

# on THE waterfront

WHERE TO FIND SARASOTA'S BEST RESTAURANT VIEWS—AND WHAT TO ORDER WHEN YOU GET THERE. BY JOHN BANCROFT

**Water, water everywhere—and plenty** of agreeable spots to sit, sip and drink in the view. When it comes to waterfront dining and festive sundowners, Sarasota and its barrier islands offer something for every taste.

Looking for the perfect place to celebrate sunset over the Gulf of Mexico with a Cosmo or a margarita? We've got it.

A fashionable Sunday brunch where your latest chic little something will draw the admiration it deserves? It's on our list.

A super-casual, shorts-and-flip-flops lunch with local color to spare and the snap of salt in the air? No problem.

Following is a roundup of nine of our favorite waterfront eating and drinking establishments. Think of this eclectic collection as a starter list for visitors in search of briny nirvana.

In style and setting, our faves are as different from one another as can be, encompassing spots to go luxe, to rough it Old Florida style, or to maximize your water time by arriving by boat. Geographically, they range from southernmost famous-for-shark's-teeth Caspersen Beach in Venice to the northern tip of Anna Maria Island, where Tampa Bay meets the Gulf of Mexico. The



## *The Way We Were*

Old Florida funk—and flavors—still live at Mar Vista in the Village on Longboat Key.

only thing they really have in common is their intimate connection to saltwater.

We've lined them up for you two ways. An annotated quick reference list orders our waterfront nine from south to north and includes shorthand tips on what to expect of each one. We begin, however, with a narrated tour ordered by level of sophistication, working our way from extremely casual to putting on the Ritz.

umbrellas, or the outdoor picnic tables.

The grouper sandwich is a reliable staple on a varied menu, and my brother is a big fan of the spicy wings. It's a good place for stone crab claws in season, too, and the wine list isn't bad.

**THE SANDBAR**, smack dab on the beach, Anna Maria. This restaurant and bar, a sibling of Mar Vista, is the northernmost stop on our tour. It's perfectly named. The only thing separating deck-dwelling sun and sunset worshipers from the blue-green waters of the Gulf is a strip of white sand.

The food is OK here, but the potables, potent or otherwise, always hit the spot. There often is music outside in the evening, but a fabulous sea breeze and the spectacle of Old Sol slipping flamboyantly below the horizon are all you really need. Cheers!

**Marina Jack**, Sarasota's downtown yacht harbor. This seafarer's splashy watering hole also has served as countless visitors' first taste of Sarasota. And why not? The bay views have always been first-rate, and now the place has grown into its setting.

There's a sophisticated dining room upstairs and an air-conditioned piano bar below, but here we're recommending the open-air Portside Patio, with tables both under roof and scattered about an extensive over-water deck. Come for sandwiches, appetizers, raw bar staples or drinks anytime. But be warned: After as little as half an hour of soaking up the Marina Jack scene, you may suddenly feel yourself in urgent need of a yacht captain's gold-braided ball cap.



### *Saluting the Sunset*

Tropical drinks—and gorgeous Gulf twilights—rule at The Sandbar.

**The Colony Beach & Tennis Resort**, Longboat Key. The sunny main room at The Colony's beachfront restaurant has big windows and lots of bright pictures on the walls. This is where you want to be seated. If you reserve well ahead, don't be bashful about asking for a table by the window. A second room, darker and with a deck-level view of the pool, definitely is second choice.

The Colony is one of two spots on our list we're recommending for both dinner and Sunday brunch. The buffet for the latter is pretty good overall, but its particular strengths are cold offerings, like smoked salmon (plenty of sour cream and capers), fresh iced shellfish and shrimp, salads and the like, and desserts, where you can count on scoring a chocolate fix substantial enough for the most hardened addict.

### *Resort Class*

The Colony on Longboat sets the standard for great food and Gulf views.

