

Fort Myers, Florida Overview



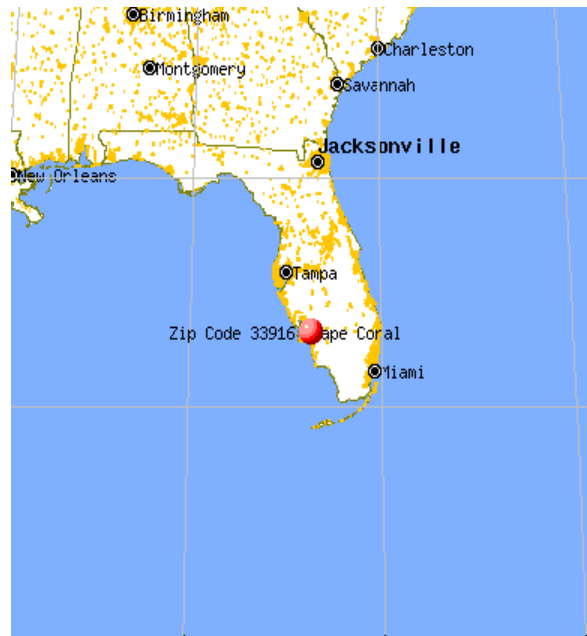
Introduction

In Fort Myers, the possibilities are endless. Nestled along the Caloosahatchee River, Fort Myers (also known as the “City of Palms”) is the entryway to Southwest Florida. Countless recreation opportunities exist to entice residents and visitors, including gorgeous spans of beach and bountiful parks. There is also no shortage of entertainment and cultural options. Dozens of museums, sporting events, dinner theaters and historical landmarks create a vibrant community. In fact, not only is Fort Myers a great place to visit, it is also an ideal community to reside. With its top-notch schools, excellent healthcare and booming businesses sector, nearly all its 61,412 residents are proud to call it home.

Location

Fort Myers is situated on the southwest coast of Florida in Lee County. It serves as the county seat. Cities within 10 miles include Cape Coral, East Dunbar, North Fort Myers, Page Park, Pine Manor and Tice. Interstate 75 and U.S. Highway 41 link to Fort Lauderdale and Miami, making travel simple and convenient.

Public transportation also makes it a snap to visit neighboring areas. Fort Myers is equipped with an Amtrak station, Greyhound buses, and the Lee Tran. The Lee Tran is an operation of 17 constant bus routes available to both tourists and residents, with a “Park and Ride” option to take riders to and from benches in the area. Disabled citizens can also take advantage of Lee Tran with Passport, the ADA Para transit service. Offering non-stop international flights as well as 35 domestic non-stop flights, the Southwest Florida International Airport serves over 7.5 million passengers yearly.



History

Fort Myers' lineage dates back to the 1500s when Ponce de Leon was believed to have visited the islands of Lee County. In 1821 Florida became a U.S. Territory. Named in honor of Colonel Abraham C. Myers, the city of Fort Myers was constructed along the Caloosahatchee River and was used as place of operations during the Seminole Indian Wars. It was a very unpopulated area with no more than ten families living there in 1876. Agriculture seemed to be the most popular industry.

Thomas Edison came through Fort Myers in 1885. He was enamored by what he saw and decided to build his home and laboratory on the banks of the river. He was instrumental in the growth and development of Fort Myers and became the most famous resident. He was even responsible for the city becoming known as the “City of Palms” by having royal palms planted to line what is now McGregor Boulevard.

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Tourism

Museums, historical landmarks, and yearly events give visitors the opportunity to experience the culture and heritage of Fort Myers.

The Southwest Florida Museum of History beginnings stem from the time when the railroad sold its track and warehouse on Peck and Monroe Streets to the city in 1971. In 1975 the old passenger depot, which had gone to ruin, began a transformation. With help from the city and donations, construction came to close in April of 1982. The museum showcases the history of Fort Myers. There is also a Downtown Walking Tour through historic downtown Ft. Myers, giving tourists a history lesson through the historic buildings.

A popular attraction for families is the Imaginarium. The Imaginarium features hands-on and interactive exhibits for all ages. Other fun aspects of the center include a hurricane simulator and an early-childhood area.

