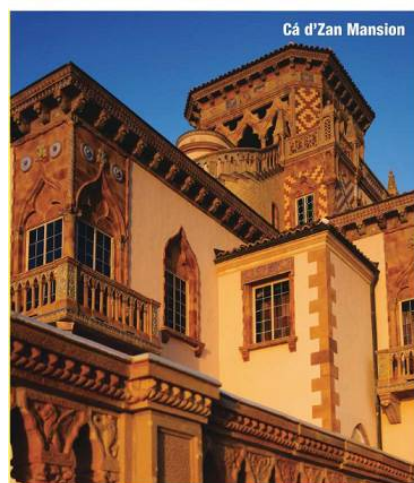


executive life |

## 24 Hours In: Sarasota



Bayfront Sarasota



Ca d'Zan Mansion

From circus history to architectural sights, nature research to shopping, this quiet Southwest Florida town appeals to the senses.

—by Alison Trinidad

**S**arasota, which encompasses several barrier islands between the Gulf of Mexico and Sarasota Bay, is an ideal day trip for arts, history and white, sandy beaches. Home to the estate of circus king John Ringling and the Mote Marine Aquarium, there's more than enough to keep you occupied for 24 hours or more.

### Getting There:

It takes a little over four hours to reach Sarasota from the River City. Go south on I-95, then west on I-4 to Tampa. From there, it's about an hour south on I-75.

### See & Do:

Sarasota's award-winning beaches are less crowded than those further south. With sugar-like sand and turquoise waters, one could while away the day searching for shark's teeth or simply catching some sun. A nice plus, public beach access and parking are free.

The circus was a driving economic force in Sarasota for

decades, and the county pays homage with a free Circus Heritage Guide and map ([sarasotacircushistory.com](http://sarasotacircushistory.com)). Plan at least a day to explore the 66-acre grounds of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art (5401 Bay Shore Rd., 941-359-5700), which include their Ca d'Zan mansion and two circus museums. Admission to the art museum is free on Mondays (\$25 gets adults in all venues any day of the week).

Another driving tour ([toursarasota.com](http://toursarasota.com)) delves into the county's architectural legacy. Plan roughly two hours to complete the self-guided tour, the buildings of which subscribe to the Sarasota School of Architecture, a nationally recognized style that combines modern influences with the region's semi-tropical climes.

Go face-to-face with manatees and giant squid at the Mote Aquarium (1600 Ken Thompson Pkwy., 800-691-6683), a working research lab that has touch pools

and a 135,000-gallon shark habitat. Its Shark Research Center is one of four National Shark Research Consortium members.

Shoppers will gravitate to St. Armands Circle, originally designed by John Ringling and now a pedestrian mall of boutiques and sidewalk cafés. Think our Beaches Town Center, but in a round and on a grander scale.

### Eat:

St. Armands Circle has a Columbia Restaurant, similar to the one in St. Augustine, if you're in the mood for Spanish cuisine. Crab & Fin has been a St. Armands landmark since 1978, specializing in fresh seafood. Try their gazpacho, a chilled, chunky tomato soup served in a martini glass. Head south to Siesta Key for fine waterfront dining at Ophelia's on the Bay, open nightly for dinner. The menu changes daily, but incorporates a blend of American, Asian and Italian flavors.

### Sleep:

A variety of hotel flags can be found in Sarasota proper, including The Ritz-Carlton, Hyatt Regency and Hotel Indigo. The Lido Beach Resort (700 Ben Franklin Dr., 800-441-2113) is both a family- and business-friendly oceanfront hotel, not far from St. Armands Circle (a free shuttle service runs to and from the shopping district). It has 222 rooms and suites in its four-story main building and adjacent 14-story tower. Most rooms (and all suites) have kitchens, which come with full-sized refrigerator, microwave, stovetop, dishwasher and tableware for four. All rooms provide free high-speed Internet access. The resort faces a private stretch of fine, white sand beach but also has an expansive sundeck, two pools and a poolside tiki bar. Décor is typical in white and light woods, but the beds are plush and over-the-water sunset views spectacular. Rooms start at \$120/night. #