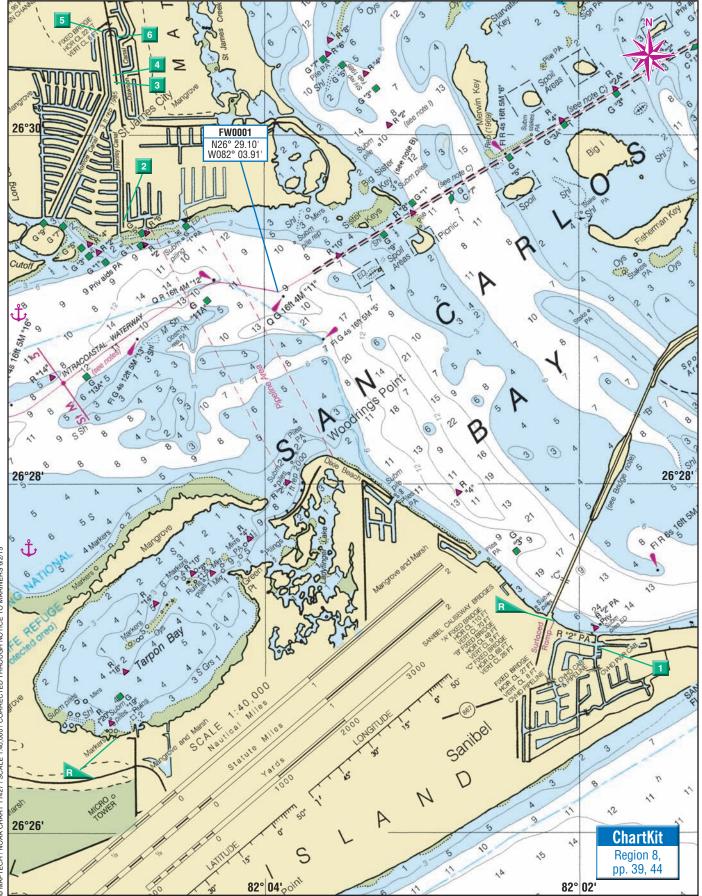
# ☆ Sanibel and Captiva



## Sanibel and Captiva 🛞

sheller's delight, the islands of Sanibel and Captiva make no bones about being tourist havens, and snowbirds from across the country have responded in kind. Everything about these small but gorgeous islands screams "We want you to visit!" The marvel is that they've done an amazing job of balancing a driving desire for tourism while maintaining small-town charm.

Banking on ecotourism as a primary draw was a great choice, as the beaches, nature preserves, bike trails, and waterside activities are truly diverse and, being so well-spaced and thought out, allow room enough for plenty of alluring shops, dining possibilities, resort spots and entertainment options. In short, there is simply no way to enjoy all that these two quaint islands have to offer in the span of a short stay, which is just one of the reasons people — especially boaters — return here time and again.

Of course, it wasn't always this way. The seafaring Calusa tribe wisely made this area home starting some 6,000 years ago. The first European explorers showed up in the 1500s. Best-known for his search for the elusive Fountain of Youth, Juan Ponce de Leon first visited the area in 1513 without mishap. When the conquistador and his crew returned in 1521, however, he was fatally wounded in a pitched battle with Calusas. General hostilities between locals and newcomers continued for several hundred years, but diseases brought by the Europeans eventually decimated the indigenous residents, who vanished by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Meanwhile, legend has it that Spanish pirate José Gaspar,

a.k.a. Gasparilla, and his buccaneer cohorts patrolled the Florida coast between Sanibel and Tampa, raiding ships and amassing treasure from 1783 to 1821. Gasparilla is said to have killed the men he conquered and kept their women as captive concubines on a small island, now named Captiva. Gaspar's treasure, supposedly buried somewhere in the region, was never found.