The Edison and Ford Winter Estates are also a tourist must-see. With over 250,000 visitors per year they are the 9th most-visited national historic site in the nation. The grounds measure approximately 20 acres, the tropical gardens cover 14 acres, and the museum totals 15,000 square-feet. The museum showcases memorabilia from Edison and Ford with changing special exhibits. Guided tours run daily through the homes, museum, laboratory and gardens.

More than 25 hotels and inns provide a range of accommodations. Visitors to the area can select from luxury resorts, budget-friendly inns, and hotels geared specifically for the business traveler.



Residential Living

Moving to the “City of Palms” is an easy decision. With pristine beaches, excellent educational opportunities, beautiful recreational parks and so much culture to experience, it’s no wonder so many people are making the move to Fort Myers.

There is housing for every type of resident, including renters, seasonal guests, and prospective homeowners. Housing includes condominiums and apartments, golf course homes, country club homes, active adult retirement communities, manufactured homes and custom-built homes.

Quiet residential areas offer family-friendly neighborhoods while high-rise waterfront communities connect residents to the lively downtown area. Property values run the full gamut from the lower \$100,000 range for manufactured homes to more than one million for extravagant beach-front properties.
every month.



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Parks & Recreation

The numerous nature parks and recreation areas in and around Fort Myers team with irresistible beauty. One of Fort Myers' jewels is Lakes Regional Park. A family favorite, this 279-acre recreational park offers fresh water fishing, canoeing, swimming, kayaks, paddle boats and playgrounds. For those who would like to walk, run or bike ride, the park's 2-mile paved pathway is ideal. Picnic pavilions and a lodge with full kitchen are also on the premises. A unique feature of Lakes Regional Park is the miniature railroad and villages. The train takes passengers on a one and a half mile ride through a 109-foot tunnel, over bridges, around a lake, and

through miniature villages. The park also features a fragrance garden where visitors can smell, feel and eat the herbs and flowers. Caloosa Nature Center and Planetarium is an environmental education organization set on a 105 acres. A museum, nature trails, planetarium and aviary offers visitors the opportunity to learn about Southwest Florida's natural history, as well as have a chance to stargaze and take advantage of other various daily activities.

Lovers Key State Park's 712-acre span is comprised of Black Island, Lovers Key and Inner and Long Key. The park plays host to an array of wildlife as well as activities such as swimming, boating, fishing and picnicking. Caloosahatchee Regional Park offers picnic areas and a covered recreation area, as well as two trails with one trail leading to an observation deck overlooking amazing views of the river.

The world-famous J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, located on Sanibel Island, is not a far trek from Fort Myers. Guests to the refuge can drive, bike, or walk the five-mile trail, which is home to over 200 endangered species of birds. Lastly, the Six Mile Cypress Slough protects two thousand acres of wetlands with a mile-long trail for excursionists to roam. Guided tours are also available.



Shopping & Dining

While strolling down Fort Myers' palm tree-lined streets why not take in a bit of shopping? From small, quaint gift shops and boutiques to sizable retail and outlet malls, there are ample choices for every customer.

Up-scale shopping can be found at the sophisticated Bell Tower Shops, with its royal palm trees and shaded walkways and its central location near the Southwest Florida Regional Airport. The Miromar Outlets in Estero possesses more than 100 designer and brand name outlet stores in a posh setting. The Tanger Factory Stores in Sanibel includes 60 manufacturers' outlets and also offers designer and brand-name merchandise. Edison Mall is also in the area for shoppers who would rather stay indoors. Anchor stores include Macy's, Dillard's, Sears and JC Penney.

In Royal Palm Square visitors can take advantage of the variety of unusual shops as well as stop in for a bite to eat and a show at the Royal Palm Dinner Theater.

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Arts & Entertainment

Fort Myers offers a wealth of entertainment opportunities with year-round musical and theatrical performances, parades, fairs and sports competitions.

Beginning as a vaudeville house in 1908, the historic Arcade Theater was patronized by famous Fort Myers residents Thomas Edison and

Henry Ford. For over 90 years it has been a popular place for residents and tourists of the city. Today it is the home of the Florida Repertory Theater (now in its seventh season), one of few professional regional theaters in Southwest Florida.

The Broadway Palm Dinner Theater entertains over 150,000 guests each year with its Off-Broadway productions and two banquet facilities. Another great venue of Broadway performances is the Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall at Edison College. The center is also home to the Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra.

