Sarasota Power and Sail Squadron

America's Boating Club – For Boaters, By Boaters

Boater's Relocation Guide for Sarasota

Developed by Boaters of Sarasota Power and Sail Squadron

For Boaters New to the Sarasota & Manatee Waterways

Boater's Relocation Guide for Sarasota

Introduction

Are you a boater (or soon-to-be boater) relocating to the Sarasota area? Perhaps you've been boating for years and are very comfortable on the water. Whether you are an experienced boater or just starting out, remember that obtaining "local area knowledge" is always best for safe and enjoyable boating.

The authors of this document are all members of the Sarasota Power and Sail Squadron, Inc., a member of the United States Power Squadrons, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation devoted to safe boating, camaraderie and public service. This Guide assumes that you have attended or will attend basic safe boating education classes and/or have prior boating experience. Thus, this Guide is ***not*** a primer on navigational markers, Piloting or Rules of the Road. Rather, it will attempt to convey some practical "local area knowledge" regarding the differences between our Sarasota Bay environs and many other boating areas around the U.S. and Canada. We suggest you attend one or more of the popular boating courses offered by the Squadron. Courses and schedules can be found on the Squadron Web site, http://sarasota-boating.org.

Perhaps your boating has been on a large, freshwater inland lake or river system. If you ventured onto the rivers you quickly entered a wide, navigable and well-marked channel with a minimum guaranteed depth of 9 feet, maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers to support wide tows of 15 large barges (3 across with 5 rows) moving various commodities up and down the nation's river systems.

Perhaps your boat never experienced immersion in salt water, and the only wildlife issues were algae growth on the hull and maybe a few zebra mussels. An ebb tide is only the name on a local waterfront bar or a song on the radio oldies station.

Yes, there are differences here in Sarasota; yet, local boaters familiar with the area often state that this is the best area in the country for recreational boating. This Guide is intended to cover the basic differences between where you were and where you are now to help you get "launched." We hope you will scan through this Guide in search of topics of interest. If other questions arise or more detail is needed, ask our Squadron members – they want to help.

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First Steps: Marinas and Boat Storage

Boats on Trailers

Numerous options are available. If your boat is trailerable, there are RV storage lots that will store boats on trailers, indoors or outdoors. Find storage that is convenient to your home or preferred boating waters with a boat ramp nearby. To find local boat ramps in Sarasota or Manatee County, the Florida Fish and Wildlife site has lists, organized by county, on its Website, or check the "Florida Public Boat Ramp Finder" at https://public.myfwc.com/LE/boatramp/public/default.aspx provided by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Figure Centennial Boat Ramp, 3 ramps

Marinas

Boat storage is available at many different public marinas, yacht clubs and other private clubs. A list of numerous marinas in Sarasota and Venice is in "The Boater's Guide to Sarasota" published by the Sarasota Power and Sail Squadron. Additional large marinas not listed there can be found just North of Sarasota in Bradenton, along the Manatee River, all with easy access to Tampa Bay and the Gulf. You can inquire on Google or another Internet search engine for "boat marinas in Sarasota County" or a similar topic.

Figure Marina Jack's Marina (Downtown)

Most marinas in the area have wet slips that can be rented by the month, quarter, or year for any boat up to large motor yachts. Some of these marinas have a limited number of wet slips with boat lifts installed at higher rates. Rates are competitive and, at this writing, available wet slips without lifts seem to be plentiful. Remember, you are now in salt water and if your boat remains in the water for long periods, bottom painting and/or cleaning may be an additional annual expense.

