

Cruise on in by boat to one of region's waterfront restaurants

There's nothing like a pleasure cruise along the Caloosahatchee, the Intracoastal, or the Gulf of Mexico to work up an appetite. Whether it's a cheeseburger in paradise at Cabbage Key, a grouper sandwich at Bert's Bar or Ralph's Killer Shrimp at Rumrunners, it all tastes better when you arrive by boat.

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel offer a treasure trove of boat-accessible options, ranging from ultracasual to special-occasion chic.

The main thing to keep in mind is that many of these establishments have only a few slips and popular spots fill up quickly – especially on weekends – so call ahead to ensure there's room and to get precise nautical directions before making the trip.

Bonita Springs

Big Hickory Seafood Grille and Marina, 26107 Hickory Blvd., Bonita Springs; 239-992-0991; Channel Marker 60 is the key to finding this reliable old restaurant where there's four feet of water even at low tide. Once you've landed a table, belly up to a plate of fish tacos, a grouper sandwich, burgers or full entrees at this rustic-but-charming spot overlooking Estero Bay. **N 26.358598, W 81.857557**

Coconut Jack's Waterfront Grille, 5370 Bonita Beach Road, Bonita Springs; 239-676-7777; Dine inside or out at this festive restaurant that offers casual fare such as ceviche, barbecue pork nachos, coconut shrimp, salads, sandwiches and seafood baskets as well as more substantive dishes such as baby back ribs and lobster tails. **N 26-19.836 W 081-50.495**

The Fish House, 4685 Bonita Beach Road, Bonita Springs; 239-495-5770; on Bonita's Back Bay. The atmosphere is casual with a menu that includes smoked fish dip, blackened tuna bites, quesadillas, seafood baskets and grouper tacos. **N 27.50967, W 80.32549**

Cabbage Key

Old House Restaurant, Cabbage Key; 239-283-2278; just off Marker 60 (accessible by boat only). The food here is Florida casual by day, a bit more ambitious at night. Said to be the inspiration for Jimmy Buffett's "Cheeseburger in Paradise," the restaurant serves burgers, peel-and-eat shrimp, crab claws and other Florida fare with an expanded selection for dinner. Should you have been fortunate enough to catch your own fish, the restaurant will cook it for you. **N 26-3924.162, W 82-1320.635**

Cape Coral

Fathoms at Cape Harbour, 5785 Cape Harbour Drive, Cape Coral; 239-542-0123; from the Caloosahatchee River, look for Marker 92 and stay to the left of red markers 2, 4, 6 and 8; turn left past green marker 9, stay right of markers 11, 13, 15 and 17, at fork stay to left and follow channel to Cape Harbour. Tuck into a selection of small plates — tsunami rolls, stuffed black and blue bread, a cold cuts board, seared beef tips — or order something more substantial such as shrimp scampi pasta, braised kurobuta pork cheeks or lavender marinated chicken breast. And don't forget the crafted cocktails. Dine indoors or out. **N 26-32.73, W 082-00.46**

Marker 92 Waterfront Bar & Bistro, and The Nauti Mermaid Dockside Bar & Grill, 5961 Silver King Blvd., Cape Coral; 239-541-5600; Whether it's a nosh or a full-fledged meal you have in mind, you can find it along with a hearty portion of waterfront at Marker 92 and its adjoining bar. Flatbread pizzas are a specialty, but there are also burgers, salads, wings and entrees such as shrimp pomodoro from which to choose. **N 26.540769, W 81.9993743**

Rumrunners, 5848 Cape Harbour Drive, Cape Coral; 239-542-0200; see boating directions above for Fathoms. Full bar. Dine indoors or out from a wide-ranging menu that includes Bahamian cracked-conch fritters, lump crab cakes, Ralph's killer shrimp, steaks, paella and seafood pot pie. **N 26-32.73, W 82-00.46**

The Boathouse – Tiki Bar & Grill, 5819 Driftwood Pkwy, Cape Coral; 239-945-2628; Marker Red 78 on Flamingo Canal. Open air, outdoor dining. You'll find appetizers, soups, salads, seafood baskets, sandwiches, burgers, and paninis.

