

## 22 best events in Sarasota-Bradenton now through May



By [Wade Tatangelo](#)  
Entertainment Editor  
By [Jimmy Geurts](#)  
Entertainment reporter  
Posted at 8:58 AM  
Updated at 11:52 AM

Festivals, fairs and more fun things to do January through May in Sarasota and Manatee counties including Bradenton and Venice.

While the holidays are behind us, season is really just getting started.

We have several circuses taking place [this week](#), then major events kicking off with the Manatee County Fair later this month, followed by festivals celebrating everything from commercial fishing in Cortez to cutting-edge films in downtown Sarasota to bluegrass and barbecue in Venice.

Yes, there's lots going on, so mark your calendar, enjoy the wonderful weather and keep telling yourself the traffic is not soooo bad. Here's our list of the best annual events, many with decades of history, taking place January through May in Sarasota and Manatee counties.

### **JANUARY**

#### **Manatee County Fair, Jan. 16-26**

The fair's family fun features everything from livestock to live music, including national country acts like Restless Heart ("When She Cries"), plus all your favorite midway action and decadent fair food. Info: [manateecountyfair.com](http://manateecountyfair.com)

### **Sarasota Seafood & Music Festival, Jan. 17-19**

For the fifth year now, the winning pairing of local bands and local seafood returns to downtown Sarasota. Vendors at J.D. Hamel Park will also offer beer and other beverages. Info: [seafoodfestivals.com](http://seafoodfestivals.com)

### **Embracing Our Differences, Jan. 18-April 5**

Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences has featured 50 billboard-sized works of art, each accompanied by an inspirational quote, in downtown Sarasota's Bayfront Park. Info: [embracingourdifferences.org](http://embracingourdifferences.org)

### **Forks & Corks, Jan. 23-27**

The Sarasota-Manatee Originals' 13th annual event will feature numerous winemaker events ranging from upscale dinners to wine tastings and samplings, ahead of the always sold-out grand tasting in The Ringling's courtyard.

Info: [eatlikealocal.com/forksandcorks](http://eatlikealocal.com/forksandcorks)

## **FEBRUARY**

### **Sarasota Highland Games & Celtic Festival, Feb. 1**

The Scottish Heritage Society of Sarasota, Inc.'s annual event at Sarasota Fairgrounds features live music, food and merchandise vendors and dancing and athletic events.

Info: [sarasotahighlandgames.com](http://sarasotahighlandgames.com)

### **Sarasota Music Half Marathon and Rockin' 10K & 5K, Feb. 2**

The sixth annual race features local bands playing along the downtown Sarasota route and a post-race brunch provided by First Watch, with a 5K added this year.

Info: [sarasotahalf.com](http://sarasotahalf.com)

### **St. Barbara Greek Festival 'Glendi,' Feb. 6-9**

St. Barbara Greek Orthodox Church hosts this celebration of Greek culture, now in its 36th year, that includes authentic foods, folk dancing, crafts and live music.

Info: [stbarbarafestival.org](http://stbarbarafestival.org)

### **Circus Sarasota, Feb. 7-March 1**

Circus Sarasota will present 30-plus performances under the Red and White Big Top. The 2020 show will feature artistry on the flag pole and single trapeze, fast-paced Alanian riders on horseback, hand-to-hand acrobatics, juggling and much more.

Info: [circusarts.org](http://circusarts.org)

### **Bradenton Area River Regatta, Feb. 8**

This annual free event featuring boat races and fireworks on the Manatee River, as well as live music and other family-friendly activities, has become one of the largest spectator events in Southwest Florida since debuting in 2015.