Rack Storage

Given that many boaters have acquired fiberglass boats with outboard power, the rack storage/high and dry facilities are very popular. Some have waiting lists that can take a few years. These facilities can typically handle boats up to 30-35 feet. Before talking to them have your boat specs in hand – length, beam, overall height (with hardtops, fixed antennas, etc.) and weight. Large forklifts are used to quickly move boats between the racks and the water. If you are relocating a boat with inboard power, either straight drive or V-drive, have photos to show the Dock Master the hull and running gear out of the water so it can be

Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 4 Protected Rack Storage

evaluated. Some of these facilities will simply not accept boats with the typical under-hull running gear of inboard engines. Some may require that you provide or pay for a rack that is suitable for your boat.

Some rack storage facilities are available with the racks inside fully-enclosed buildings for windstorm protection. If you ask, the Dock Master should tell you the wind ratings of the building design. Category 4 and some Category 5 wind load ratings are claimed and should be documented on the facility's architectural drawings. You may have heard that our beloved Florida has occasional Hurricanes.

Hurricane Threats

We've all seen the photos of hurricane damage with busted-up boats stacked like cordwood. It's a difficult and depressing subject. The Sarasota Power Squadron offers a standard seminar on hurricane protection and the BOAT/US organization provides extensive written advice with good descriptions and drawings. Take full advantage of these resources and talk with your marina, storage facility, and other boaters in your area. The City of Sarasota has not suffered a direct hit in over 100 years. Nonetheless, near Hurricane winds were endured by Sarasota County in 1944. So, boater beware.

General Boat Maintenance

There are a few differences, and they can depend on boat and propulsion type. Outboard engines are considered easiest to flush and maintain. Inboard engines should ideally have closed cooling systems rather than raw water. If you wish, local marina maintenance firms can rig a fresh water flush through the raw water components of your engines. However, without a flush-out ability, be prepared for shorter life of inboard risers and exhaust manifolds (some say 2-3 years can be expected). Keep in mind that a salt water environment leads to faster corrosion and seizing of threaded fasteners and components. Keep your boat as free of salt as possible and your bilge dry. Outboards should be fresh water flushed after each use. Consider a fresh water washdown of all exposed components after each use on the water.

If you're keeping the boat in a saltwater slip, locally appropriate high quality bottom paint is an absolute essential unless you store your boat on a lift. Hull maintenance workers recommend that a thorough cleaning and re-painting of the bottom should occur every 2-3 years. In the meantime, plan to hire a local dive firm to visit once per month to remove local marine life hitch-hikers and check and replace your sacrificial zincs as required.

Documentation and Registration

Your boat's documentation, a Federal program, remains valid, but remember to change your mailing address. You don't even need to change your home port unless you want to, since any U.S. location with a valid Zip Code is now legal for a home port. Florida registration of your boat is required by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. Registration numbers are required on the hull and you *must have your Registration Certificate on board and available if requested by a law*

enforcement officer or the Coast Guard. Registration can be accomplished at your county Tax Collector's office. *You will see law enforcement* on the water and they will stop and inspect your boat from time to time.

Required Equipment

A list of required equipment is available from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission in printed form or online at: http://myfwc.com/boating/safety-education/equipment/ . In addition, the Squadron provides free inspections, called Vessel Safety Checks, of your boat at your home or marina. Call the Squadron to set up an appointment. The Coast Guard and local city and county governments have patrol boats to assist boaters and enforce on-the-water rules. They are not kidding about speed limits. A good way to get stopped is to have small children on board who are not wearing certified flotation gear. Be prepared to be boarded.

Kayaking and Canoeing

As in other areas, these activities have become very popular. In fact, the Sarasota Power and Sail Squadron invites its members to numerous outings, using kayaks to explore beautiful trails on local waters (despite the fact that these vessels use neither power nor sail). In most instances, you do not need to have your own canoe or kayak – rentals are available from local vendors. Participants are informed ahead of time if a trail is appropriate for beginners in this sport. Each Squadron sponsored journey has a leader and helpers to assure a safe and enjoyable trip for all.

For detailed information see the Sarasota County Paddle Guide:

www.scgov.net/WaterRecreation

and the Manatee County Paddle Guide:

https://www.mymanatee.org/home/government/departments/parks-and-recreation/natural-resources/education-volunteer/paddle-manatee.html .

