



AllWays Traveller

Naples, Florida

www.allwaystraveller.com

The way to start a stay in the Sunshine State

Naples, an upmarket destination located between Miami and Fort Myers, in Southwest Florida, has long been a lure for those seeking a pleasingly sub-tropical climate, pristine beaches and glorious sunsets.

The name itself came when a late 19th Century magazine article sang the praises of the area and compared it favourably with the Bay of Naples, Italy.

The Naples of today is a compact thriving community, whose residents take real pride in their community, keeping it clean and very safe – for themselves and those visitors lucky enough to spend time here.

Naples beach, which runs along 10 miles of the Gulf of Mexico, is regularly listed in the world's top beaches.

In the historic Naples downtown, the 5th Avenue South and 3rd Street South districts provide the main lure with their range of coffee shops, bars, fine restaurants and upscale retail outlets.

Ashley Gibbins

Managing editor
AllWays traveller



www.ParadiseCoast.com

The Paradise Coast

The area linking Naples with nearby Marco Island and the Everglades is promoted as the *Paradise Coast*.



An independent view of Naples

A place I never get tired of visiting

By Ashley Gibbins



I really like Naples and try to head there for a few days whenever I am lucky enough to get to the Sunshine State.

Landing at Miami International, the two and a bit hours drive to Naples is on the OK side of onerous after a long transatlantic flight.

It means I get to arrive in Naples early evening with just enough time to check into the hotel, dash out for a relaxing cocktail and a bite to eat before my body demands a rest.

Dining alfresco in shirt sleeves on a warm Florida night, a little light headed because of the time difference (not the margarita's) and the memories of an arduous flight and a chilly London soon drift away.



A place to stay

Finding the right place to stay in Naples is a key factor in making the most of a stay.

There are a string of fine beach front hotels a little way out for those needing little else, and some delightful budget hotels in quiet residential areas.

But I prefer to be located in the historic downtown area.

It means I am within strolling distance of the brightly coloured, art deco style, buildings strung along avenues of towering palms and lush landscaping.

This is also where one finds the colourful bars, fine dining restaurants, eclectic coffee shops and art, craft and designer stores.

But it is also within walking distance of the beach, and a doddle on a bike.

While in Naples

Naples Botanical Gardens



These botanical gardens are a delight with 170 acres of gardens created by some of the worlds finest landscape gardeners.

In addition to the cultivated Brazilian, Asian and Caribbean gardens, there is a water garden, childrens area, butterfly house and 90 acres of restored natural Floridian habitat.

www.naplesgarden.org

Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens



Naples Zoo is in an historic 53-acre old tropical botanical garden and, while not huge, provides a delightful half day.

The primate expedition cruise is a 30-minute boat trip around the islands that are the cage free homes for the zoo's primates.

www.napleszoo.org

A golfers dream

Florida is one of the world's top golfing destinations and the Naples area has more than 80 championship courses.

The Bellasera Hotel

This time I chose the *Bellasera* and could not have been more pleased for it is, undoubtedly, one of the best hotels in town.



Standing within a casual stroll from the historic 9th Street, one is captivated by the hotel's grand reception with its sweeping staircase and architectural style, which recreates a Tuscan villa.

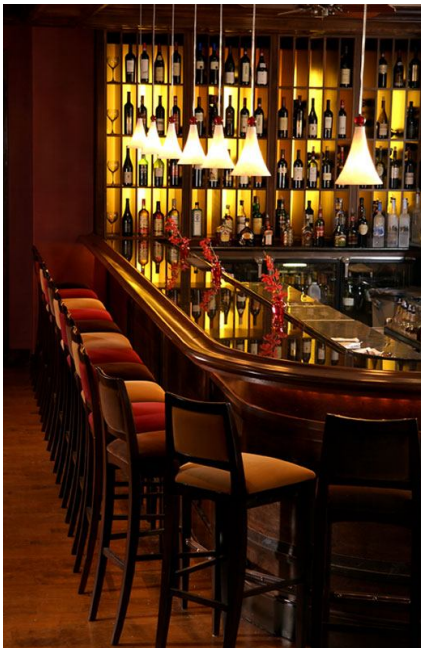


This leads onto the courtyard patio with its dining area and the pool beyond.

