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Sarasota & Her Islands Offers *Low- to No-cost* Adventures This Summer

Sarasota, Fla. (June 2009) – Sarasota & Her Islands (www.sarasotafl.org), on the central west coast of Florida, is often recognized as a luxury vacation destination, but this high-end experience need not scare away those traveling on a budget this summer as the Sarasota Convention and Visitors Bureau announces its Free & Cheap Dozen list.

The list was created to highlight opportunities for vacationers to enjoy at little to no cost. “We realize that so many families still want to take a vacation, but may need to scale back their spending while enjoying some much deserved R and R,” said SCVB President Virginia Haley. “While they may need to scale back on spending, they don’t have to scale back on fun, quality time and memorable experiences because we’ve compiled at least a dozen things families can do to achieve it all.”

The Free & Cheap Dozen:

1. **Feel the sand through your toes.** - Sarasota & Her Islands have miles of white-sand beaches including Siesta Key beach, which was Dr. Beach’s number two beach in the country in 2009. Public beach access and parking are **free**. (www.sarasotafl.org)
2. **Run away with the circus.** - The circus is a dominate social and economic force that has evolved for more than a half-century in Sarasota County. The many sites and symbols of that long-standing and vibrant presence is available in a **free** Circus Heritage Guide. The Guide

is a journey to discovering what makes Sarasota & Her Islands unique.

www.sarasotacircushistory.com)

3. **Stroll the estate of a Circus King.** - The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is an estate befitting the circus king, John Ringling. The Estate offers a Museum of Art, the *Cà d'Zan* Mansion, two Circus Museums, the Historic Asolo Theater and 66 -acres of grounds and gardens on Sarasota Bay. The Museum of Art is **free** on Mondays, 10 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. and includes special exhibitions (tickets to all venues just \$25 on Mondays, and throughout the week). Stroll the grounds and gardens for **free** any day, 9:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

www.ringling.org)

4. **Touch the tooth of a shark.** - Venice Beach is famous for offering visitors a chance to play archaeologist in the sand. Prehistoric shark's teeth and fossils of other marine life surface in this area as a reminder of their presence here long ago. Findings serve as one-of-a-kind, **free** souvenirs.

5. **Drive to architectural gems.** - Sarasota's architecture has been attracting world wide attention since the early 1900s and played a key role in defining the city's identity rooted in art, culture and design. Take a two-hour driving tour to some of the best examples of these architectural gems. The Architecture Tour map is available for **\$10** through the SCVB.

www.toursarasota.com)

6. **Days of Discovery.** - Visitors enjoy \$2 off with coupon to Sarasota's major attractions such as The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Mote Aquarium, Selby Botanical Gardens, G.WIZ Science Museum, South Florida Museum and Bishop Planetarium, Historic Spanish

Point and Sarasota Jungle Gardens . The Days of Discovery coupon is available at www.sarasotafl.org.

7. **Head downtown.** - You don't have to be a local to enjoy Sarasota's Downtown Farmers' Market. This **free**, Saturday morning market is a potpourri of fresh produce, food, flowers and plants, fine artisanship, friends and fun. (www.downtownsarasotafarmersmarket.com)
8. **Revel in the festivities.** - Festivals scheduled through October in Sarasota County with **no entry fees and low cost-tickets** include: Downtown Venice Labor Day Weekend Craft Festival, Sept. 5 - 6 (www.artfestival.com), The Ringling International Arts Festival, Oct. 7 - 11 (www.ringlingartsfestival.org).
9. **Stretch your mind.** - Beginning Yoga is offered for **free** on Siesta Key beach every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning. (yogaonsiesatabeach@yahoo.com)
10. **Canoe through nature.** - Ranger-guided canoe rides on South Creek at Oscar Sherer State Park are available every Wednesday for **\$4 park fee plus canoe rental** with limited space. (941-485-5956).
11. **Cherish old Florida.** - Bring your hiking boots and bug repellent for a self-guided trip back to old Florida in the Myakka State Park. Myakka is completely removed from the hustle and bustle of daily life and **free** to access. Schedule an entire morning for a hike on any part of the 39 miles of trails that snake through the 37,000 acres of wilderness.
12. **Dance in the shadows of the sunset.** - FridayFest, the **free** outdoor summertime music series and celebration set along the bayfront of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, tunes up for an eclectic season of Caribbean, Salsa, Rock, Oldies and Country music from top Gulfcoast bands. Every Friday, 5 - 9 p.m. through October. (www.vanwezel.org).

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Sarasota and her string of eight islands are located along Southwest Florida's Gulf Coast between Tampa and Ft. Myers. Sarasota and Her Islands is comprised of Sarasota, Longboat Key, Lido Key, St. Armands Key, Manasota Key, Siesta Key, Casey Key, Englewood, Nokomis, North Port, Osprey and Venice. In addition to sandy beaches, Sarasota and Her Islands also offer numerous cultural and ecological attractions. For more information on saving and discovering in Sarasota, call the Sarasota Convention & Visitors Bureau at (800) 522-9799 or visit www.sarasotafi.org.