



TED MASE/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

FLORIDA

AFTER THE DISASTER

In the last 18 months, natural disasters have devastated popular travel destinations around the world. Today, the Globe begins a series of occasional stories examining how these areas are coping with their new realities.

Captiva comes back

Dealt a roundhouse blow by Hurricane Charley, Sanibel and its sister isle battle to regain business

By Necee Regis
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

CAPTIVA ISLAND, Fla. — On Aug. 13, 2004, a Friday, Chris van der Baars sat in Fort Myers watching coverage of Hurricane Charley on television. He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

The storm, originally expected to hit the coast farther north in the Tampa-St. Petersburg area, was passing near the islands of Sanibel and Captiva. To be precise, it was crossing directly over the 330-acre South Seas Resort on the northern tip of Captiva, where van der Baars is the general manager. As he watched, Charley did a little loop backward over the island be-

fore heading north again.

Two days earlier, van der Baars had evacuated 1,500 guests and staff from the resort.

"It's a simple decision. You think of the worst consequence and then try to avoid it," he said.

The worst, indeed. In only three hours, Charley had strengthened from a Category 2 storm, with 110-mile-per-hour winds, into a 150-mile-per-hour Category 4 monster, becoming the strongest hurricane to strike Florida since Hurricane Andrew in 1992. The resort, which in high winter season could accommodate 3,500 guests, was nearly destroyed.

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PHOTOS BY WILLIAM S. SPEER/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



Bruce Bradley of York, Pa., had things in focus on Sanibel Island last week. On Captiva Island, Hurricane Charley cut a swath along Gulf Drive, and the damage to South Seas Resort, roofs and all, was huge.



ESSDRAS M SUAREZ/GLOBE STAFF

Dale Chihuly's "Glade Lake Walla Wallas" float at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Coral Gables, Fla.

All that stuns is not sunlight: Tut and the garden of glass

By Tom Haines
GLOBE STAFF

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Consider first a quotation by archeologist Howard Carter that accompanies the exhibited riches of Egypt's boy king at the Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale: "All that glitters is gold."

Now consider a second quotation, from poet Walter Savage Landor inscribed on a bench on the grounds of the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Coral Gables, temporary home to the creative colors of glass artist Dale Chihuly: "Nature I loved and, next to Nature, Art."

While the ongoing King Tut exhibit worships wealth, chronicling an ancient civiliza-

tion through praise of its ruler, Chihuly's art takes a viewer far from politics and power and into the synthesized intimacy of palm fronds and smooth, arcing glass.

For all their differences, though, the two exhibits share this: Each compellingly explores foreign worlds while drawing visitors into decidedly different sides of modern South Florida.

The Tut exhibit, set within windowless walls among the boulevards and boutiques of booming Fort Lauderdale, packs up April 23. Chihuly's glass, settled in ponds and tropical tracts south of Miami, leaves May 31, a day before the official start of hurricane season.

ART, Page M6

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PHOTO GALLERY

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Restored but still scarred

► **CAPTIVA**
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"The street was 15 to 20 feet deep with trees and debris. There wasn't a single building untouched. We had to put in new walls, floors, plumbing, electric, you name it. Only the concrete structures remained," said van der Baars, who slept in his office without power for eight months in the wake of the storm.

Foliage was also heavily damaged. It cost more than \$1 million to prune and pull out twisted mangrove roots by hand. Van der Baars estimates that repairs at the resort, which has yet to reopen, have topped \$140 million.

"If there's a silver lining to all of this, it's that we had planned to begin a renovation in September 2004. The hurricane speeded this up, since we couldn't do it in parts. We have 400,000 guests a year come through here. South Seas Resort is a huge engine for the larger community," he said.

Van der Baars is not just bragging about the role his resort plays on Captiva and Sanibel, neighboring subtropical barrier islands just off the west coast of Florida. Over a recent three-day visit, local residents and business owners consistently mentioned South Seas as they described the physical and economic devastation Hurricane

Charley left behind. They also had their own tales of survival.

On one sunny day, the tables and benches in front of the Mucky Duck restaurant and bar were filled with visitors lunching on fish and chips, oyster po'boys, and English pub food. The Gulf of Mexico sparkled beyond the beach where people were gathering the plentiful shells that have made these islands famous. On the horizon, barges were dredging sand to replenish the shoreline. It was hard to imagine the power of the storm in such an idyllic scene.

"It was like a bomb went off out here," said Victor Mayeron, owner of the Mucky Duck. "The patio was covered by 18 inches of sand. Our outdoor bar was up in a tree. The music stand totally disappeared."

The storm pulled off part of the roof, allowing water inside, which caused the ceiling tiles to collapse. All the tables and chairs were ruined and the wood floor warped. Still, Mayeron counts himself lucky, as the restaurant reopened nine weeks later.

