

## TRAVEL

# Siesta and Long Boat: Florida's Key to Luxury

Discover the keys of Sarasota; Siesta and Long Boat on Florida's Gulf Coast. Here, you'll find long stretches of white-sand beaches and a warmth that nourishes both your body and soul. Having been a frequent visitor to this city for more than two decades, Sarasota continues to amaze me with new hotels and exciting things to do.



Mira Temkin

**Seaside paradise awaits you.** The

Hyatt Siesta Key Beach, A Hyatt Residence Club, is a new concept in vacation luxury, which opened in late 2009. I had the pleasure of staying here for a few nights and was duly impressed with the lavish amenities and unparalleled service – and it's all just steps away from the top-ranked Crescent Beach. Cabanas abound, but not just ordinary cabanas. These private cabanas have relaxing beds or a table and chairs. At night, you can take time to sit by the beachfront fire pit.

The 44, exclusive two-, three-, and four-bedroom residences feature the ultimate in designer luxury, from the exclusive Hyatt Grand Bed to the imported Italian linens to the elegant art and furnishings. I'm not usually one who checks out appliances, but these were extraordinary. A Kohler Tile Rain Shower, spa tub, and a Kohler heated toilet seat highlight the master bath. Wait until you get to the kitchen – Sub-Zero refrigerator, Wolf oven and range, double-drawer dishwasher, and private cappuccino maker were all there to wow me. And just as you would expect, state-of-the-art flat screen TVs, a Blu-Ray DVD player, and a Bose stereo system enhanced the ambience.



LONGBOAT KEY CLUB AND RESORT

Ed Braunlich, resort general manager, told me that on many evenings, guests prefer to stay at home rather than frequent one of Sarasota's many fine restaurants. "With views like this in an extraordinary atmosphere, they enjoy a chef-prepared gourmet dinner and watch the sun set over the Gulf of Mexico from their private terrace," he says. I could see why. Who would want to leave?

It's not only the luxurious amenities; it's the impeccable service that begins even before you arrive. The resort's concierge team will call you, ask what you desire, and have everything ready, waiting for you. Stylish candy dishes, filled with nuts and M&M's, say welcome. The resort can also arrange for in-room spa services or on the beach. How about watching a movie under the stars with Surfside Cinema? Or a personal nanny to watch the kids? Relax in lounge chairs or watch a movie while floating in the pool. To get your day started off grand, the Hyatt offers a delicious, complimentary breakfast every morning. Now, there's a reason to get up and seize the day! *Hyatt Siesta Key Beach; 941-346-5900; siestakeybeach.hyatt.com.*



HYATT SIESTA KEY BEACH



HYATT SIESTA KEY BEACH

Clockwise from left: The Longboat Key Club and Resort has 410 acres of gorgeous beachfront property; the Hyatt Siesta Key Beach makes it hard to leave the Gulf.

**AAA four-diamond vacation destination.** Looking out of my balcony to the Gulf of Mexico, I see a little slice of heaven. An award-winning 410-acre beachfront property and private country club, Longboat Key Club and Resort is Sarasota's only full-service resort. With world-class tennis, two golf courses, Island House Spa, fitness facilities, a 291-slip marina, and six private restaurants, there's little reason to leave.

The resort offers 218 newly renovated condominium suites. Sealy Presidential beds, Egyptian cotton towels, 42-inch Plasma TV, and a range of other upscale touches add to the elegance. Personalized concierge service is dedicated to your exquisite pampering, while the complimentary shuttle service to St. Armands Circle means you don't need a car.

My sister and I dined in Portofino Ristorante, which features classically inspired Northern Italian home cooking in a casual, trattoria-style atmosphere. Our server recommended the Salmon Arrosto in Menage: wood roasted salmon with basil pesto, set in a savory saffron broth of julienne vegetables and ribbons of pasta. A glass of Pinot Grigio, as well as gorgeous waterfront views, made the evening a delight. Because the restaurants are open only to guests and club members, we often saw the same people on the tennis courts who dined with us at night. Conversations flowed as easily as the wine.

For workout enthusiasts, the Fitness Centre is open to resort guests on a complimentary basis. From full-circuit Body Masters weight-training equipment to Stairmasters, and rowers, there's more than enough to keep your heart pumping. Go for a morning run along the island path or even a brisk walk on the pure white sandy beach. To relax, take a yoga or meditation class at the Mind & Motion Studio.

**Tennis is the name of the game.** The resort opened a \$4.5M tennis facility at its Harbourside property, just a few miles down the road, where play is complimentary for resort guests. Recipient of the USTA's "Facility of the Year" award, tennis buffs will find 20 Har-Tru clay courts with optimal playing conditions as well as offering private instruction. The club's tennis concierge will match guests for games, based on playing level. If tennis is your game, this resort will thrill you. *Long Boat Key Club and Resort; 800-237-8821; longboatkeyclub.com.*

**Shopping and dining at St. Armands Circle.** St. Armands is more like a wheel with spokes

coming out from all sides. Surrounding the circle are beautiful boutiques, cafes, and fabulous restaurants, such as Café L'Europe and Columbia. Also recommended is Café Venezia, which serves great pizza, paninis, and salads. There's nothing like sitting outside on St. Armands watching the crowd go by, sipping an iced mocha. Did I mention Kilwin's? You won't miss this famous chocolatier... your nose will lead you to the sweetest (and busiest) place on the Circle!

**Spring training in full swing.** From February to March, the Ed Smith Stadium is home to the Baltimore Orioles spring training camp. And unlike the regular baseball season, you'll find it easy to collect autographs and see your favorite players. The action on the field is major league, but the atmosphere is more like hometown America. Other training camps are a short drive away: Pittsburgh Pirates (Bradenton), New York Yankees (Tampa), and Philadelphia Phillies (Clearwater).

**See the stars.** This year, the festival celebrates its 13th Annual Sarasota Film Festival from April 8-17, with 10 days of nonstop cinema and celebrities as well as more than 150 independent, international, and short films in competition. *Sarasotafilmfestival.com.*

**All under the big top.** In Sarasota, the circus doesn't just come to town – the circus is the town! With the palatial Ringling estates, the Ringling Museum of Art, and eight live circuses, Sarasota has earned its name as "Circus Capital of the World." To make sure you don't miss anything, the Sarasota Convention and Visitor's Bureau has produced the Sarasota Circus Heritage Guide, a self-guided tour of circus highlights in the area. *Circussarasota.org.*

**The beach is waiting.** Make plans to visit Sarasota soon. No matter what your idea of a great vacation, Sarasota and the Keys blend big-city sophistication with small-town ambience for a perfect Florida getaway. *800.522.9799; sarasotafl.org.*

*Mira Temkin is a Highland Park-based freelance travel journalist who has ventured across Europe and visited most of the Caribbean Islands. Her travel articles have appeared in Chicago Tribune, Family Time Magazine, and six-00-three-five magazine. In addition, she is the Chicago Upscale Travel Examiner for examiner.com. She can be reached at miratemkin@gmail.com.*

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