Mother Nature dictated a great deal of the history of the two islands. A hurricane in 1926 tore through Captiva Island, making two separate islands: Captiva and North Captiva, with what is today known as Blind Pass separating the two. Most recently, Charley, a Category 4 hurricane, made landfall in this area in August 2004, devastating Sanibel, Captiva, Pine

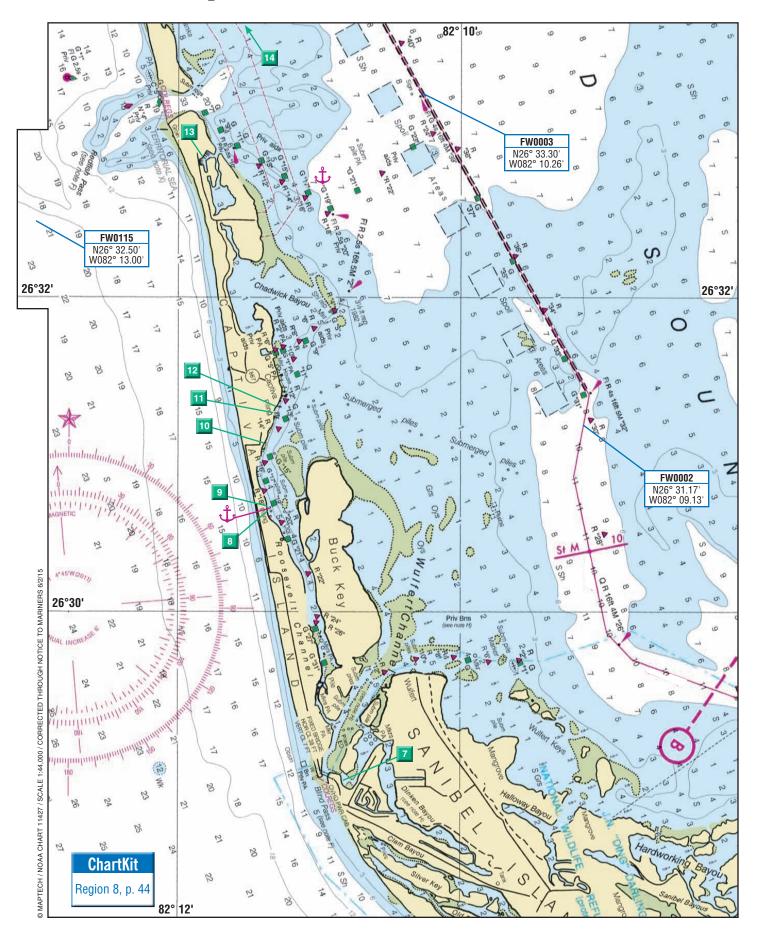
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Facilities continue, next page

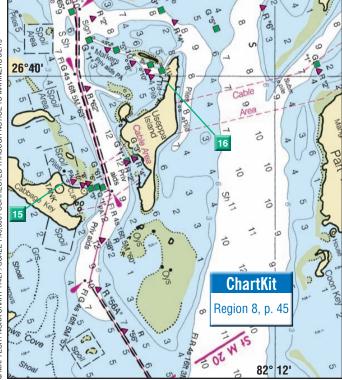


Sanibel Island Light on Point Ybel marks the entrance to San Carlos Bay.

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Island and the smaller island outcroppings in Pine Island Sound. Stands of trees in the region were leveled, mangrove forests destroyed; hundreds of homes and resorts, including the South Seas Island Resort on Captiva, experienced water damage. A new, shallow (and non-navigable) pass, locally known as Charley Pass, was created on North Captiva, parting the island into two sections. But even a Category 4 storm couldn't keep the industrious islanders down. They started picking up the pieces immediately.

Ultimately, the damage from Hurricane Charley, although epic, was much more to vegetation than to man-made structures. There was actually a bit of an upside to the storm in that it took out a lot of exotic, invasive vegetation and the rebound of native plants since has been a plus for local wildlife. Additionally, many hotels and businesses that were damaged took the opportunity not just to repair, but to significantly upgrade, their properties. Silver linings, indeed, but the end results have been favorable for the ecology, local businesses, visitors and tourist-based communities. Today, the islands themselves, mostly part of a national wildlife refuge, are as beautiful as ever, albeit slightly rearranged.

