

## **Sarasota Public Art: Artistic Paradise Among the Palms**

Situated on Florida's spectacular Gulf Coast, Sarasota is widely known as a magnet for artists and holds public art incredibly precious. Beyond Sarasota public art, including art installations seemingly at every turn, there are numerous galleries in the downtown district. Seasonal visitors returning to Sarasota make it a point to check in with their favorite pieces while catching up with familiar artists and delighting in what's new.

### **Sarasota Revolves Around Its Art**

The city is home to only the best in art outdoors. Community discourse revolves around art, public and private, debating the virtues and shortcomings of specific examples and their placements. For instance, debate pops up intermittently regarding the twenty-five-foot "Unconditional Surrender" replica statue near Bayfront Park. Recently relocated, while still inside the park, it now stands a short trek away from its original site where Tamiami Trail curves southerly. The Bayfront offers free access to trails, playgrounds, and shady spots. Leashed pets are welcomed. The marina – a sight to behold – is adjacent, and there are casual dining options on-site.

Just north of downtown is the Ringling College of Art and Design. Their students are frequently seen bearing in-process artworks, instruments, and all manner of paraphernalia around its adjacent neighborhoods. Yes, the college is named for "that" Ringling, the famous circus entrepreneur. The Ringling name brands the college, the museum, a theater, and even the impressive bridge spanning the causeway over to swanky St. Armand's Circle.

### **Sarasota Public Art is Everywhere**

Keep an eye out for art! Sarasota is so exceptionally art-friendly that its highways and by-ways are replete with artistic expression. As you ramble, be on the lookout for art in the neighborhoods, art in public parks, art along the waterfront, and private residential courtyards. You wouldn't want to miss any Sarasota public art.

### **The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and More**

I assure you, a visit to the Ringling provides a master class. The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is a perfect place to dive into Sarasota's art scene while putting some miles on your pedometer. Within a mile of downtown, enter the Ringling complex premises just off Tamiami Trail. Perhaps you flew into Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport (SRQ). If so, you would have noticed the Ringling along your drive to the heart of the city. You'll find ample parking adjacent to the museum and near its neighbor, the Asolo Theatre. Both are affiliated with Florida State University. Allow at least an afternoon to navigate and enjoy the entire experience. Note: The Ringling College of Art and Design's campus is located just a few blocks away.

## **Still More the Ringling Complex**

Enter the Ringling Museum grounds through the large welcome center. To your left will be the lovely gift shop, more than worthy of a stop on your way in or out. To the right are the ticketing area and the Ringling's casual dining restaurant. You may choose to purchase tickets to the Museum of Art and The Circus Museum and to "Ca d'Zan" (House of John), but you don't have to. There is no charge to tour the property.

## **Garden Statuary and the Ca d'Zan**

Visitors have the option to enter free of charge to roam the grounds only. Yes, access to the museum's gorgeous, flourishing, art and garden-laden grounds is indeed free. Do pick up a map to guide your steps through the vast experience. On route to the mansion and throughout the expanse, you might also choose to take advantage of roaming golf cart transportation. It's handy and free of charge.

As you enter this verdant paradise, remember, this was once a private estate. Ca d'Zan, the Ringling mansion, lies ahead on the waterfront. Admission is charged to tour the inside of the home, but the exterior grounds and waterside terraces are free to enjoy. As you linger along the water's edge, glance back toward the City of Sarasota to view the iconic Ringling Bridge that spans the John Ringling Causeway. The Ringling name comes up often in Sarasota, and deservedly so. Their legacy has been instrumental to the vibrancy of the city.

Mable Ringling's passion for roses is evident throughout, and most especially amidst her unique garden displaying many varieties and adorned with sculptures. Proceeding around the grounds, you will encounter permanent and visiting open-air exhibits. Whether you choose to focus on the multitude of open-air installations or tour the museums, you've made the right decision. The grounds are worthy of an entire afternoon. It is not uncommon for tourists to revisit, spending a second day touring the massive Circus Museum, Museum of Arts, Ca d'Zan, and again smelling the roses!

## **Indian Beach Sapphire Shores Neighborhood**

"The Ringling" is situated alongside a residential neighborhood called Indian Beach Sapphire Shores. The community rests along Sarasota Bay and boasts an eclectic assortment of design styles from mid-century modern to historical classics. A walk or drive through the community will take you back toward Sarasota, parallel to "the Tamiami Trail." You'll happen upon an assortment of public art, also representing various genres, in this neighborhood. Some installations bear markers that name the artist, the work, and its meaning, while others are unmarked, and interpretation is up to the beholder.

During your visit to Sarasota, you'll want to look in on the art galleries in and beyond downtown, where you might make a selection or two for shipment home. Visit the local parks where art abounds. You'll encounter public art on street corners, in neighborhoods, and even adorning the downtown roundabouts! Visit the campus of [Ringling College of Art and Design](#), whose approximately 1,600 students hone their creative skills in all manner of fine art, including animation, cinematography, illustration, and sculpture. A top film school, the college hosts notables from the film industry, especially during the annual Sarasota Film Festival, held in May. Sarasota is blessed with many excellent performance venues, also adorned artfully.

## **The Circus and the Church**

When traveling downtown along Fruitville Road, you will notice [St. Martha's Parish Church](#). Here again, the Ringling legacy shines in the church's artistic interior. The circus wintered in Sarasota for decades, and the parish was its church home. John Ringling North, a nephew, and circus executive, assisted in building the church where many performers attended Mass.

Circus performers helped hands-on in its actual building. At that time, the circus premiered performances in Sarasota, with proceeds benefitting church construction. And, each season, the parish priest blessed the circus train as it departed on tour. Within the church, painted windows adorn the altar. The unique window frames are, in fact, circus wheels!

Although the circus is no longer in business, the blessing tradition lives on in the 1951 movie, *The Greatest Show on Earth*. A DVD of the film is available in the Ringling Museum's gift shop. The parish continues to offer an annual "Circus Mass" presented by priests from around the United States who are associated with the Catholic Circus and Travelling Show Apostolate, for the intentions of the many circus folks who continue to reside in Sarasota.

## **Sarasota Public Art: A Treasure Trove**

Sarasota, Florida, is a treasure trove of outdoor adventure, unique, easy to access, and filled with memories to last a lifetime!

### **For More:**

- [The Ringling Museum](#)
- [Indian Beach/Sapphire Shores Association](#)
- [Circus Apostolate](#)
- [Visit Sarasota](#), official tourism bureau
- On our site: [Florida Everglades: Diversity and Natural Beauty](#)

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