

How the Circus Came to Town



The Circus Past

Sarasota became a celebrated "Circus Capital of the World" when John Ringling moved his Ringling Bros. Circus winter headquarters to the area in the 1920s. The famous Ca' d' Zan mansion, the renowned art museum and grounds are part of the Ringling campus that also includes the Ringling Circus Museum. In the 1950's, Cecille B. DeMille filmed "The Greatest Show on Earth" in Sarasota.

On St. Armands Circle lies the Circus Ring of Fame, where more than 100 legends of the Circus are honored with dedicated plaques.



The Circus Present

Led by Sarasota native Nik Wallenda, known for his high-wire walks across Niagara Falls and above Times Square, Wonderland Illuminate is a family-friendly holiday spectacular featuring world-class circus artistry under the big top.

A cornerstone of Sarasota's circus heritage, Circus Sarasota now offers year-round performances and circus arts programming in addition to its annual big top production.

Big Cat Habitat and Gulf Coast Sanctuary, founded by Kay Rosaire, a member of Sarasota's famous circus families, serves as a rescue center for exotic and domestic animals, such as lions, ligers, monkeys, and bears. Visitors can enjoy a petting zoo and wildlife shows.



The Circus Future

Aspiring aerialists and other future circus hopefuls can learn skills at Sailor Circus Academy. Students from 4th through 12th grades are eligible to participate, and the academy puts on its own show every spring.

Created by world-renowned circus performers Pedro Reis and Dolly Jacobs, the Circus Arts Conservatory has weekly drop-in classes and summer camps for children ages 5 and up. Adults can take classes, too.

Tito Ganoa's Flying Trapeze Academy in Venice, visitors can learn flying trapeze, aerial silks, and other circus arts year-round, led by a world-renowned circus performer.

Sarasota's circus tradition continues to thrive through year-round performances and the training of future circus artists.

