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Sarasota County, Florida 2018

Beyond miles of sugar-white sand beaches, lies a haven of arts and culture, eclectic festivals and exquisite dining in Sarasota County. Nearly 1,000 new hotels rooms welcome visitors in 2018. A glimpse into Sarasota County's heritage finds rich roots in the circus and a tidy Amish culture, while birding and nature spots provide outdoor fun.

New Hotels & Air Service

Art Ovation, an Autograph Collection by Marriott, in the heart of downtown Sarasota and within walking distance to many of the city's cultural venues such as the Sarasota Opera and Florida Studio Theatre, opened in late March 2018. In homage to Sarasota as the "Cultural Capital of Florida," this hotel infuses arts into the universal character of the hotel, with quarterly curated exhibitions and performing arts vignettes on a regular basis.

The Carlisle Inn of Sarasota opened the first-ever hotel in Sarasota's Pinecraft Amish and Mennonite community in March 2018. It offers 100 rooms and is within walking distance of the area's famed home-style restaurants. The décor weaves Florida's natural scenery into the overall beautiful and simple decor the Amish and Mennonites are known for in other parts of the country. Curated collections of quilts are on display and gives a historical lesson in the long-standing Amish and Mennonite tradition of quilt-making.

The Sarasota Modern, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel located in the Rosemary District of Sarasota will be designed to honor Sarasota's mid-century modern architectural heritage. The hotel is expected to open in Fall 2018.

Embassy Suites is slated to have 180 rooms and 18 stories in the heart of downtown when it opens in late 2018.

Allegiant Air will offer year-round, non-stop service to and from Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport (SRQ) and Cincinnati, Ohio; Pittsburg, Pennsylvania and Indianapolis, Indiana beginning in April 2018.

Culture Hound

Known as Florida's Cultural Coast®, Sarasota has Florida West Coast's only professional ballet, professional opera and professional orchestra alongside more than ten theatres and the State's Art Museum, The Ringling.

The recently debuted **Kotler and Coville Glass Pavilion** serves as the new formal entryway into **The Ringling**. This architectural representation of glass provides glimpses of the American and European studio glass work inside, most of it donated by the Kotler and Coville families.

Through June, **Marie Selby Botanical Gardens** will continue to integrate the arts throughout the grounds and gardens with the "**Warhol: Flowers in the Factory**" exhibit, exploring Andy Warhol's botanical, conservationist leanings. Whimsical, fun and unexpected pops of colorful art, using botanicals as the medium, will be infused throughout the gardens and grounds.

The first stop on its U.S. tour, **Ordinary and Extraordinary – An Architecture of Heightened Awareness** opened in January at the Center for Architecture Sarasota. Focusing on the progressive, environmentally responsible design of Brooks + Scarpa, the exhibit will showcase works by the designers as well as a look into the lives of the designers themselves.

Mote Aquarium and Laboratory currently the "**Sea Debris: Awareness through Art,**" featuring "**Washed Ashore.**" through June 2018. It features larger-than-life, marine-inspired sculptures made entirely of plastic and other debris gathered from the Oregon coastline.

International Sports Competitions

Nathan Benderson Park in Sarasota County, the only International Rowing Federation-approved course in North America, will host the **Masters World Rowing Regatta in 2018**. Sarasota County is quickly gaining a reputation for hosting international competitions.

Discover Natural Sarasota County

Hike, paddle, bike, fish or sit back in Sarasota's natural paradise. Wetlands, lakes and a river interconnect throughout **Myakka River State Park**, one of the state's oldest and largest parks and **Oscar Scherer State Park** offers **concierge camping packages**. The **Celery Fields**, opened its first welcome center, and offer exceptional opportunities to observe more than 300 species of birds nesting and foraging in their natural habitat. Sarasota County has a **hand-held guide** to help adventurers navigate their way through the natural landscape.

Additional Story Angles and Ideas

The Circus Came to Town

Famously renowned as the historical winter home for the Ringling Bros. Circus, visitors can check out **The Ringling Circus Museum**, and for live circus entertainment they can head to the **Circus Sarasota** and **Sailor Circus** performances at select times throughout the year. The **Circus Arts Conservatory** now offers weekly adult and youth classes where visitors can try circus arts themselves.

Amish Living

A tidy Amish and Mennonite community inside the town limits welcomes its fair share of snowbirds from sister communities in the north. Most locals know the neighborhood for its home-cooking and fresh produce stands. Legendary for its pies, **Yoder's Restaurant**, is a family-owned gathering spot for locals and visitors seeking comfort food and nearby **Der Dutchman** has a full-menu and buffet and a shopping boutique upstairs from the restaurant.

Dine Away

Brimming with outdoor dining and fresh local seafood, Sarasota has one of the largest groups of independent restaurants. The annual **Forks & Corks Wine Festival** in January and the **Savor Sarasota Restaurant Week** brings the masses out for more than 60 restaurants offering special prix-fixe menus in June.

Shopping and Strolling

Enjoy a walk around **St. Armands Circle** and delight in more than 100 shops and restaurants set just steps from the sandy white shores of Lido Beach or stroll **Dearborn Street** in Englewood or **Venice Main Street** in Venice. **The Mall at University Town Center** opened just steps from Nathan Benderson Park with Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy's and Dillard's as anchor stores. The mall joins **Westfield Southgate Mall**, **Westfield Sarasota Square** and **Ellenton Prime Outlets** to offer numerous choices for shoppers.

For more information, visit VisitSarasota.com

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About Sarasota County

Located on Southwest Florida's Gulf Coast, Sarasota County offers a vibrant arts and cultural scene, a diverse array of culinary experiences, a circus heritage unlike no other in the world and a variety of opportunities to take advantage of the clear waters and the great outdoors. Sarasota County provides a beach getaway with numerous sprawling, white-sand beaches, including Siesta Beach, named the Trip Advisors' People's Choice Award for "Best Beach" and the "Best Beach in America" by Dr. Beach in 2017. For more information on visiting Sarasota County, visit www.visitsarasota.org or call (800) 522-9799.