Healthcare

Lee Memorial Health System

The system offers the Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida, Lee Memorial Hospital, Health Park Medical Center and Lee Convenient Care. Lee Memorial provides 24-hour emergency and trauma care as well as a rehabilitation hospital. They are also rated very highly in stroke care, orthopedics and intensive care. Health Park Medical Center offers 24-hour emergency care, surgery and rehabilitation, obstetrics and inpatient and outpatient care. They rank very highly in cardiology and intensive care. Lee Convenient Care has many walk-in clinic locations.

Southwest Regional Medical Center

This acute and general care hospital is equipped with 400 beds and is ranked on the top 100 hospitals in the country. Other outstanding aspects of this facility include the Patty Berg Cancer Center, the Kidney Transplant Center and the Southwest Regional Rehabilitation Center.



Gulf Coast Hospital

This facility, affiliated with Southwest Regional Medical Center, offers a wide range of services including diagnostic services, emergency, family health, rehabilitation and surgical. Their emergency care facility is available 24 hours a day and boasts the shortest wait times in Lee County.

The Family Health Centers of Southwest Florida offers primary and preventative care for low-income families. There are also many facilities and services available for the older population including assisted living and nursing homes.

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Business & Industry

Fort Myers is one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the nation. A wealth of entrepreneurial opportunities, stable infrastructure, a booming labor force, and favorable climate enable area businesses to thrive and prosper. Fort Myers profits most from several major sources, the first and largest being tourism. Construction, retirement and investment dollars also contribute significantly to the city's economic intake. Manufacturing can also be considered a notable entity in the city's business.

The top employers in Lee County include Lee County School District, Lee Memorial Health System, Publix Super Markets, Wal-Mart Corporation, Lee County Administration, Southwest Florida Regional Medical Center, City of Cape Coral, WCI Communities and Bonita Bay Group.

Top manufactured products include newspapers, lumber, umbrellas, aviation components, frozen food snacks, building supplies, prefabricated storage buildings and gazebos, electrical coils and concrete. Lee County boasts 29 industrial parks and facilities including over 700 buildings totaling 7.5 million square feet.

Lee County's unemployment rate in January 2006 increased only slightly to 2.3 percent, but still places as the second lowest rate among Florida's 67 counties. Since January of 2005 the county has added 14,300 nonagricultural jobs with an increase of 6.6 percent overall. All industry divisions gained in employment in the past year, the most significant being construction with a 17.5 percent boost.



Education

With over 76,000 students enrolled, Lee County School District is the 60th largest district in the nation and continues to grow rapidly. The Lee County District operates 43 elementary schools,

19 middle schools, and 13 high schools. Among these are four alternative education schools and 10 charter schools. There are also Montessori and private school alternatives to choose from.

Fort Myers High School is ranked as one of the top 32 schools in the nation. The high school has also been named four times by Newsweek as one of the top 100 schools in the country. In its 95th year in operation, Fort Myers High School is one of the oldest schools in the state of Florida.

There are also opportunities for higher education in Fort Myers, including Florida Gulf Coast University and Southwest Florida College. In the surrounding areas post-secondary options include Edison Community College, Manatee Community College and International College.

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Government

Fort Myers is governed by a council-strong mayor. The council members are elected by registered voters in their ward and serve for a term of four years. Citizens can participate in city government by attending City Council meetings and public hearings and serving on an array of committees and boards. The Fort Myers Police Department totals over 200 employees including officers. With five stations, more than 80 patrol units, community policing and police auxiliary (volunteer officers) residents of this city can feel safe. The police department offers programs like The Citizen Police Academy, which gives residents the opportunity to experience police work firsthand. There are also programs for children, including D.A.R.E. and G.R.E.A.T.

Since its start in 1901, the Fort Myers Fire Department has made its level of service top priority and, because of its high standards, has become a Regional Training Center for the State of Florida Fire Marshal's Office. The Fire Department, a full-service department known as Fire/Rescue, boasts an excellent hazardous material response team. The Fire/Rescue employs 88 fire-fighting and emergency personnel including one Fire Marshal and three Fire Safety Inspectors. The Fire Department also provides informative programs for children.

Worship

More than 250 religious congregations encourage a diverse community of faith. Fort Myers is home to many churches, as well as chapels, temples, mosques and other religious facilities. There is also an array of fellowship centers to further cater to the community.