much smaller than neighboring Sanibel. However, Captiva has been built up in a way where it has attracted most of the resorts and tourist spots. On the southern side of Captiva, there is a narrow stretch of water known as Blind Pass that separates the two islands. The pass is spanned by a small bridge and offers some of the best shore fishing around. Both sides feature beach parks complete with parking and amenities. So many island estates flank Captiva Drive that it is called "The Gold Coast." On the tip of Captiva is the world-renowned South Seas Island Resort, with major attractions for tourists and residents alike, including a golf course and South Seas Yacht Harbour.

## WEST SIDE

Residents and well-informed tourists who visit Sanibel and Captiva generally refer to the two islands as though they were one unit, and divide the area into a "west side" and an "east side." The west side (Captiva) is more built up along the side that runs along the Gulf of Mexico. It features beachfront estate homes and villas that can be rented weekly or monthly by tourists. The west side is also narrower, so properties available in the area often have gulf to bay views.







## EAST SIDE

The east side (of Sanibel) is much more built up. Many of the stores and other commercial activities can be found here. To reach the east side by land, travelers first cross the Sanibel Causeway from the mainland town of Punta Rassa, which is part of the greater Fort Myers metropolitan area. The causeway is over two miles long and is preceded by almost two miles of fully preserved Florida wetlands. From there, the east side consists of the residential areas to the south and the preserved wildlife refuge to the north. The east side is ideal if you plan to regularly visit the attractions in nearby Fort Myers, Cape Coral or Fort Myers Beach.

## MID ISLAND

Between the two “sides” of the islands is the Sanibel Elementary School and state-of-the-art recreation center, among some quiet sprawling neighborhoods surrounded by nature. For those seeking Old Florida and Sanibel the way it used to be, this is the area to explore.

## TOWN OF SANIBEL

The town of Sanibel itself is the centerpiece of the attractions on the east side. It features two golf courses and a wide range of resorts and condominiums for tourists. Most of the land area of the town is filled with upscale homes that were constructed in the late 20th century. On the eastern edge of the town, the Sanibel Lighthouse is a major attraction in a large area surrounded with almost a full square mile of preserved forest, a public fishing pier, and a pristine beach that runs along the entire area to the north, south, and east.



## J.N. “DING” DARLING NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Over half of the land area of Sanibel Island is preserved as the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. The wildlife refuge is named after Ding Darling, a cartoonist from the early 20th century who was a major leader in the conservation movement. One of the largest mangrove ecosystems in the U.S. can be found in the nature preserve despite its proximity to some major Florida cities. Visitors who are interested in exploring the refuge have plenty of options, including canoe tours, motorboat tours, and visiting one of the refuge’s many observation towers. There is also a trail that runs along the entire stretch of preserved land for ambitious hikers and bikers.

## SOUTH SEAS ISLAND RESORT

The South Seas Island Resort is one of the most iconic attractions in the area. The resort is situated on the northern tip of Captiva. It features several styles of condos and cottages flanked by a golf course and incredible views of the Gulf of Mexico. The resort features all amenities anyone would expect from a premier venue, including a clubhouse, tennis courts, several swimming pools, Offshore Sailing School, Blackwood Tennis Academy, marine based childrens programs, a worldclass Yacht Harbour, and so much more. A fully managed rental service makes properties here a convenient investment.

## PINE ISLAND SOUND

One of the most distinctive features of Sanibel and Captiva is Pine Island Sound that separates the islands from Florida’s coastline. The sound is approximately seven miles wide. In most of the area, Pine Island is visible on the opposite side of the water. Although there is no bridge running directly from Sanibel or Captiva to Pine Island, tourists can reach the island with a water taxi that runs from Captiva or Bokeelia to the outer islands. Plenty of tours cover vast areas of the Pine Island Sound, so curious travelers have easy access to exploring this beautiful natural waterway.





# What to Expect

## CLIMATE

Sanibel and Captiva are situated in a tropical area, so visitors should expect temperatures to be relatively hot throughout the year. Additionally, the climate is generally humid on most days of the year. In the summer, temperatures average around 90 degrees in the middle of the day. The winter months offer a milder climate with highs around 75 degrees. Consequently, the peak tourist season runs from January to April each year as tourists seek a mild alternative to the cold weather in northern states.