#### Things to See and Do

Unless you're a marathon walker, you'll probably want wheels to explore this spread-out area. Sanibel alone is 12 miles long and 5 miles wide at its widest; skinny Captiva, which is connected to Sanibel by a small bridge, is 5 miles long; and Pine Island is 17 miles in length. Bicycles, motor scooters and rental cars are available. Approximately 23 miles of wonderful bike paths run the length of Sanibel (but not Captiva). Riding is easy since the islands are fairly flat, and rental places abound. Among them are: Billy's Bikes and Segway of Sanibel (239-472-3620), which also runs tours on Segways; Tarpon Bay Explorers (239-472-8900) on Sanibel - and **YOLO Watersports** (239-472-9656) on Captiva. Car rentals are available from Enterprise (239-454-0770) in Fort Myers Beach, which offers a free pick-up service, and Sanibel Service Center (239-472-2125), a Hertz outpost on Sanibel. Sanibel Taxi (239-472-4160) is another handy way to get

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7	Castaways Marina	239-472-1112		12/	Υ/	20	2/2	W		R			G	IB	RSL	HP	R	All
8	'Tween Waters Inn Island Resort & Marina	239-472-5161	16/72	46/	Y/	130	5/7	WC	♦▲50	R			GD	All	All	HPT	R	All
9	Captiva Island Yacht Club	239-472-4133					PR	IVAT	E-RECI	PRO	CAL PF	RIVILEGES						
10	Green Flash Bar and Grill	239-472-3337			Υ/	70	5/6		DOC	K-AN	ID-DIN	E					R	All
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12	McCarthy's Marina	239-472-5200		21/	Υ/	26	4/3	W							R		S	All
13	South Seas Island Resort	888-777-3625	16/68			120	6/6	W	♦▲100	F	PRIVAT	E	GD	All	All	All	IR	All
14	Barnacle Phil's Harbor Restaurant	239-472-1200			Υ/		3/6		DOC	K-AN	ID-DIN	E					R	All
15	Cabbage Key Inn	239-283-2278	16/11		Υ/	95	7/7		♦▲50	D				I	RSL		R	All
16	Useppa Island Club	239-283-1061	16/14			110	10/6	W	♦▲∎100			PRIVATE		I	RSL	HPT	R	All

Information in these listings is provided by the facilities themselves. An asterisk (\*) indicates we have confirmed the facility's existence, but it did not respond to our request for updated information.



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from place to place. Don't expect to get anywhere fast on Sanibel or Captiva islands; the speed limit is 30 mph.

If your boat has a draft too deep (i.e. 5 feet or more) and you'd like to do a bit of island-hopping in Pine Island Sound, you can rent a power boat from Jensen's Twin Palm Resort & Marina, Captiva (239-472-5800); Beach Bums Boat Rental, Captiva (239-472-6336) and Boathouse Powerboat Rentals (239-472-2531) at Sanibel Marina. Another alternative: Captiva Cruises (239-472-5300) runs half-day excursions to the out-islands as well as dolphin, wildlife and shelling cruises.

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Talcum powder-soft sand, abundant shells and glorious sunsets make the 16-plus miles of Gulf Coast beaches the top attraction on Sanibel and Captiva. The area is second only to Australia's Great Barrier Reef for the amazing bounty of beautiful shells. In fact, shelling is so popular here that beachcombers in the bent-over position are said to be doing the "Sanibel Stoop." Shellers also wade in the shallows to the east of the islands. With collections from around the world, Sanibel's Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum (3075 Sanibel-Captiva Road; 239-395-2233) will tell you everything you ever wanted to know about shells - and then some. And if you'd rather buy than "stoop," visit She Sells Seashells (2422 Periwinkle Way; 239-472-6991), the island's oldest shell emporium. Bowman's Beach, on Sanibel Island, is considered by locals to be the best for shelling. It is also generally uncrowded during all but peak tourist season. If you are serious about shelling, however, get out early in the morning to increase your chances of finding something unusual. People scour the seashore here from dawn to dusk. Not all the best shells are found right along the surf; occasionally, a real gem will turn up at the top of the rack line or along any sculpted edges cut into the dunes by storm tides.

