

TRAVEL

Naples, Fla., offers a beautiful, year-round getaway

BY BRIGITTE D. KNUDSON
SPECIAL WRITER

Naples is southwest Florida's answer to Miami's trendy South Beach and Palm Beach's inescapable luxury all rolled into one neat package.

Located on the calm and clear Gulf of Mexico about 35 miles south of Fort Myers' Southwest Regional Airport, Naples offers something for everyone - pleasant weather, pristine beaches, great shopping, diverse restaurants and plenty of interesting things to see and do.

While Naples is a haven for weary northerners in the winter, it is a wonderful place to visit year round. In fact, after April the population begins to decrease, making restaurants and other attractions less crowded and more affordable.

The average high temperature is 77 degrees, with lows in the winter months usually in the mid 60s. During summer, temperatures in the mid to upper 80s during the day, and the low 70s in the evening. While water temperatures in the

Gulf of Mexico hover in the mid to upper 60s during winter, they rise to the mid 80s during summer months.

Lodging is amply available at various prices and styles, depending on your budget and taste. The Ritz-Carlton Hotel of Naples, featured on TV's *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, is located on scenic Vanderbilt Beach. Rooms are available from \$360-\$525 per night from December through April, but the price drops to \$145-\$275 per night from June to September.

If renting a condo is more your style, average prices of \$600-\$2000 per week during the peak season drop considerably to \$300-\$1000 weekly during late spring and summer.

Naples is home to 41 miles of pristine, white beaches. Southwest Florida is famous for the amount of shells that wash up on its beaches, and shelling is a favorite pastime of beach-goers.

If shopping is your forte, Naples offers an abundance of world-class shopping. The Village at Venetian Bay is a beautiful

site to shop or take in a meal. Built on stilts right on the bay, these scenic, pastel shops are reminiscent of Venice, Italy.

The 5th Avenue Shops, located in Old Naples, offer many upscale boutiques and restaurants. During the evening, the area becomes a stomping ground for the well-heeled in search of quality live entertainment and gourmet food.

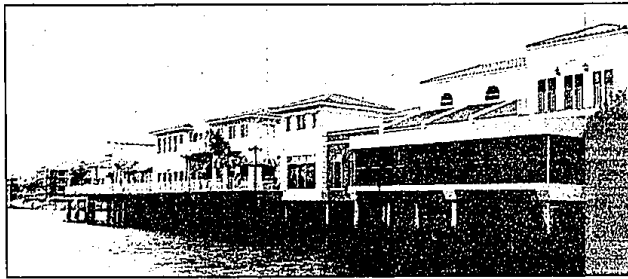
Finally, a trip to Naples is not complete until visiting the eclectic shops at Tin City. Tin City is located on US-41 right at the Naples Docks. Tin City features shops that carry everything from T-shirts to crystal. Weary shoppers can dine while overlooking the gorgeous bay at Merriman's, a wonderful seafood restaurant.

Naples is home to an abundance of good restaurants. A good bet for the breakfast and lunch crowd is Mancini & Moise, a Jewish-Italian restaurant (3745 Tamiami Trail N.). The friendly people here bake all of their own breads and bagels and home cook all of the food. They serve meats (pastrami, brisket, turkey and corned beef).

If a pub and grill is more your style, the recently opened McCabe's Irish Pub & Grill, located in The Inn on Fifth (699 5th Ave. S.), is a fun choice. Run by a second-generation Irish-American, the inside of the pub was built in Ireland by master craftsmen and then shipped in pieces to Naples. A crew was then brought from Ireland to assemble the pub.

After you've sunned, shopped and eaten, it will be time to take in a little activity. Naples offers activities for all interests and ages.

If golf is your game, there are over 40 courses available in Naples and Marco Island (just south of Naples). While tee



Prime shopping: The Village at Venetian Bay is one of Naples' most popular shopping centers.

times can be reserved with a telephone call at public courses, the various private courses operate a little differently.