Figure 5 Kayak Trails in the Area

Getting Underway….

Shallow Waters

Sarasota Bay and other connected waters along the Intracoastal Waterway are notoriously shallow. Some boaters refer to this as "thin" water. This is a great and beautiful boating area, but you have to be careful. The good news is that the bottom is generally sand and if you don't hit it too hard, you can back off (or jump out and push off). In most of the Bay depths are from 7-12 feet, but get close to land or a barrier island (Key) and water depth can quickly disappear. On both sides of the Intracoastal channel water depths are often just 4 or 5 feet and sometimes less. In Sarasota Bay, high and low tides matter. The good news is that tidal height variances are much smaller than in many other coastal areas (e.g., approx. 2 feet). Get charts of the local waters you plan to cruise and develop some local area knowledge. A commonly used Waterproof Chart is #21E, *Anna Maria Sound and Sarasota Bays*, available from West Marine and other sources. A GPS with current charts can save your prop, but watch the water color changes for clues since depths can change frequently.

Local Boat Traffic

Commercial boats other than tour boats are very rare, so the traffic is usually other recreational boats. Traffic is usually not heavy on weekdays. It can become quite congested during the Winter season and/or on holiday weekends. Always maintain a look out.

The Intracoastal Waterway

For the safest passage from one point to another along our coast, use the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW). The ICW passes from Tampa Bay through Sarasota Bay and then through waters to the South, and the channel is fairly well marked with day marks or buoys. The Intracoastal Waterway is a channel designated by the federal government that has been created along the Eastern Seaboard, Florida and the Gulf of Mexico, West to Brownsville, Texas. Its purpose is to provide a more safe water passage with depths to accommodate most smaller boats while minimizing exposure to open seas. Most of the Intracoastal Waterway is designed to provide a minimum channel 100 feet wide with depths of 9-12 feet. Unfortunately, the government funding to properly maintain the channel and its designated depths by dredging has been spotty at best. In our area, the Intracoastal channel does provide the most safe and reliable means of travel between points along the coast. When out and about, if in doubt, head for the Intracoastal channel. Getting to and from the Intracoastal Waterway may be a challenge. Some local markers can be found, but check your chart or GPS or consult your Dock Master.

Local Navigable Channels

If you depart the ICW to enter a harbor, canal or marina, check for channel markers that can assist you in finding a safe passage. These are usually “private aids” to navigation provided and maintained by local governments or property owners. These private aids typically follow the federal conventions for size, shape, colors and numbering and are often found on the official charts for the area. Even if not noted on local charts it is usually safer to follow the advice the markers provide.

Shoaling

A shoal is simply a sandbar, often underwater and just below the surface. Unless you’re at the helm of a hovercraft, shoals tend to be problematic. Shoaling is the creation of shallow areas as a sandbar is being built up over time by the movement of our fine white sand carried by water currents. Yes, the same material that creates our world-famous area beaches can create annoying, if not treacherous hazards that seemingly reach up to grab the bottom of your boat and invade your pristine engine. (As the local saying goes, if you’ve not run aground, you’re not really boating in Sarasota.)

Shoals are most common at the inlets or entrances, called “passes,” that connect the Gulf of Mexico to the bays, such as Sarasota Bay or other coastal waters. Understand that the passes have ebb and flood tides passing through them a couple times a day. The tidal currents can flow at velocities up to four knots. Two prominent examples are Big Sarasota Pass and New Pass which are easily seen on your chart and in the photo shown below. The shoals tend to develop in the center of the channel and then run along the sides of the inlet a short distance from the shoreline. Thus, the best passage through a pass is often a matter of hugging the sides of the channel, between the shoal and the

shoreline. The shoals can build up well inside the passes, depending on the flow of water in and out of the pass. Consider moving out of the way of other boats while you watch a few boats make the passage. You may want to follow one that is moving at slow speed. Note that the passes are not dredged consistently and are at times impassable. *Check your charts and with fellow boaters for* ***local area knowledge*** *before heading to Sarasota area passes to the Gulf.*