Info: [bradentonarearegatta.com](http://bradentonarearegatta.com)

### **Thunder by the Bay, Feb. 14-16**

The 22nd annual **Thunder by the Bay Music & Motorcycle Festival** will return to the Sarasota Fairgrounds with headlining pop-metal band Warrant performing such hits as the 1990 party anthem “Cherry Pie” on Feb. 15. Info: [thunderbythebay.org](http://thunderbythebay.org)

**Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival, Feb. 15-16**

Nestled along north Sarasota Bay, Cortez is one the few remaining commercial fishing villages in Florida and an excellent place to eat fresh seafood and hear local live music, especially during this festival that dates back to 1981 and now draws about 20,000 attendees each year. Info: [cortez-fish.org](http://cortez-fish.org)

**Venice Italian Feast & Carnival, Feb. 20-23**

The 32nd Venice Italian Feast & Carnival at the Venice Airport Festival Grounds will feature four days of Italian food and family fun, including midway rides and games and live music, in a city with strong ties to its Old World namesake.

Info: [italianamericanclubofvenice.com](http://italianamericanclubofvenice.com)

**DeSoto Food & Music Festival, Feb. 28-March 1**

This festival and Hernando De Soto Historical Society fundraiser moves this year to Nathan Benderson Park, but still features the same blend of food and music, with acts including John Michael Montgomery (“I Swear”), The Georgia Satellites (“Keep Your Hands to Yourself”) and Slaughter (“Fly to the Angels.”) Info: [desotohq.com/food-music-fest](http://desotohq.com/food-music-fest)

**MARCH**

**ArtSlam, March 7**

The free, family-friendly event features dozens of teams of students and creatives bringing art to downtown Bradenton’s Old Main Street, with attendees encouraged to engage in the creative process. Info: [realizebradenton.com](http://realizebradenton.com)

**Sarasota Jazz Festival, March 8-14**

Expect a lineup of top-shelf national and regional acts at the Jazz Club of Sarasota’s 40th annual festival, with Grammy-winning jazz vocal group The Manhattan Transfer headlining. Info: [sarasotajazzfestival.org](http://sarasotajazzfestival.org)

**Sarasota County Fair, March 13-22**

The 84th annual Sarasota County Fair will provide another chance to eat deep-fried foods while checking out the livestock and deciding if you’re brave enough to get on one of those spectacular rides. Info: [sarasotafair.com](http://sarasotafair.com)

**Suncoast BBQ & Bluegrass Bash, March 27-28**

The 11th annual festival returns to Venice Airport Festival Grounds with another world-class pairing of barbecue and bluegrass artists like The Grascals and Lonesome River Band. Info: [suncoastbbqbash.com](http://suncoastbbqbash.com)

### **Sarasota Film Festival, March 27-April 5**

SFF has earned a strong national reputation for bringing award-winning films and stars to Sarasota, often being one of the next stops for movies after their Sundance Film Festival premieres, along with parties and other events.

Info: [sarasotafilmfestival.com](http://sarasotafilmfestival.com)

### **APRIL**

#### **Shark's Tooth Festival, April 3-5**

Venice is famous for its shark teeth, so it's only fitting to have this annual event at the Venice Airport Festival Grounds featuring arts/crafts, food, music and plenty of fossilized teeth from the ocean's deadliest predator, with proceeds benefiting Special Olympics Florida-Sarasota County. Info: [sharkstoothfest.com](http://sharkstoothfest.com)

#### **Devereaux-Kaiser Collector Car Meet, April 19**

Entering its 51st year, the show is expected to draw as many as 1,200 vehicles, vintage 1995 and older, to Sarasota Fairgrounds. Info: [sffbf.org](http://sffbf.org)

#### **DeSoto Grand Parade, April 25**

The annual De Soto celebrations come to a close with this parade, starting at Manatee High School and ending in downtown Bradenton, which becomes a massive street party where plastic beads are coveted like gold. Info: [desotohq.com](http://desotohq.com)

### **MAY**

#### **Harvey Milk Festival, May 1 and May 7-9**

The 11th annual LGBTQ festival paying tribute to pioneering politician Harvey Milk concludes with a free concert featuring national acts in downtown Sarasota's J.D.

Hamel Park. Info: [harveymilkfestival.org](http://harveymilkfestival.org)