

Explore the Barrier Islands

SW Florida's Island Coast

By Capt Fred Rossiter

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My wife and I discovered this sub tropical paradise in 2002 after a family vacation to Key West. We sent the kids home early after Christmas, extended our vacation and drove to the Fort Myers/Cape Coral area by ourselves. Over the next week, we discovered an enchanting chain of barrier islands off the coast of Southwest Florida. Like pearls on a necklace in an azure sea, they all offered surf, sand, sun and fun and a lot of good fishing. Each was unique and each begged to be explored.



Running from the South to North, the first significant island off the coast of Fort Myers is Estero Island, home to the little beachside town of Ft. Myers Beach. This is Southwest Florida's version of Miami Beach but on a smaller scale. North of there one discovers the magical islands of Sanibel, Captiva, North Captiva, Cayo Costa and Gasparilla Island with the town of Boca Grande where the billionaires live and play. Interior to these islands, are two large bodies of water named Pine Island Sound and Charlotte Harbor. Seventeen mile long Pine Island is the largest of the interior islands. Useppa, Cabbage Key and dozens and dozens of other mangrove lined islands are found within Pine Island Sound. This huge area encompasses the second largest estuary in Florida. It is fed by 3 major rivers, the Caloosahatchee to the South and the Myakka and Peace Rivers to the North.



This estuary is home to abundant sea life. Sport fishermen come here for snook, redfish, trophy tarpon, grouper, snapper, shark and dozens of other species. Waterfowl and shore birds inhabit the area in large numbers along with manatee and a smaller population of alligators. Fresh Gulf shrimp are the best in the world and Southwest Florida's delicious stone crab are found no where else.

I've met sailors who tell me this area offers some of the finest sailing in the world. If you're a yachtsman, you'll be right at home in the Gulf, bays or the Intercoastal Waterway. The boats down

here are magnificent!! Fishermen will find enough water and fish here to occupy them for a lifetime. The beaches are world class and shelling is a local pastime. It is coastal living at its finest.

A lifelong angler, I learned that Southwest Florida's Lee Island Coast offers a 12 month window of fishing and boating with all the comforts and necessities of life. No sacrifices are necessary here! They have hospitals, restaurants, movie theaters, doctors, shopping centers and all the ingredients to make for a good life and a grand retirement! The fishing is great and the people are friendly. Golfers take notice; this area is also a golfing Mecca! The lifestyle is casual and laid back. The colors are bright, the music is lively and the cuisine is a mixture of spicy Caribbean, seafood and Southern comfort.

Now, eight years after our initial discovery, this paradise is our home. We've settled in nicely. Guess what! We have a lot of friends who love to come and visit! We have a beautiful house with a pool and my wife and I have jobs and a life we could barely imagine back then. Those once mystical sub tropical islands are all now part of our everyday life.

I'm a Charter Captain, fishing guide and water taxi. I spend my days among these magical islands named Captiva, Sanibel, Cayo Costa and Boca Grande. I still enjoy exploring these islands myself and now I get to help tourists and fishermen from around the US and the world explore them too. The very best way to explore these islands is by boat. It's quicker and the only way to get to some of these islands. What could be better than spending a beautiful day on the water exploring these barrier islands. Any number of local Captains and water taxis can help you.

There is lots to see and do for the tourist or vacationer! We can fish for 200 pound Tarpon on the sandy flats in turquoise blue waters or we can catch snapper for dinner tonight! I can take you on an eco tour to see the manatees and alligators or we can hike thru a canopy of palms to the surf on a secluded beach on the Gulf of Mexico. We can lunch at Baranle Phill's on Upper Captiva Island or eat fresh oysters at Cabbage Key. Consider my boat to be your own personal "water limo" and let me take you to the restaurants and boutiques on Boca Grande for a visit. You can also walk the beaches of Gasparilla or visit the lighthouse.

If you fall in love with these barrier islands as my wife and I did 8 years ago, you might catch yourself thinking wild crazy thoughts about making this place your permanent or second home. Check out the real estate. You can find some bargains! "It's a great place to visit and by golly, you just might want to live here"!



Capt. Fred Rossiter