Captiva

The Green Flash, 15183 Captiva Drive, Captiva; 239-472-3337; Intracoastal Waterway Marker 38. Watch for the green flash said to occur just as the sun sets. Meanwhile, feast on raw oysters, bisque, fresh seafood and surf and turf. **N 26-2723.41, W 81-5715.18**

Old Captiva House, 'Tween Waters, 15951 'Tween Waters Drive, Captiva; 239-472-5161; Marker 38. The menu at this lovely Gulf-front restaurant includes wild mushroom ragout, curry lobster spring rolls, roasted rack of lamb and Caribbean crusted grouper. **N 26.510457, W 82.189039**

Fort Myers

The Marina at Edison Ford, 2360 West 1st Street, Fort Myers; 239-245-7049; Marker 54. The Company's motto is "You Can't Fake Fresh." Florida Seafood Restaurant that has amazing fresh shrimp, fish, and crab.

The Lighthouse Restaurant, 14301 Port Comfort Road, Fort Myers; 239-489-0770; Mile Marker 11 in Jonathan Harbour, just past Connie Mack Island. There's a full bar, indoor and outdoor dining, seafood, crab cakes, pasta, prime rib and more. **N 26-29.25, W 81-59.36**

Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa, 17260 Harbour Point Drive, Fort Myers; 239-466-4000; Marker 11. Choose from Charley's Cabana Bar, with light fare served at a casual bar on the water; Tarpon House, with inside and outside seating that overlooks the resort pool and waterfront serving a mix of Florida favorites; or Courtside Steakhouse, with its full bar and menu featuring steaks, seafood and upscale service. **N 26.48930, W 82.01080**

Fort Myers Beach

Bayfront Bistro, 4761 Estero Blvd., Fort Myers Beach; 239-463-3663. This casually elegant restaurant and bar sits atop Snook Bight Yacht Club, offering a prime view of the back bay, serving flatbreads, salads, seafood, steaks and more. **N 26.438815, W 81.918763**

Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille, 708 Fishermans Wharf, Fort Myers Beach; 239-765-9660; Sit inside or out and get a great view of Estero Bay while dining on conch chowder, crab cakes, ceviche and other Caribbean-tinged treats and a wide range of libations. For dessert: Drunken Parrot Carrot Cake, which is liberally spiked with Gosling's Black Seal Rum. **N 26.459243, W 81.952564**

Original Shrimp Dock Bar & Grill, 2200 Main St., Fort Myers Beach; 239-463-3043; Recently opened, this waterfront restaurant offers a wealth of shrimp dishes as well as grouper, other seafood dishes and offerings for those who prefer land-based proteins like meatloaf and ribs. **N26.457 W81.944**

Flippers On the Bay, Lovers Key Beach Club & Resort, 8771 Estero Blvd., Fort Myers Beach; 239-765-1040; Just east of Big Carlos Pass near the drawbridge. This open-air bar and grill features sandwiches, salads, crab cakes, exceptional coconut shrimp and local seafood with a more upscale menu for dinner. **N26.406.255, N 81.876.262**

Matanzas Harborside Restaurant, 416 Crescent St., Fort Myers Beach; 239-463-3838; An institution on the Fort Myers Beach waterfront, Matanzas has earned its reputation on fresh seafood, well-crafted drinks and pizza (served on the Upper Deck Bar). Dockage while dining is free. **N 26.455746, W 81.953552**

Nervous Nellie's, 1131 First St., Fort Myers Beach; 239-463-8077; A casual waterfront eatery and bar with a mind-bogglingly large menu that includes loads of appetizers, burgers, salads, barbecue, fajitas and more. **N 26.27.23.41, W 81.57.15.18**