Although not a great lover of lying in the sun, the Bellasera's outdoor pool with its fountain and oh so tall palms proved irresistible.

This is where you would find me during the late afternoon on each day of my stay.

A smart bar, indoor restaurant and gym/spa complete the amenities.



As for the accommodation, the Bellasera has 100 self-contained studio, one, two and three-bedroom suites.



These have all the amenities one could wish for including cooker, fridge/freezer and washer/dryer; two flat screen TV's and internet access.

Finally the staff in the hotel are friendly and helpful to a one.

www.bellaseranaples.com

The Phil



That Philharmonic Center for the Arts is a truly premier arts and performance centre with 15 galleries dedicated to displaying world-class paintings, sculpture, drawings and other art forms.

As a performance venue the Phil also attracts the world's finest musicians and entertainers, of all genres.

www.thephil.org

Everglades City

Everglades City, a small town on the edge of Florida's Everglades, is known as the Stone Crab Capital of the World.

Over 375,000 pounds of stone crab claws are farmed between October and May each year.

Gulf grouper, snapper and other fish are also brought in regularly to the city's docks and many local restaurants serve the catch.

The town is also the western gateway to Everglades National Park and the staging post for the Everglades airboat tours and other guided tours of the Ten Thousand Islands.

www.florida-everglades.com

Dropping smoothly into a daily routine

The other pleasure about returning to a place is that one can easily drop into a daily routine which, at the start of a longer break, provides the opportunity to recharge for the more active days to come.



In Naples, this invariably means rising early and heading for one of the delightful coffee shops along 5th and 3rd.



One day it might be the 5th Avenue Coffee Shop, the next the Brick Café and Bar where, with an iced latte and a copy of the Naples Daily News and the warm morning sun overhead I contemplate the day.

Watching the world go by tends to be a spectator sport of mine but, in Naples the world, or at least the part of it that resides here, tends to turn up for coffee.

Retired couples enjoying what is obviously their daily get together; professionals grabbing twenty minutes in the sun before heading to the office, the mothers and toddlers comparing child care techniques and (during the winter months) the 'snowbirds' who have fled the northern states.

And they are all happy to include me in the conversations and to offer informal, impromptu and invaluable tourist information.

Getting around Naples

I am determined to leave my car at the hotel for as much of my stay as possible and this proves no problem.

And so when eventually leaving my chosen coffee shop, two feet will get me into and around the downtown area, while for the beach or anywhere a little further out I use a bike.

The wide sidewalks, quiet roads and great Florida weather make cycling a pleasure.

The Seminole Tribe of Florida



The Seminole Tribe of Florida live on the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation and run swamp buggy eco-tours, airboat rides and a number of animal shows.

A rustic camping village provides native-style teepees for overnight stays.

Every spring the tribe stages the Big Cypress Shootout, a three-day battle re-enactment and festival, which honours the Seminole's struggle and sacrifice to remain in their homeland during the 1830's, when the United States was attempting to enforce its policy of Indian removal.

www.semtribe.com

Naples Trolley Tours



For those preferring a more easy option the Naples trolley tours provide hop-on-hop-off, guide tours of the area that cover all points of interest.

The service runs seven days a week from 9.30am to 5.30pm.

www.naplestrolleytours.com

Naples beach



Naples beach, which is no more than 15 minutes from downtown on two wheels, is a stunning 10 mile stretch of golden sand that deliberately shuns the commercial ventures found further up the coast.

For a focal point, pick out the 1,000 ft long Naples fishing pier, which has been a landmark in the area since 1888.



This is a great place to watch pelicans skimming the surface of the clear, blue waters and sand dippers scamper along its shoreline.

The pier also provides a grandstand view for a spectacular Florida sunset.

And this is, pretty much, how I spend my time, very happily, while in Naples.

And while I may not do a great deal during my stay I always leave with the determination to do very little here again as soon as possible.

Lunch on Naples Marina or in Tin City

For a late lunch on my first day I cycle on to Naples Marina, less than a mile from its pier. The Dock restaurant and bar here is ever popular with residents and visitors alike.

www.dockcraytoncove.com



Tin City, at Naples Waterfront, which is a short distance from the top of the 5th Avenue, was once the hub of the areas clam-shell and oyster processing industry and now houses gift and boutique stores and two quayside bar restaurants.

