



Enduring charm OF NAPLES

It's easy to feel at home
in Florida's warmth and beauty



STORY AND PHOTOS BY BLAIR QUINN

It's a long drive from Waterloo Region to our winter stay in Naples in southwest Florida so, like a lot of snowbirds, we tend to stay longer as we get older.

We started off years ago as winter vacationers, but over time we feel more like winter residents. After all, who goes on vacation and gets a wheel alignment? In fact, while we were in Naples last winter we took a few mini-vacations just to get away.

Naples, which is on the Gulf of Mexico, boasts that it has more millionaires per

capita than anywhere in the United States, and judging by the expensive homes, cars, yachts and golf courses, there certainly appears to be plenty of wealth. But with a little planning, you can live well there without having to go over the top financially.

The fact is, Naples has lots to do, including doing nothing.

Our winter house came with a heated pool and we used it most days, especially when our family visited. At times we were a little loud (thank goodness for tolerant neighbours), and I lost a few afternoon naps, but

Although Naples, Fla., caters to the wealthy, it also has much to offer regular travellers and families, including the beaches of Naples Pier (previous pages) and Rookery Bay nature reserve.

you have to love having the grandkids on hand.

And Naples is a great place for grandparents and their grandchildren as folks often joke that the city rolls up its sidewalks by 9 p.m. because the winter populace has so many retirees.

It took us a number of years to learn to do things out of rhythm with everyone else. For example, we shop for groceries in the late afternoon or early evening to avoid the crowds.

We like to catch up on our reading while we are there, using the library – \$10 a month covers library privileges for us both.

The first golf course we played is a Canadian-owned track called Old Corkscrew and it is rated consistently as the top course in the region. Bring your A game as it's a Jack Nicklaus-designed course.

As for dining, there are so many locally owned restaurants, you won't run out of choices, with excellent variety throughout the region.

The Naples Zoo is a nice family outing of about three to four hours, and it's an easy walk with parking close by. The giraffes are particularly graceful and oh, so big. You can feed a giraffe, ride a camel, or go on an unusual boat tour to see monkeys on small island habitats.

We also visited the Rookery Bay, a nature reserve, and the Botanical Gardens. Don't worry about being bored – aside from having beautiful plant displays, the Botanical Gardens also has Lego-built statues that the children will enjoy so there is something for everyone.

The Naples Pier, refurbished in the summer of 2015, is a must-see and very popular not only for the pier but the beach as well. No matter what the weather, the pier is often the hottest place in town so sunscreen and hats are a must.

The evening sunset attracts a lot of people, and in my opinion the view from the beach on the south side of the pier, rather than on the pier itself, is the best. Be sure to bring your camera. About 10 minutes or so after



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Nashville, Tenn., makes a wonderful stopover on a roadtrip to Naples, Fla. Nashville is, of course, famous for its country music, but it has some musical surprises as well.

at sunset the pier/ beach clears and you have those last few minutes of near solitude at dusk. It's beautiful.

There is an excellent afternoon tour on a commercial yacht called the Naples Princess that took us into the backyard waterways of opulent homes in an area called Port Royal. It is a spectacular cruise, and you may want to not only bring a camera, but your realtor and banker as well.

Last winter's vacation included a couple of getaways. One was a two-night mini-vacation to the Marriott at Marco Island. It's about 35 minutes away and offers everything from wonderful views of the Gulf to the game of golf, on the newly refurbished Hammock Bay course.

Our other getaway was a one-night stay in Key West, accessed by a three-hour boat ride. While in Key West, we visited the Ernest Hemingway House and just walked around in comfortable shoes (no socks), shorts, T-shirts, ball cap – like a tourist trying to look like a local. Truly Margarita-

ville for a day and a half.

A Florida holiday is not complete without Major League Baseball. We went to the Boston Red Sox open house at JetBlue Park at Fenway South in Fort Myers in late February. It's free, including the parking. You get to see the players and roam about, including inside the dugout and out on the field. It's a nice change from simply going to a baseball game, because you feel part of the process at their training camp.

As we got ready for our trip home, we decided to spend four days in Nashville – with a stop in Chattanooga, Tenn., on the way there. Chattanooga's attractions include a half-mile footbridge across the Tennessee River, and the nearby Hunter Art Museum, which was eclectic and interesting.

As for Nashville – what a treat and with lots to do.

I have always thought of Nashville as being about country music, but it's very

mixed. While we were there, first-rate entertainment not only included the Grand Ole Opry variety show, which is broadcast all over the world, but also jazz trumpeter Chris Botti, performing with the Nashville Symphony, and Rūfūs du Sol, a pop-dance group from Australia, over at the Exit/In dance venue.

We spent an evening at the Blue Bird Café where songwriters perform their proven hits or launch new songs to a small and willing audience. The music museums include the Country Music Hall of Fame (which is the best), where tributes include Bob Dylan, the first non-country artist to record in Nashville. A bus tour took us to RCA Studio B where a lot of famous songs were recorded by the likes of Elvis Presley. The Musicians Hall of Fame and Museum is worthwhile along with the Johnny Cash and George Jones museums, as well as a visit to the Ryman Auditorium, former home for the Grand Ole Opry, which still operates as a music venue to this day.

Nashville restaurants are excellent, from the farm fresh home-grown menus to eclectic cuisine, including a neighbourhood called 12 South, which is pretty well door-to-door restaurants with a mixed bag of food choices.

One of the biggest surprises was the tour of the Jack Daniel Distillery in Lynchburg, Tenn., about an hour away. This is a well-organized tour and I would recommend going even if you don't like whiskey. We learned enough about whiskey to have a greater appreciation for the taste as well as the distilling process. It's interesting that the distillery, which turned 150 last year, is located in a county that has been "dry" since Prohibition. 

More information:

Naples – www.naplesgov.com
 Chattanooga – www.chattanooga.gov
 Nashville – www.visitmusiccity.com



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