Winter is also the drier time of year. The occasional cold front may bring some rain with it. However, expect most days to be warm and sunny with clear skies, or a sprinkling of puffy white clouds. Some might say the perfect weather to explore the many opportunities outdoors. Summer brings almost daily thunderstorms. Watch the clouds build up during the day from clear skies in the mornings to towering cumulus clouds and shortlived downpours in the mid to late afternoons, or sometimes evenings. Since there is almost always a small breeze coming in from the ocean, many permanent residents still love the beaches in summertime, when they can enjoy the warm water all to themselves.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Most of the population of Sanibel and Captiva is relatively affluent and educated. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the median family income in Sanibel is approximately \$138,194 per year. However, the islands have a relatively low population. The overall population of the combined area is relatively modest at just 7,052. The area is growing, but city ordinances will prevent large development projects from overtaking the island in future years.

## ISLAND APPEAL

In both Sanibel and Captiva, there are no buildings allowed over 3 stories high, which means that there will likely never be “overdevelopment” of high-rises. Furthermore, a full third of the islands are designated wildlife habitats with no development. Combine that with the fact that neither island has any traffic lights, and the result is a delightfully quiet environment with minimized light and other pollution. So go ahead, head outside and enjoy the stars at night!



# What to Do

When on Sanibel and Captiva Island, you are sure to find many activities that you will enjoy. As a vacation destination, there are plenty of services and stores that cater to almost any type of visitor. Whether you are looking for the highest point of luxury, something more laid-back, or an adventurous experience, you are sure to find something that exceeds your expectations.

## SHOPPING

Shoppers fall in love with Sanibel and Captiva because the islands offer enough unique stores to stay busy throughout the year. Almost all shopping needs can be met on the islands, so residents rarely need to cross to the mainland to do their shopping if they don't want to. Most of the stores on the islands are run by individual owners, so few chain stores can be found in the area.

Nevertheless, you can still find everything you need, including clothes, jewelry, gift shops, and even hardware stores. Consequently, Sanibel and Captiva are great places for relaxed shopping free of the high foot traffic, loud music, and long walks that characterize shopping at the mega malls of most tourist destinations.

## OLDE SANIBEL

On the eastern edge of Sanibel island, the original community that was built around the lighthouse still exists to this day. The shops that originally were built for the practical convenience of locals have been converted into gift shops that carry everything from ice cream to local souvenirs. There is even a deli shop and a variety of outstanding restaurants where visitors can stop for a casual meal.

## PERIWINKLE WAY

One of the major reasons why tourists come to Sanibel and Captiva is to peruse the unique shops that can be found in the area. As mentioned earlier, the islands have no mega mall that seeks to attract a large volume of tourists. Instead, the islands feature small outique shops that are mostly found along the main thoroughfare and managed and owned by locals.







## THE RIDGE

On the western edge of Periwinkle Way if you turn right on Palm Ridge Road, there is some off-the-beaten-track shopping to be found. “The Ridge” is rarely frequented by first-time visitors because of its slightly hidden location but is an excellent place to stop in for massages, books, jewelry, medications, and even homemade soup.

## NATURE INSPIRED

Sanibel and Captiva are primarily visited as a beach getaway, but a significant portion of travelers ultimately decide to make the trip to see the fantastic nature preserves on the island. Consequently, there are many shops that cater to tourists looking to bring home their own piece of the island’s beauty.

The Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife sells Sanibel-themed puzzles, toys, books, and even jewelry. Travelers should also be sure to check out “Ding” Darling’s Refuge Nature Store, a venue that carries high-quality birding supplies and “Ding” Darling-related memorabilia.





## DINING

Dining is arguably the area where Sanibel and Captiva excel the most. Leading restaurateurs from across the country have flocked to the islands to take advantage of the boom in tourism while often settling down in the area with their families. Restaurants on the islands go way back to the Prohibition era. Cuban rum was smuggled onto the islands before being transported to the mainland, and many tourists frequented the islands to dine at exclusive restaurants that would serve the rum flowing through the area to special guests. Today, the area's legacy is preserved with a plethora of world-class restaurants that can suit any budget.



