

Beachouse Bloggings

While this island is indeed laid back, and some people only operate on island time, there are many things to do if you spend some time looking for them. Recently my husband and I were once again captured by the serene feeling of being on an island on Charlotte Harbor in Florida where average temperatures are in the low 70's and there is not a snowflake in sight; and to leverage this idyllic place the fishing is world class!

On the northern end of the island, Bocilla Island, also known as the quiet end, you can find breakfast in a historic site waiting to be discovered. **Captain Con's** located right on the water serves a nice breakfast for \$2.99, with one dollar extra for bacon or sausage. The service is friendly, the view to die for and the grits are good. This northern tip was a seaport in 1904 where they shipped hemp, mangos and other locally grown goods to the cold north.

Also in Bokeelia and only if you want shrimp right off the boat and into the fryer, or locally caught fish try **The Coastal Connection** on Portobello Road for a truly Old Florida experience. This down home and laid back open air restaurant on Jug Creek has lots of activity at all times. We watched a boat cruise by with a sofa and chairs aboard, moving day on the island I suppose. Recreational and commercial fisherman come and go from the docks constantly some with a large catch and some with not, but always with a happy smile because they know they are in a rare part of the world. One will never lack for a friend at the **Coastal Connection** because right in front of you on the docks and in the water are comical pelicans, soaring sea gulls hungry for a French fry and stately egrets looking for bugs. There is no liquor license, just pull a beer from the pickup truck cooler and leave a donation on the bar; only on Pine Island! Warning, do not get dressed up and do notice the interesting repair to the wicker sofa on the porch looking over jug creek. Across the canal is the busy Jug Creek Marina where you can buy flash frozen New Bedford scallops and local pink shrimp. The Jug Creek Air Force is located there, swarms of brown and white pelicans always looking for a bite. You can drive or come by boat.

News flash, at the end of the 240 ft pier at the Dickenson's Beachouse Lodge, a manatee appeared the February weekend when we where there. In local lore the manatee is the Pine Island version of the ground hog and when seen that means winter is over on Pine Island. Eat your heart out Chicago.

The island has over 50 percent of its artists supporting themselves by selling their art. That means galleries abound in Matlacha, St James City and in Bokeelia. One of my favorites is the **Crossed Palm Gallery** where verdant orchids and sparkling handmade jewelry greet you at the entrance to the charming gallery. Jeff, outfitted in Sponge Bob Square Pants clothing, will happily help you to make a purchase. They carry well known local artists and prices are affordable.

The **Tarpon Inn**, a beautifully restored 1920's Pine Island Inn, has a fine restaurant with a very good chef and lovely service. They also have a friendly bar complete with a fire place and authentic locals with whom to have a before dinner drink. One of the locals gave me a prehistoric shark's tooth he found on the banks of the Caloosahatchee. I was thrilled.

One of my favorite restaurants on Pine Island is **Red's** on Stringfellow Road, which is fantastic and quite a scene. They are soooo busy so get there early and enjoy the wait. It is worth it. Very friendly service and also a friendly bar also where you can eat if you wish. Medium prices.

The Waterfront Café in St James City is also great . They make the best habanera vinegar I have ever had and, if you use it sparingly, it adds marvelous flavor to fish, shrimp, cole slaw and yummy French fries. You can drive or come by boat as it is on a canal. I told you Pine Island is paradise. **Pork Bellies** has good BBQ and **Raymary Grill** has a nice breakfast and friendly service as well.

The Pine Island Public Library is first class and the Pine Island swimming pool is very nice with tennis courts fronting the park.

The Museum of The Islands is run by the Historical Society, it has informed guides and a collection of early artifacts from the island and books on local lore available.

Pine Island has been inhabited for more than a thousand years starting with the Calusa , an advanced tribe of Florida natives. **The Randall Research Center**, part of the University of Florida, is the place to walk, learn and enjoy the outdoors as the Calusa did. I highly recommend a visit. Take a guided tour on Wednesdays.