Wildlife viewing also reigns supreme here, with manatees, dolphins, alligators, sea turtles, and rare birds making their homes in Sanibel's 6,000-plus acre J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge (239-472-1100, www.fws.gov/ dingdarling). Named for a Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist and avid conservationist, the refuge is one of the nation's largest mangrove ecosystems. Walk, drive, pedal or paddle through, but make sure to stop by the education center to view Darling's political cartoons. Seventy to 100 years later, many still ring true.

In the marshes, Tarpon Bay Explorers (900 Tarpon Bay Road; 239-472-8900) offers canoe and kayak rentals and tours, narrated tram tours and fishing charters through the refuge. While we haven't tried this ourselves, we've been told you can also tour parts of the refuge in your own dinghy. For a real look up close and personal at the backwater creeks and wildlife of the refuge, take the kayak tour. It is awesome. Anglers who visit the preserve by car would do well to try their luck along the 4-mile Wildlife Drive. Along this road you can catch tarpon up to 30 pounds, snook, sea trout and plenty of sheepshead, among other species. Shrimp bait, plastic swim baits and small tins are all you need to get started. Feeling a little more adventurous? Rent a kayak for fishing the bay waters within the preserve. You may also enjoy visiting the neighboring Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (239-472-3644), or the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (239-472-2329).

Kayakers can also explore sections of the Great Calusa Blueway (239-533-7474), a 190-mile-long marked trail that meanders from Charlotte Harbor south to Bonita Springs and is home to heron, ibis, manatees, sea turtles and river otters. Several local outfitters offer rentals and tours, among them Adventures in Paradise (14341 Port Comfort Road; 239-472-8443), Captiva Kayak Company & Wildside Adventures (11401 Andy Rosse Lane, 239-395-2925) and the aforementioned Tarpon Bay Explorers.

Shopping is always high sport on the islands, and there are dozens of stores and galleries selling clothing, crafts, jewelry, art, shell souvenirs and more, with prices ranging from reasonable to ridiculous.

By the way, the Sanibel and Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce (239-472-1080, www.sanibel-captiva.org) is a wonderful resource. Their free guidebook lists just about every shop, restaurant and vacation activity in the region, and is available at many participating businesses.

Culture doesn't hang out a "gone to the beach" sign on these islands. The eight-building Sanibel Historical Village and Museum (850 Dunlop Road; 239-472-4648) tells the story of the early settlers and includes the island's old general store as well as an early post office and school house. Sanibel Big Arts (900 Dunlop Road; 239-395-0500) is a thriving performance and visual arts center that hosts theater, dance, concerts and gallery shows. Movie lovers will find first-run films on Sanibel at Island Cinema (535 Tarpon Bay Road; 239-472-1701), and several restaurants offer live music and entertainment.

Out on little sister Captiva Island, take a look at the Chapel by the Sea (239-472-1646) on Chapin Lane. It was built in 1901 and formerly served as the island's one-room schoolhouse. The shopping and dining are particularly good on Andy Rosse Lane.

For sheer luxury, the South Seas Island Resort (239-472-5111) has it all — swimming, tennis, golf, beaches and water sports. Boaters who stay at the marina have complete access to the resort facilities. The 'Tween Waters Inn Island Resort (800-223-5865; www.tween-waters.com) offers comfortable rooms and cottages, a pool and spa, a restaurant for fine dining and another one for casual eats, a tackle shop, and kayak/paddleboard rentals/tours right on the property. Don't miss the hermit crab races held once or twice each week. You'll likely see manatees at the marina here, too. Best of all, from your room or the dock you have easy walking access to both the Gulf of Mexico and Pine Island Sound.