From a distance, especially on cloudy days, Shoals can be difficult to see from your boat. If you are proceeding at a reasonable speed and get close to a shoaling area in bright sunlight you can often see some good indicators. Patches or strips of lighter colored water indicate sunlight striking white sand near the surface (the shoal). Patches or strips of brown colored water indicate sunlight striking sea grasses near the surface. Of course, everyone's favorite indication of shoaling is seeing birds standing on or walking around on what appears to be the surface of the water. In that case, best to be careful and turn away….

Passes to the Gulf

While there are a number of routes from Sarasota Bay to the Gulf, due to shifting sand and dredging conditions you should check your route with your dock master or someone familiar with the local waters before departing.

There is easy access from the Manatee River and entrance to Tampa Bay which is to the North of Sarasota Bay.

Big Pass is South of Lido Key and New Pass is between Longboat Key and Lido Key. Note that shoaling and missing markers have been reported regularly. Proceed with caution! The Coast Guard's *Local Notice to Mariners* states that the sand in Big Pass is constantly shifting and conditions can change daily. Larger, deep draft boats could encounter problems. Observe markers carefully as some are located on the very edge of shoaling.

Some boaters may prefer to use Venice Inlet to the South or Passage Key Inlet to the North to avoid the most troublesome passes.

No Wake Zone Rules

Florida has two categories of limited wake areas: No Wake and Minimum Wake. A No Wake Zone allows you to only maintain steerage and headway, normally with the engines at 3 or 4 knots. At proper no wake speed you should not see any white water behind the transom. A Minimum Wake Zone requires that your boat be off plane, fully settled in the water, with the bow *not even slightly elevated*. In Sarasota County, speed limits are posted on marker signs along the Intracoastal Waterway. No Wake speeds always apply within 300 feet of the land fronting the Gulf of Mexico, at bridges and passes to the Gulf, and at Marinas and other congested areas. Unless otherwise posted, Sarasota County requires Minimum Wake speeds in the narrower waters south of the Siesta Key Bridge and all the way south to Venice. Signs requiring minimum wake or slow speed often specify maximum speed allowed.

Speed Limit Signs

Navigating the bays and channels is not like driving on a federal highway. You need to be observant. Most of the Intracoastal Waterway South of Sarasota Bay is a “Minimum Wake” area. When you

travel out of a low-speed area, you will often see large black-on-white rectangular signs that state "Resume Normal Safe Operation." Be sure to warn passengers before pushing the throttles. The *"Boating and Angling Guide to Sarasota County"* (Internet link provided on page 11) includes a map of speed limit areas.

Water Skiing and Tubing

One area in Sarasota Bay has been designated as a recreational area for higher speed activities. This area encircles a small island (designated as a "Spoil Area" on the charts) that is in Roberts Bay South of Sarasota Bay and is directly East of Marker "78" on the ICW. The posted speed limit for this area is 35 miles per hour.

Manatee Zones

In these areas you should proceed at Minimum Wake speed or less. This usually allows the slow-moving manatees the opportunity to safely move away from your boat and its propellers. Keep a sharp lookout because these slow-moving and slow-witted "sea cows" often do not move out of the way.

Additional Related Topics

"Beaching" Your Boat

Placing the bow of a boat right on the beach is a frequent practice in the area. However, there are many cautions that must be followed to do so safely. Consideration must be taken of the currents and tides at the spot chosen, as well as the size of your boat, the type of hull and the size and type of your anchor. Danforth and Plow anchors are widely used in the area. Places can be found to beach your boat in the Venice Inlet, and in Longboat pass (with special attention to the currents). Be sure to observe all weather broadcasts and signs regarding swimming conditions including rip tide warnings.