### DOC FORD'S SANIBEL RUM BAR AND GRILLE

If you are looking for a sports bar that serves excellent food, Doc Ford's Sanibel Rum Bar and Grille is one of the best options in the area. Many celebrities frequent Doc Ford's, and Randy Wayne White often hosts book signings at the venue. Overall, it is a great place for individual travelers and couples alike.

### THE PAPER FIG

Paper Fig Kitchen believes that even a quick breakfast bite, lunch on the go (or on their shop porch), afternoon nosh, or "I don't have time to shop, chop & prep" take along dinners should be available... their kitchen to yours. Don't miss it!

### GEORGE AND WENDY'S SANIBEL SEAFOOD GRILLE

If you are looking for a quiet lunch or dinner, George and Wendy's Sanibel Seafood Grille is a great choice. The restaurant offers sandwiches, wings, steaks, and most American favorites. In the evening, the venue often features live entertainment, and it even offers a banquet room for large events.





## NATURE ATTRACTIONS

The main lure of Sanibel and Captiva will arguably always be its pristine natural beauty. From its tropical tree-lined roads, to picture-perfect beaches, lovely backwater estuaries and nature preserves, these islands are any nature-lovers dream.

## BEACHES

From east to west, each of Sanibel and Captiva's public beaches has its own character to be enjoyed.

## CAUSEWAY ISLANDS PARK

Along the Sanibel causeway that connects the islands to the mainland, you will find several man-made beaches on both sides of the road. The entire causeway was re-constructed in recent years in an ambitious project that turned a simple bridge/road into a fascinating recreation area, complete with amenities.

The causeway park is a great spot for a picnic near your vehicle, to launch a kiteboard or windsurfer, cast a fishing line, or engage in several activities at once. This is a great spot to gather with the whole family without having to walk far from your car.

## LIGHTHOUSE BEACH PARK

The park on the easternmost tip of Sanibel is where the historic Sanibel lighthouse can be found. This park comes in two flavors, complete with two separate parking lots. There is a fishing pier in the northern part where the water is deeper. In the south is white-sand beach perfect for swimming and soaking in the sun. Walk the trails through the center, or along the beach to the east where you will find the lighthouse.





## GULFSIDE CITY PARK BEACH

Travel down Algiers Lane in order to reach the parking lot for this beach. Gather your things and walk along one of several sandy trails through island and beach vegetation to reach this endless stretch of dream-like Florida beach.

## TARPON BAY BEACH

Although parking for this beach is some distance from the beach itself, the trip from car to sand will reward you with amazing vistas of the Gulf and a beautiful white beach. This Sanibel beach is cleaned regularly to provide the best experience for travelers, but still has a tremendous amount of excellent shells.

## BOWMAN'S BEACH

Whereas the Gulfside and Tarpon Bay beaches are nestled between beachfront resorts and mansions, Bowman's Beach offers a day on the beach in Olde Florida. There is very little to no development in the surrounding area. Find a spot in ample parking, and after finding your way across a footbridge and down some trails, peg out a spot as a base from which you enjoy endless shelling or an amazing sunset.

## BLIND PASS BEACH

Blind Pass separates Sanibel and Captiva and is a favorite spot for fishermen. With very limited parking, come early and enjoy a secluded fishing spot under the bridge or further down the beach in either direction. Beware of strong currents as the tides squeeze their way through this narrow inlet. Due to the currents, this is not a swimming beach, but attracts fishes of every kind.



## TURNER BEACH

On the Captiva side of Blind Pass, is another park. This side is perfect for groups with more interests than just fishing. For the fisher, there is a rocky jetty and a small, ever-changing strip of beach by the bridge. One can also fish from the bridge or walk across it to the other side. On the north side of the breakwater is a broad strip of beach ideal for swimming, sunbathing, shelling, or a long beach walk along The Gold Coast. Again, parking is very limited, so try to come early, or expect to wait for someone to leave.

## ALLISON HAGERUP BEACH PARK

Facing almost due west, this beach is arguably the best spot to view a sunset over the scenic Gulf of Mexico. Step into a blissful paradise of aquamarine water and white sand towards the northernmost tip of Captiva. Being the most remote of the Sanibel and Captiva beaches, only accessible to those who stay nearby or those who don't mind a long drive to get to the beach, the location oozes exclusivity.