The pleasure boat trips out into Naples Bay start from here.

Again a good place to lunch.

www.tin-city.com

Evenings in Downtown Naples



Downtown Naples after dark, with its excellent choice of bars and restaurants, is a bustling place in a sophisticated way.

I urge you to start the early evening with happy hour in the piano lounge of Trulucks restaurant. The live pianist is sure to be good, the half price appetisers delicious and their margarita's 'to die for'.

The Truluck's restaurant itself comes highly recommended.

If you want to explore the downtown area further, there are many fine dining restaurants and bars along 5th and 3rd with many entertaining guests with great live music.

AllWays more Naples

When to go to Naples

Being Florida, the 'Sunshine State' you can be sure of warm and mostly blue skies.

It can, however, get oppressively hot (outside) during the summer months with short, but very sharp, showers during the afternoon.

This period is also mosquito season for those looking to visit the Everglades.

Florida's hurricane season runs from 1 June to 30 November.

Spring, fall and winter are glorious seasons.

Summer and fall (its off seasons) will see Naples quieter with restaurants and bars offering happy hours and dinner specials to lure customers.

Many hotels in Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades discount their rates between May and December.

How to get there

By air

International visitors will probably fly into either the Miami or Orlando airports and then drive.

As for regional airports, Southwest Florida International Airport is about 30 minutes drive from Naples.



I flew with Virgin Atlantic from London Heathrow.

In addition to Miami and Orlando, Virgin Atlantic flies to 28 other major destinations worldwide in the USA, Australia, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia and Africa.

www.virgin-atlantic.com

By road

Interstates 4 and 75 will get you to Naples from Orlando in about five hours and Interstates 95 and 75 from Miami in about two and a half hours.

Where to stay



There is a wide range of accommodation in the Naples area, including the Inn on Fifth in downtown, and at a string of five-star oceanfront resorts.

I stayed at the Belleseera Hotel, which is part of the SunStream portfolio.

SunStream offers a collection of condominium-style hotels and resorts in Naples, Fort Myers Beach and now Cape Coral.

www.sunstream.com

Getting around

Car rental will be needed to get to Naples and its surrounding areas.

All major car rental companies operate in Florida.



I try to travel with Dollar, which has a complete line of vehicles at competitive rates and always provides a cracking service.

www.dollar.com

Where to wear

This is Florida where shorts and t-shirts are the daytime norm year round and smart casual for the evening is fine everywhere.

Teva Churn



As for footwear I was invited to try the Teva Churn multi-sport shoe that specialises in getting wet.

I must say they were lightweight, comfortable and possibly the only pair of shoes I needed.

Great for the flight (and slipping off and on through security), well suited for walking along the beach and in the water and casually smart enough for the evenings.

www.teva.com

Going to the movies

There is always something a little special about going to the movies in the States, and the 11-screen Silverspot is as good a cinema as you will find with state of the art digital sound, leather seats and reserved seating.

The Silverspot is in the Mercato, a new 53-acre upmarket development of retail and restaurant outlets.

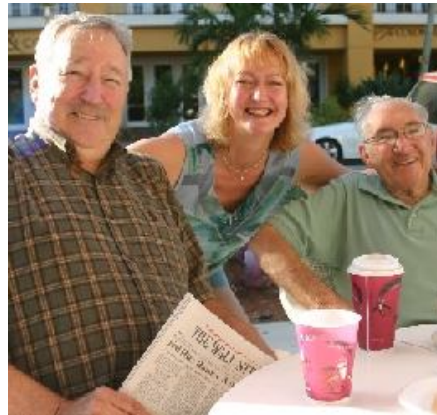
www.silverspot.net

More information



www.ParadiseCoast.com

A snapshot of Naples



The International Travel Writers Alliance



AllWays

www.allwaystraveller.com

AllWays traveller provides independent travellers with an equally independent view of the world from the travel journalists in the International Travel Writers Alliance.

The International Travel Writers Alliance

www.itwalliance.com

The International Travel Writers Alliance is the worlds largest association of professional travel writers, editors, broadcasters and photographers.

Ashley Gibbins



Ashley is Chief Executive of the International Travel Writers Alliance.