As for the fishing in general, you'll find sheepshead around nearly any piece of structure in the waters around Captiva and Sanibel islands. There are also plenty of agreeable sea trout in the channels of Pine Island Sound, and snook at the

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A vessel motors along the ICW between Bird Key, foreground, and Useppa Island, background.

docks and bridges. For redfish, work the edges of Pine Island with live shrimp or shrimp imitations and you should have little trouble connecting early or late in the day.

#### **Pine Island**

Pine Island, the largest island on the west coast of Florida, is fringed with mangrove waterways and filled with mango groves. (There is even an annual **Mango Mania** festival if you happen to be here in July.) The island is low-key and quaint with an Old Florida-style rural waterfront character. To visit, you'll need to harbor hop in a shallow-draft (5 feet, max) boat or do your exploring by car. The towns of **Matlacha** ("Matluh-shay"), **Pine Island Center**, **Bokeelia** ("Bo-keel-ya"), **Pineland** and **St. James City** each offer a unique ambiance.

Matlacha has the charm of an old fishing village, with the addition of art galleries, gift shops, boutiques and seafood restaurants — all painted in bright, tropical colors. Don't miss Creative Coast weekends, Fridays and Saturdays on the second weekends of November through April, where you'll find wonderful island-made artwork and crafts as well as the Matlacha Hookers. No, not what you think! These Hookers are civic-minded female anglers who run a fishing tournament to raise funds for local charities.

Pine Island Center is the island's downtown with shops, grocery stores and fast-food restaurants. To the south, St. James City is a real boaters' community and the island's most populated area. Most homes have frontage on a vast array of canals that offer direct, if distant, access to the Gulf of Mexico. And the Calusa Land Trust's **St. Jude Nature Trail** offers a way to walk or bike through local wetlands. In Pineland, on the northwest side of the island, you can walk along the **Calusa Heritage Trail**, an archaeological site operated by the Florida Museum of Natural History, and the location of a 2,000-year-old Calusa village. The entire main street of Bokeelia, a fishing community on the island's northern tip, has been named a historic district, with several buildings from the early 1900s.

Fishing charters, water taxis and tour boats run from Pine Island to Cabbage Key, Cayo Costa, Captiva, North Captiva, and Sanibel Island from several locations including **Four Winds Marina** (239-283-0250) and **Jug Creek Marina** (239-283-3331) in Bokeelia, and **Pineland Marina** (239-283-3593) in St. James City. **Refer to the** *Charlotte Harbor and Punta Gorda* chapter for more information and for their locations on the chart. For more information, go to *www.pineislandchamber.org* as well as *www.pineislandfl.com* and *www.floridascreativecoast.com*.

#### The Out Islands

**Cabbage Key**, **Cayo Costa**, and the **Useppa** islands are special because they can only be visited by boat. As noted previously, tour boats leave from Captiva and Pine Island, but it may be more fun to visit on your own.

The **Cabbage Key Inn** (239-283-2278) is the main attraction on the tiny island. The inn's funky pub/restaurant has a spectacular view and it's surrounded by rustic cottages.



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Rumor has it that some guy named Buffett wrote a song about cheeseburgers and paradise after having lunch at Cabbage Key. Almost every square inch of interior space has been wallpapered with dollar bills signed by patrons - tens of thousands of them! Some of the posts in the restaurant are spongy to the touch due to the many layers of money. The owners will take any fallen bills to the bank for donations to local charities.

The naturalists' heaven Cayo Costa State Park (941-964-0375; www.floridastateparks.org/cayocosta) features about nine miles of shell-filled beaches, a pine forest, and nature trails with an amazing array of wildlife. Camping cabins are available for a small fee for those who can't get enough swimming, shelling and fishing in just one day. You can visit by private boat or take the Tropic Star (239-283-0015) ferry from the Jug Creek Marina in Bokeelia. Reservations are recommended.