Swimming Beaches

Look for those areas marked off for swimming. Be sure to heed markers saying "Do Not Swim." In addition to the famous and huge Siesta Key public beach, look for New Pass Beach and City Island Beach. Coquina Beach is located along the south end of Anna Maria Island running up the gulf side. Bean Point beaches, at the Northern tip of Anna Maria Island, are mostly deep and expansive with powder sand, sea oats, dunes and wildlife. Enjoy great views of Egmont Key, Tampa Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.

Links to beach information for both Sarasota and Manatee Counties are shown below, plus a quick link to beach safety information regarding riptides, dangerous marine life, etc. Please heed safety suggestions.

https://www.scgov.net/beaches/Pages/default.aspx

Quick link to beach safety information:

http://www.mymanatee.org/home/government/departments/public-safety/marine-rescue/beaches/beach-safety-information.html

Fishing Spots

Obtain a copy of *"Boating and Angling Guide to Sarasota County"* produced by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. It is available online, or in hard copy at the Sarasota Visitors Center, 1710 Main St. in Sarasota, or by contacting the Power Squadron. It contains a listing of artificial reefs as well as popular fish caught in the area. Points are marked on the map from Anna Maria Island to Venice.

An online link to the *"Boating and Angling Guide to Sarasota County"* is shown below:

https://www.scgov.net/searchcenter/Pages/Results.aspx?k=boating%20and%20angling%20guide

Obtaining Fuel

See the list of marinas referenced in the Boating and Angling Guide to Sarasota County discussed directly above. A similar guide is available for Manatee County. See also Marinas.com and Google for more sources. The Marina Jack Marina, a landmark on the East side of Sarasota Bay, has a large fuel dock located directly in front of the main building.

Red Tide

Red Tide, or Florida Red Tide, is an algal bloom having a higher than normal concentration of algae known as K. brevis. These usually form off shore but conditions may cause them to move toward shore. Florida red tides cause fish and other vertebrate death by attacking the nervous system. In addition, persons with respiratory conditions can suffer serious illness by breathing the toxins which are produced. Infected oysters and clams can cause Neurotoxic Shellfish Poisoning in some consumers. Florida red tides have been recorded as far back as the 1700s. For the status of Florida red tides, contact
http://myfwc.com/research/redtide/events/status/

Local Weather Information

Before heading out, get a local weather report from NOAA National Weather Service (or another reliable source) at:
http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?CityName=Sarasota&state=FL&site=TBW&textField1=27.3361&textField2=-82.5466#.V4-5RjFTHNM .

Your VHF radio will have designated weather channels usually shown as WX2, WX3, etc. Another good local source is Channel 9 TV. USPS offers a course in weather that can help you understand the weather predictions as well as signs of trouble while on the water.

Heat and Dehydration

We have them both and they can sneak up on you when you are not looking. In addition to the sun, constant shifting of the body while boating causes the body to generate heat which, in turn, causes the body to perspire in order to cool. Dehydration can result from this perspiration even if the breeze of motion makes you feel cool. Other signs of dehydration include dry mouth, sleepiness, irritability, weakness, dizziness, and a headache. Loss of fluids can cause undue fatigue and accidents can easily arise from such fatigue. Drinking water at least every 15 or 20 minutes can avoid dehydration. Note that serious dehydration may require medical attention. Note also that consumption of alcohol aggravates dehydration. It has been found that one-third of the amount of alcohol that it takes to make a person legally intoxicated on land can make a boater equally intoxicated on the water.

Conclusion

The Sarasota Power and Sail Squadron hopes you find this Guide to be a helpful reference as you migrate to our piece of paradise. Consider broadening your local boating knowledge by attending local squadron classes and seminars, meeting experienced boaters, and asking the additional questions that are sure to arise. For more information, see the Squadron Web site at www.sarasota-boating.org .

Figure 8 Ringling Bridge at Sunset

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