"There was absolutely no business out here. I felt the sooner we got open the better. Everything we lost is just stuff," he said. "We've been so fortunate. You can't replace human life — that's the tragedy — the rest can be fixed."

One of the noticeable differences is the absence of the canopy of mainly Australian pines that lined Periwinkle Way and Captiva Drive, the main thoroughfares. Some of the islands' lush feel and a certain sense of privacy are gone.

Plans to restore the canopy differ between the islands, in part because, in 1974, the city of Sanibel incorporated, breaking off from



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It is nesting time for ospreys and thousands of birds at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island.



GLOBE STAFF

Lee County to form its own government. According to Steve Greenstein, the executive director of the Sanibel and Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce, the roadway replanting on Captiva is the responsibility of the individual residential owners, who can plant according to their own taste and design of their properties.

On Sanibel, three civic organizations, including the Chamber of Commerce, have formed the Periwinkle Partnership. This group has implemented a master plan to restore the canopy on Sanibel using all native plants, and to add amenities like drinking fountains, rest areas, and bike racks.

"We anticipate the first plantings to take place this summer. There will be no irrigation system, so we're waiting for the rainy season," said Greenstein.

At the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel, most vegetation is growing again, according to lead Park Ranger Kevin Godsea.

"What visitors will notice is that the back half-mile of the trail was devastated and is not coming back. That part was an ancient red mangrove forest, which can't re-

store itself naturally like sea grapes, Gumbo Limbo trees, or even black and white mangroves. On Shell Mound Trail, we lost what was the largest red mangrove tree in the nation," said Godsea.

Refuge biologists are still assessing the disruption to the lives of wading birds, like egrets, herons, and cormorants, that nest in communities called rookeries. The loss of canopy on some of the hundreds of tiny islands that dot the refuge exposed the wildlife to heat and predators.

"We were lucky that the storm hit in August when it wouldn't disrupt the fall migration patterns, though the sea turtles that usually hatch then were hurt," Godsea said.

The migrating patterns of humans are easier to track. At the Bubble Room, the decorative and colorful 1930s and '40s memorabilia in the dining rooms complements the ottoman-sized cakes in a glass display case. Jim George, the general manager, spouts statistics by rote.

"We were closed for 98 days after the storm. The first year we did 65 percent of the previous year's business. This year we're running at 82 percent, which isn't bad. According to our credit card records, Massachusetts makes up the major percentage of our guest base. We're not happy that sales are down, but we'll make it."

With more than \$200,000 in damage, and a shortage of manpower and materials in the state, George and his staff quickly learned how to hammer, caulk, and paint. When he did reopen, many of his bartenders, cooks, and waitpersons had taken full-time jobs in the construction industry, leaving him understaffed.

"It would be nice if all the restaurant people who work up in

If you go . . .

Where to stay
Tween Waters Inn
15951 Captiva Drive
Captiva Island
239-472-5161; 800-223-5865
www.tween-waters.com
Rooms, suites, efficiencies, and cottages are available on a narrow strip between the Gulf and Pine Island Sound. Amenities include tennis courts, pool, spa, fitness center, restaurants, and marina. Winter rates: \$260-\$620.

South Seas Resort
5400 Plantation Road
Captiva Island
239-472-5111; 800-965-7772
www.south-seas-resort.com
After being closed for 19 months, a "soft opening" is slated March 17. Call for rates and information about available amenities.

Where to eat
The Mucky Duck
11546 Andy Rosse Lane
Captiva Island
239-472-3434
www.muckyduck.com
English pub food, sandwiches, salads, and fresh seafood, overlooking the Gulf. Lunch \$7-\$17, dinner \$17-\$33.

The Bubble Room
15001 Captiva Drive
Captiva Island
239-472-5558
www.bubblebarrestaurant.com
Hearty portions of seafood and meat dishes bearing cutesy names, and enormous home-baked desserts. Chockablock full with 1930s and '40s memorabilia. Lunch \$6-\$9, dinner \$21-\$32.

Redfish Bluffish
14970 Captiva Drive
Captiva Island
239-472-1956
www.redfishbluffishcaptiva.com
Seriously great tapas-style dining in a casual, funky setting. Chef trained at The French Laundry; wall decor provided by Hurricane Charley. Lunch \$9-\$13, dinner \$6-\$12 per tapas plate.

What to do
J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge
1 Wildlife Drive, Sanibel Island
239-472-1100
www.fws.gov/dingdarling
An 8,000-acre complex of mangrove forest, cordgrass marshes, West Indian hardwood hammocks, and nesting and roosting islands. Named after the political cartoonist J.N. "Ding" Darling, who helped save this land from development. Education/visitors center free. Motorized vehicles \$5, hikers, bikers \$1.

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