Useppa Island is an ultra-exclusive, private island that welcomes visitors only under certain circumstances. Rich in history, it has a fabulous 100-year-old inn and restaurant ---the Collier Inn - beautiful homes and cottages, complete resort services and a full-service marina, all upscale.

The Useppa Island History Society Museum (239-283-9600), officially named the Barbara Sumwalt Museum, showcases the history of Useppa Island from the Ice Age to the present. Signature pieces are forensic restorations of the Useppa Man and Woman, taken from skeletons unearthed during archaeological digs. More modern relics include military garb and gear from 1960 to 1961 when the CIA trained Cubans forming Brigade 2506 for the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The Useppa Island Club stresses the private nature of the island, and says only members and guests or those seeking membership are welcome, but exceptions are sometimes made. Marina dockage is sometimes available to visiting yachts (up to 110 feet with a draft of 6 feet or less) with prior arrangements. Call or hail the harbormaster (239-283-1061, ext. 163 or VHF 16) in advance. About the only way to visit trouble-free is via Captiva Cruises (239-472-5300), which runs daily trips for lunch and museum visits.

### Restaurants and Provisions

Dining options on Sanibel and Captiva range from the elegant and expensive to pizza, cheeseburgers, hot dogs and fried fish.

The Jacaranda (239-472-1771) has been delighting islanders for more than 20 years with good food, lively music and dancing. The Thistle Lodge (239-472-9200), overlooking the Gulf, is another fine choice for a special meal.

Brush up on your nautical flags before you have breakfast or lunch at the casual Gramma Dot's Seaside Saloon (239-472-8138) at the Sanibel Marina. We saw someone negotiate a free glass of wine when she correctly spelled out the flags on the server's shirt. The food is delicious and pure comfort.

Other favorites are the Lighthouse Café (239-472-0303), the Island Cow (239-472-0606), the East End Deli (239-472-9622), and Cheeburger Cheeburger (239-472-6111). There's free Wi-fi at the casual **Sanibel Bean** (239-395-1919) and you'll surely want to try the Yucatan shrimp appetizer at Doc Fords Sanibel Bar and Grille (239-472-8311). For great fried or grilled seafood, pull into the Lazy Flamingo (239-472-5353). It's a local favorite and you can get any fish you catch cooked to order here. Bring in a redfish and go with a mesquite or blackened presentation.

Provisions are easy enough to find on Sanibel, with numerous markets and convenience stores, including Jerry's Foods (239-472-9300), Bailey's General Store (239-472-1516), and Rosie's Island Market & Deli (239-472-6656).

Captiva Island hotspots include the Green Flash Bar & Grill (239-472-3337), the Mucky Duck (239-472-3434), where you can watch a glorious sunset and sip whatever pleases you, and the Bubble Room (239-472-5558), which is filled with toys, trains, good food and fun. There's also the Key Lime Bistro (239-395-4000) with an outdoor patio and live music.

The South Seas Island Resort (888-777-3625) and 'Tween Waters Inn (239-472-5161) have a variety of inhouse dining options, from casual to fancy. The Crow's Nest at 'Tween Waters is said to have the best island nightlife.

Get your groceries and sundries at the Island Store (239-472-2374) on Andy Rosse Lane or the Santiva General Store (239-472-5556) at Blind Pass, where the two islands almost meet.

On Pine Island you'll find a number of dock-and-dine restaurants specializing in fresh seafood presented with low-key island flair, including the Waterfront Restaurant & Marina (239-283-0592) in St. James City and Bert's Bar and Grill (239-282-3232) in Matlacha (refer to the preceding chapter for its location). There is a supermarket in Pine Island Center.

### \* Charts

Use Maptech ChartKit Region 8, pages 39, 44 and 45; NOAA charts 11427 (1:40,000) and 11426 (1:80,000).