Parrot Key Caribbean Grill, 2500 Main St., Fort Myers Beach; 239-463-3257; Marker 24 near the Matanzas Pass Bridge. A lively, open-air restaurant and bar that features crab cakes, conch fritters, fish and chips, a raw bar, seafood and festive drinks. **N26.457 W81.944**

Pink Shell Beach Resort and Marina, 275 Estero Blvd., Fort Myers Beach; 463-6181; Marker 11. Bongo's Bar & Grill is a poolside restaurant serving wings, calamari, salads, flatbreads, burgers, sandwiches, wraps, steaks, ribs and seafood. **N 26-27 40.8132, W 81-57 54.7272**

North Fort Myers

Cactus Jack's Southwest Bar and Grill, 3448 Marinatown Lane, North Fort Myers; 652-5787; Dine indoors or in the tiki hut along a wide canal just off the Caloosahatchee River. The canal entrance is about 50 yards west of Intracoastal Waterway Marker 54. There's a bevy of bar fare — much of it with a Tex-Mex flair — including nachos, tacos, refried beans and such. Live music some nights. **N 26.659718, W 81.890386**

Three Fishermen, 13021 N. Cleveland Ave., North Fort Myers; 239-599-8568; just northwest of the Caloosahatchee Bridge. This open-air seafood joint may have the best riverfront view in Lee County. The menu is almost exclusively seafood, including crabs, shrimp, mussels, scallops, and fish and chips. **N 26-39-29, W 81-53-03**

North Captiva

Barnacle Restaurant, 4401 Point House Trail, North Captiva; 239-472-1200; Markers 1 and 2 in the Safety Harbor Channel. This casual, accessible-only-by-boat restaurant is famous for its black beans and rice but also serves wings, crab cakes, coconut shrimp, salads, tacos and other fare. **N 26.35.51, W 82.12.24**

Pine Island

Lazy Flamingo 3, Four Winds Marina, 16501 Stringfellow Road, Bokeelia; 283-5959; Marker 8, look for the sign for Four Winds Marina; slips for restaurant are near the condos. An ultracasual nautical outpost, it specializes in fresh local seafood as well as wings, conch fritters and burgers. **N 26.42.060, W 82.09.378**

Bert's Bar and Grill, 4271 Pine Island Road, Matlacha; 239-282-3232; just east of the Matlacha Bridge near Marker 55. A casual, popular spot that serves lots of bar fare — wings, peel and eat shrimp, pizza and a great grouper sandwich. **N 26.37.977, W 82.03.960**

Tarpon Lodge Restaurant, 13771 Waterfront Drive, Pineland; 239-283-2517; in Wilson (Pineland) Pass north of Marker 13. Choose from the well-appointed restaurant or casual bar for a full meal, sandwich or snack. It's a great place to watch the sunset. **N 26-39.562, W 82-09.180**

Woody's Waterside, 3051 Stringfellow Road, St. James City; 283-5555; Marker 13, take main channel at St. James City and turn into Monroe Canal (second canal). This laid-back sports bar offers comfort fare such as black bean chili, barbecued pulled pork, crab cakes and burgers. **N 26-30 262, W 82-04 966**

Waterfront Restaurant, 2131 Oleander St., St. James City; 239-283-0592; Cozy and casual, the Waterfront offers a wealth of dining options including black beans and rice, po'boys, baskets (shrimp, grouper, gator, conch and others), Pine Island clams, stone crabs (in season, and homemade desserts like coconut fried cheesecake. **N26.29517 W082.04.9024**

Sanibel

Gramma Dots, Sanibel Marina, 634 N. Yachtsman Drive, Sanibel; 239-472-8138; Dine on grouper and shrimp while checking out the plethora of yachts and birds as well as the occasional manatee that pass by. **N 26 27 0, W 82 1 50**