

SARASOTA AND HER ISLANDS, FLORIDA'S CULTURAL COAST

SARASOTA, Fla. – Prized for the sands of Siesta Beach, named one of the world's best, Sarasota and Her Islands is a resort destination that attracts visitors from nearly every corner of the world. Sarasota isn't just known as a hot spot on the Gulf Coast, however—the beautiful city makes up Florida's Cultural Coast.

John Ringling of the Ringling Brothers Circus started it all in the 1930's, when he built one of Sarasota's finest treasures, now known as the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. In addition to the Ringling Museum, Sarasota is home to an opera, ballet, and symphony orchestra, as well as theatres, art galleries and artist communities.

The majestic purple Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall adds even more color to shimmering Sarasota Bay—designed by William Wesley Peters of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, the Van Wezel hosts free music nights, Friday Fest on the Bay, as well as big concerts and theatrical productions. In October of 2009, Boyz II Men take the stage; Jewel and the Ten Tenors perform in November. *Avenue Q* joins the musical line-up in December; *Hairspray* and *Mamma Mia* kick off the 2010 season and *Xanadu* will dazzle audiences in April.

Italian tragedy *Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci* begins the Sarasota Opera House's 2010 season in February, along with *Hansel and Gretel* and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco (Joan of Arc)* takes the stage in March. The Sarasota Opera House also offers the Sarasota Youth Opera, which is the most comprehensive program in the U.S. to involve young people in the performance of opera.

October 2009 marks the start of the Asolo Repertory Theatre's 51st season. The Asolo, in collaboration with the Sarasota Ballet, brings Tony Award winning-musical *Contact* to Sarasota, along with many other productions. Asolo's New Stages project, *Life in the Middle*, gives a voice to teens in the Sarasota community while the first ever New Play Festival, *Uplugged!*, also joins the 2009-2010 line-up.

Local theaters including the Venice Little Theatre and Golden Apple Dinner Theatre, as well as a slew of music and dance companies, including the Florida West Coast Symphony, also call Sarasota home.

The Sarasota Ballet of Florida, supported by international ballet stars and choreographers,

welcomes Sir Peter Wright's *Giselle*, featuring world-famous dancers Alina Cojocaru and Johan Kobborg, to the Sarasota Opera House stage in November 2009. *The Nutcracker* arrives in December, just in time for the holiday season. *Othello* will kick off the 2010 season in January.

Lovers of the visual arts will flock to the Ringling Museum of Art to see its collection of world-renowned Peter Paul Ruben's tapestries, as well as other Old Masters paintings. Beginning in December 2009 and stretching into April 2010, Ringling brings "Gothic Art in Gilded Age" to Sarasota. The special exhibit includes nearly all of the furniture and items from the Gothic Room of the home of Alva and William Vanderbilt.

The Historic Asolo Theater is considered one of the most important architectural works of art ever brought to America and currently functions as a modern performing arts venue, hosting music, dance and theatrical performances, as well as lectures. The Monday Night Film series gives visitors the opportunity to view classic and educational films in style.

Fans of modern art will find it all in Downtown Sarasota, which is jam-packed with art galleries, theaters and independently-owned boutiques. Visitors can tour Towles Court Artists Colony, an artist's neighborhood filled with studios that often double as homes. Bright colors and, of course, art abound. On peaceful Venice Main Street, little shops and galleries add to the allure of the beach town.

Living and breathing culture, Sarasota and Her Islands offers visitors an eclectic sampling of the arts. For more information on discovering Sarasota and Her Islands, visit www.sarasotafl.org or call (800) 522-9799.

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