### Vavigation and Anchorages

Before you plan your voyage to Sanibel, Captiva or any of the islands in Pine Island Sound, please read the navigation advice in the preceding chapter, which has important information about the ICW and the twisting channels that run through the shallow waters of both Pine Island Sound and San Carlos Bay. Boats with a draft greater than 5 feet will face challenges here and may do best taking the Gulf route and ducking in to one of the marinas on the mainland or on the tips of Sanibel and Captiva islands. South Seas Island Resort (888-777-3625) has an approach with depths of 5 to 7 feet, with deeper water at the docks. Call ahead for advice, because shifting sands are the norm here.

The good news is: You can visit the Sanibel Marina (239-472-2723) at the south end of the island without passing through Sanibel Island Causeway Bridge. Approaching from the south, be sure to give the shoals off Point Ybel a wide berth and then follow the marked channel through San Carlos Bay to Fl R 4s 16ft 3M "6" near the start of the

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Some of the best anchoring is in Pelican Bay, west of Punta Blanca Island, right, at the north end of Cayo Costa, left.

Okeechobee Waterway. About 1.5 miles west-southwest is Fl R 6s 16ft 4M "2." Once Fl R 6s 16ft 4M "2" is abeam, you will see the marina's entrance channel on the shore before you reach the bridge.

Marine facilities and restaurants on **Captiva Island** are located south of Chadwick Bayou in Roosevelt Channel. Approach this area from the ICW's R "38" (Statute Mile 13.1), then head southwest to Fl R 2.5s 16ft 5M "2" at the Roosevelt Channel entrance.

West of Fl G 4s 16ft 4M "39" (Statute Mile 13.7) on the ICW is the entrance channel to **South Seas Island Resort**. This is also the route to take to Redfish Pass, which requires local knowledge. In the past, the channel from the ICW has shoaled, so be sure to call the dockmaster for the latest information before approaching.

**To reach Pine Island from San Carlos Bay**, follow the ICW to Statute Mile 5, where a channel leads to Pine Island's St. James City. Small craft frequent this area, but locals tell us it is "tight" for bigger boats. Ditto Pine Island's other ports.

**To reach Matlacha via Matlacha Pass**, follow the winding well-marked channel to the north of G "1" near Big Sister Key and Picnic Island in San Carlos Bay.

Facilities and attractions at **Pineland** and **Bokeelia** on the north end of Pine Island can be reached by following the ICW to Fl R 4s 16ft 5M "52," where a channel goes off to the northeast. The channel leading to Pineland starts just north of **Part Island**.

To reach Bokeelia, you'll pass G "7" Priv to port at **Patricio Island** before setting a course for Fl R 4s 16ft 3M "8." Past the light, follow an eastward course along the north side of Bokeelia Island toward G "1," a private marker indicating access into Bokeelia. (**The first chart in the** *Charlotte Harbor and Punta Gorda* chapter shows Pineland and Bokeelia.)

If you prefer to anchor in these waters, you'll find a cove south of the ICW in the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel that offers good holding ground in 4 to 6 feet of water, but there is nowhere close to land a dinghy.  $\oplus$  Other popular anchorages are east of the ICW near Useppa Island, wherever the charted depths and conditions permit.  $\oplus$  In westerly winds, boats sometimes anchor inside the tips of North Captiva Island and Cayo Costa on either side of Captiva Pass.  $\oplus$  But, these spots are unprotected from easterly winds and subject to powerful currents. Another favorite is Pelican Bay, west of Punta Blanca Island near the north end of Cayo Costa and just south of Boca Grande Pass. Refer to the preceding chapter for additional details.

# Shoreside and Emergency Numbers Airport:

—Southwest Florida International (Fort Myers) 239-590-4810 **Car Rental**: Enterprise (Fort Myers Beach) 239-454-0770 **Coast Guard**: Fort Myers Beach 239-463-5754 or VHF 16 **Customs**: Fort Myers 239-561-6205

Florida Wildlife Commission: 888-404-3922

Taxi: Sanibel Taxi 239-472-4160

#### Tow Service:

—Sea Tow 800-4SEATOW or VHF 16

-TowBoatU.S. 800-391-4869 or VHF 16 +