## SHELLING

The preserved nature around Sanibel and Captiva makes for some of the best shelling in the world. Vast quantities of large shells are pushed onto the island's sandy beaches every day. Some of the beaches are left completely natural, so they are stocked with excellent shells that wash up from the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. If you want to understand the shells in the area, consider going on a guided shelling tour or visit Sanibel's Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum to get the best experience.

Even long-time residents can be spotted doing the occasional "Sanibel Stoop" when walking down the beach. With so many beautiful shells to choose from, it can be hard to resist the temptation. You can find many of the most treasured shells in the area, such as Fulton's Cowrie, a junonia, banded tulip, or the alphabet cone.





## BIKING

In a nature-focused area, it is unsurprising that Sanibel and Captiva have become major destinations for both casual and professional bikers. City ordinances allow bikers to ride along the entire 16-mile span of Sanibel-Captiva road. Most residential communities are built around public roads, so casual bikers willing to map out a route can enjoy a scenic experience by riding through some of the area's relaxed residential communities.



## RIDING IN J.N. "DING" DARLING NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The most significant attraction for bikers is the main wildlife refuge since it offers pristine nature and well-built trails. Most bikers ride down Wildlife Drive in the morning since it has very little vehicular traffic and ample space for cars to safely pass. However, bikers should keep in mind that there are no mountain bike trails on the island due to the need for preserving the natural habitat.

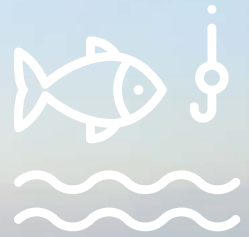
## RIDING IN THE TOWN OF SANIBEL

Bikers can be seen throughout the town of Sanibel at almost all hours of the day. Bikers are free to go down the main roads of Periwinkle Way, Gulf Drive, and Casa Ybel Road. The lighthouse itself is also designed to accommodate bikers with plenty of bike racks for safe storage.

## RIDING ON THE SANIBEL CAUSEWAY

The Sanibel Causeway is open for bike traffic. The causeway features a wide lane on each side of the road to accommodate both bikes and foot traffic. Bikers coming from Sanibel island are not required to pay a toll to use the causeway.





## FISHING

Almost any kind of fishing can be done on Sanibel and Captiva because of the area's well-preserved nature. The fish in the Pine Island Sound are safe to eat due to the low pollution levels in the preserved habitats. Fishing is restricted for commercial purposes, but tourists are free to fish in limited quantities in the area. Make sure you get the correct fishing license for the type of fishing you'd like to do.

## CHARTER FISHING

Travelers and locals who want the ultimate fishing experience have plenty of charter vessels to choose from. The marinas on Captiva Island offer boats that travelers can charter by the hour, day or week. There are also group charters that generally start on both Sanibel and Captiva or across the causeway in Punta Rassa.

When joining a group charter, you should keep in mind that many charters go out into the Gulf of Mexico for true sea fishing. Some charters even go out into international waters, so they provide you with more opportunities to catch as many fish as you want with limited restrictions.

## OFFSHORE FISHING

Whether on a charter or on your own vessel, heading offshore offers numerous opportunities for catching the likes of Tarpon, grouper, snapper and many more.





## INSHORE FISHING

The preserved backwaters throughout Sanibel and Captiva are rich with numerous species, including favorites such as snook, redfish, and the epic tarpon. If you are new to inshore fishing, make sure that you head out with a guide who can make sure that you avoid catching endangered species while visiting the best fishing spots. Many inshore fishermen on the islands have decades of experience and a true passion for fishing, so they truly know how to help you get the best catch. For residents with their own boats, Pine Island Sound is known for some of the best sport fishing in the world. Make sure to take along a good chart and follow the channel markers to avoid running aground in these very shallow waterways.

## PASSES

Blind Pass is a favorite for shore fishing. By boat, navigate your way over to Redfish Pass or North Captiva Pass and drift in or out with the tide while bottom fishing for grouper, or any of a number of species that use these passes as a highway between inshore and offshore habitats.

## SHORE FISHING

Enjoy fishing from shore at any of the beaches, public piers, or private docks. Local favorite catches include Sheepshead and seatrout. Both are good for catch-and-release or eating.





## WATERSPORTS

For thrill-seeking tourists, Sanibel and Captiva offer some of the best watersports in Florida. You can enjoy everything from kayaks to high-powered speed boats when you know where to look on the island. In general, tourists should start at one of the island's marinas that are open to the public when considering watersports. Vendors, such as Upper Island Jetski tours, are vetted and offer exciting and educational packages.

