

Poolside Pleasure

Tropical drinks with more than just a splash of water



The Oasis pool bar, Tween Waters Inn & Resort, Captiva Island

by **Libby Boren McMillan**

Southwest Florida can set the stage for moments that make you catch your breath and wonder, “Do I really live in a place this wonderful?”

For each of us it’s something different that makes us feel luxurious in a very simple island sort of way. But most will agree that nothing says “life is great” like sitting at a pool bar, sipping something frozen, and chatting with the folks nearby. Fortunately, Sanibel and Captiva islands offer several venues for doing just that.

The Oasis at the legendary Tween Waters Inn & Resort just might be the most popular pool bar among locals. It overlooks one of the islands’ largest pools, and features an agreeable staff including Lisa Rodriguez, who has been there, off and on, for eighteen years. Food is served from 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day, and the bar stays open an hour longer. You can get there

by car or boat, but when the resort is full a visit may require a \$25 day pass (which acts as credit for drinks, food, and merchandise). With kiddie pool, hot tub, and lots of lounge chairs, the only thing missing is the beach, but that’s only a short stroll away.

Next stop on the pool bar tour would be at Sanibel’s West Wind Inn. While the Normandy Restaurant is well known, the West Wind’s pool bar remains one of the best kept secrets on the islands. It sits on an elevated platform with no obstructions blocking the glorious sea breeze or endless views of the Gulf of Mexico.

Part-time wedding consultant Janice Ulrich makes this friendly place even friendlier as she serves up cold drinks, pizzas, and ice cream while answering questions about the islands. “We have wonderful food,” she says of the menu that includes quesadillas, wings, mussels, barbecue, and grilled ham and havarti

PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE



Above: West Wind Inn pool bar, Sanibel Island; right: Courtney's Tiki Lounge at Sanibel's Holiday Inn.



sandwiches. Old-fashioned signs promote the more unique offerings, including mojitos, mango frozen daiquiris, and vanilla cookie-dough cups. But it's the view and the breeze that steal the show. Seven umbrella tables make board games a possibility, so bring yours along and unwind. The pool bar is open from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days a week and food is served from 11:30 a.m. until 2 p.m. A Friday night happy hour offers half-price drinks and music from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Diners at historic Thistle Lodge gaze out over Coconuts, the Casa Ybel pool bar located just off the restaurant's outside deck. Situated in the huge pool area at the popular West Gulf Drive resort, the bar offers unobstructed views of the water, and on a clear day you can see all the way down the coast to north Naples.

"We're open 11:00 a.m. until sunset, and food is served the same hours," says Kenny Kolc, who has worked there for seventeen years. "Everything out here is pretty much frozen drinks: piña coladas, rum runners, margaritas, and daiquiris. And we have afternoon entertainment on Sundays." Kolc admits that most of his

guests are pretty laid-back, in typical pool bar fashion. When asked if he can answer any island question after all his years behind an island bar, he laughs and says, "I hope so; I try! But don't ask me about bushes or plants or shells though, I don't know about that!"

Sundial Resort, part of the Blackstone collection of hotels, offers a unique view from Crocodial's pool bar, where patrons can watch children funnel down through a twelve-foot-high seashell into the swimming pool below. This busy circular bar affords the view of your choice: bikini-clad girls sunbathing by the pool, a hot volleyball game, the Gulf of Mexico, or musicians playing island-style music every Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Food is available 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and the bar stays open until 6 p.m.

Sanibel's Holiday Inn designed its fenced pool bar to service resort guests. Accessible only with a key, Courtney's Tiki Lounge is colorfully decorated with old records and flip flops on the walls, and its roof makes for a shady spot as well as a respite from any weather. The lounge offers all the cold and frozen drinks you could want, as well as lunch from 11 a.m.

to 5 p.m. that includes wraps, sandwiches, burgers, nachos, and burritos. A cold case is filled with drinks for nearby swimmers and sunbathers, and a small sign touts "ice pops, seventy-five cents." Even without knowing what these are, they certainly sound like something that would be good on a hot day.

Not far down the road, on East Gulf Drive, the Sanibel Inn, yet another Blackstone property, has a small pool bar with a nice view. Set back from the beach, the Take Five, named after the well-known jazz tune, is operated by the owners of Ellington's Jazz Bar, also located at the resort. "We just redid our pool bar menu," says general manager Audrey Kassem. "We have panini, wraps, chicken salad, tuna salad, dogs, fries, onion rings, fried grouper sandwich, grouper fingers, fried popcorn shrimp, and wings." There are also a few tables where patrons can spread out. When asked what special drinks might be available, "Forbidden Fruit," says Kassem mysteriously without offering to share her secret ingredients, "and rum runners, lots of rum runners." Take Five accepts cash or room card, but no credit cards. "We welcome locals," says Kassem.



Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa, just over the Sanibel Causeway in Fort Myers

The spectacular Pelican Pool Bar at Sanibel Harbour Resort is a true must-do for pool bar aficionados. It is well worth the drive across the Sanibel causeway, or be adventurous and come by boat. Situated on the Intracoastal Waterway and facing due west, the bar is unrivaled

for sea breezes, boat-watching, and water views. “Our ‘Sunburn’ is a special here,” says a busy Pelican bartender who details the ingredients of this drink that is probably less painful than its name implies, including spiced rum, coconut rum, banana liqueur, pineapple juice, and grenadine. “Ninety percent of our drinks are frozen,”

he says, “and the piña colada is the most popular of all.”

While enjoying the breeze, soaking up the sun, or chilling in the shade, depending on which side of the bar you choose, you can even watch sports events on a small television set. Of particular note are

the attractive plastic cups in which drinks are served, many of which have found their way into the cupboards of local residents. Open 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily and until 5 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, the bar often closes before sunset, but that doesn’t mean you can’t stick around. Just order a tall drink before closing time, sit back, and soak in the wonder of life in Florida as big sky colors change from blue to gold to pink. And summer thunderheads make the views even more dramatic.

Whichever pool bar you choose, you’re sure to be a little more relaxed in no time at all. One bit of advice, however: wearing little pink umbrellas behind your ears makes it hard to be serious, so be sure to remove them before answering that cell phone call from your office. 🌴

Libby Boren McMillan is a freelance writer for Times of the Islands.

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