## PARASAILING

When looking out at the coastline, tourists can be seen parasailing on almost any day of the year. Of course, you will want to check the weather before booking a parasailing charter since the area frequently experiences thunderstorms that could potentially make it impossible to go out to sea, especially in summer. However, the tight-knit community on the islands fosters a trustworthy atmosphere, so there is no need to worry about not providers not being flexible.

## MOTORIZED RENTALS

For the ultimate watersports experience, nothing beats renting out a jet ski or motorboat for an afternoon. In the areas frequented by tourists, shops offering motorized rentals can be found on nearly every corner. Just use caution when renting to ensure that you buy from a reputable company such as Sunny Island Adventures or Yolo. Your hotel or tour guide can most likely connect you with a trusted provider that can give you a fair price.





## KITEBOARDS & WINDSURFING

Of course, there is no requirement to spend a lot of money on motorized equipment or expensive charters to have a great time. With steady breezes coming from the Gulf of Mexico some parts of the year, kiteboarders and windsurfers can often be found by the causeway, Lighthouse Beach Park and many other beaches working to catch some air. You can bring your own equipment or rent at an inexpensive price at a local shop.



## KAYAKS, CANOES & SUP'S

Paddle-powered watersports are another favorite pastime around the islands. Whether exploring the mangroves and local wildlife by kayak or canoe, getting in an early-morning workout paddle-boarding, or taking out a fully equipped foot-peddled kayak for some serious fishing, there is a paddle perfect for every type.

## SAILING

Steady breezes, especially in fall and spring, calm waters and warm temperatures year-round, make the waters surrounding Sanibel & Captiva ideal for sailing. In fact, the world-class Offshore Sailing School has one of their main location at the South Seas Resort on Captiva. All experience levels, from kids sailing a small dingy for the first time at summer camp to those more comfortable in a bluewater cruiser will enjoy all there is to offer.



# GOLF, TENNIS, AND PICKLEBALL

Guests who visit the islands of Sanibel and Captiva have no shortage of golf courses and tennis courts to choose from. The major resorts have their own tennis courts, and golf courses are only a short drive away. In many cases, resorts are built directly on golf courses to provide the ultimate experience for golf lovers.

## GOLF COURSES

In all, the islands of Sanibel and Captiva feature a total of four golf courses. Most of the courses are available to the public, but some courses are much more expensive than others. The Dunes Golf and Tennis Club is a great public golf course to start with since it is situated directly in the heart of the town of Sanibel. South Seas guests should also be sure to check out South Seas Golf Course since it is built directly on the ocean for incredible views and an unparalleled experience.

## TENNIS

Tennis courts are not hard to find on Sanibel and Captiva. Some tennis courts are available to the public at no charge, but there are also tennis courts associated with hotels and golf courses.

## PICKLEBALL

Pickleball is especially popular on the islands due to the community's historical love for tennis, badminton, and similar sports. Many locals visit badminton courts on a daily basis to face off against a stranger at the public courts, so visiting these locations as a solo traveler can make for an enjoyable experience.







## ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Sanibel and Captiva have a rich local culture that significantly patronizes the arts. The island was historically inhabited by the Calusa Indians before being taken over by Spain. Consequently, it has been home to military conflicts and has changed hands many times in ways that make for exciting theater for tourists.

## MUSEUMS

The islands of Sanibel and Captiva feature several museums that are designed around the area's rich history and natural environment. The Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum is situated in the heart of Sanibel Island and is the only museum in the country that entirely centers around seashells. Travelers should also be sure to visit the Sanibel Historical Museum and Village to learn about the pioneers who settled in the islands in the 19th and 20th centuries.

## CRUISES

Small day cruises are available throughout the island. Captiva Cruises is one of the major companies, and it offers dolphin tours that are great for families. There are also sea life cruises that troll through the natural habitats while treating guests to adult beverages and live entertainment. Day cruises to the other islands are a "must do

## THEATERS

Travelers should be sure to check out the Big Arts Strauss Theater on Sanibel Island for exciting live entertainment. The theater features 160 seats in a modern facility that hosts plays, comedies, and a wide range of traveling shows.