Nature lovers find a proverbial jungle of activities while visiting Naples. The Everglades lie southeast of the city, and many tour operators offer a variety of excursions ranging from guided nature tours to swamp buggy rides.

The Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, located northeast of Naples and operated by the National Audubon Society, is an 11,000-acre sanctuary that features 600 year-old cypress trees and is home to a number of local animal species, including alligators, white-tail deer, and a number of bird species. A 2.5 mile nature trail winds through these various environments. Admission for adults is \$6.50, children 6-18 \$3, under 6 free. National Audubon Society members pay \$5.

But visitors need not leave the

city of Naples for wildlife adventures. The Conservancy (14th Ave. North off of Goodlette-Frank Rd.) features a wildlife rehabilitation center as well as kayak rentals, guided boat tours, and an outdoor aviary. Kids will really love the indoor Discovery Center, with its animals and hands-on displays. The Southwest Florida Museum of Natural History is housed here and features seven aquariums as well as daily sea-turtle presentations. Admission is just \$5 for adults, \$2 for children 3-12, and free for children under 3.

If you love the sea, a variety of choices await you at the Naples Docks. Charter boats offer half and full day deep-sea fishing, dolphin watching, and dinner cruises. Day trips to Key West also leave from this location and include breakfast and dinner at rates starting from \$70 per person.

On a May deep-sea fishing excursion, I caught many red

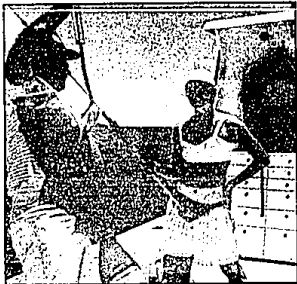
grouper and snapper. The Gulf of Mexico can also be enjoyed by landlubbers at the historic Naples Pier, located a few blocks west of the Old Naples area. The pier features ample seating for enjoying the ocean and beach scenery. A fishing license is not needed for fishing at the pier.

Finally, for the young and young at heart, the Teddy Bear Museum of Naples (2511 Pine Ridge Rd.) hosts a collection of over 3,000 teddy bears and includes displays of antique and limited-edition bears. Bear-making demonstrations are popular, but be sure to call first at 698-2711 for availability.

If you are planning a visit to Naples, Fla., be sure to visit their web site (www.naples-florida.com), which offers further information on places to stay, dining, golf, attractions, weather and local businesses.

Brigitte Knudson is Livonia free-lance writer.

Big catch: Livonia's Brigitte Knudson had no trouble landing the big ones in the Gulf waters off Naples.



GREAT ESCAPES

Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 591-7279.

TELL US YOUR STORY

We want to hear from you! Have you been somewhere interesting? Have you had a special adventure? Is there a quiet island you'd like to recommend or a highly promoted place you'd like to warn against? Do you have special tips for other travelers to make their journeys easier?

Have you met some interesting people in other countries that you'd like others to know about? We want to share your stories and your color pictures on our travel page. Call Hugh Gallagher at 734-953-2118, or fax him at 734-591-7279 or e-mail him at hggallagher@oe.com.

LIGHTHOUSE CRUISE

The Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association is hosting a Detroit to Toledo lighthouse excursion aboard the Diamond Jack on Sunday, Aug. 23. The full day of cruising will provide views of the Grosse Ile, Boblo,

Detroit River and Toledo Harbor lighthouses plus other mariners of interest. This light cruise is included, \$78 per person. Deadline is June 29. Write to: GLLKA, Henry Ford Estate, 4901 Evergreen, Dearborn, MI 48128. Phone 313-436-9160 or fax 313-436-9143. GLLKA is a non-profit organization dedicated to lighthouse preservation and education.

AIRPORT ALERT

WJR-AM (760) has created an hourly airline travel update which airs two minutes after the top of every hour during peak drive times. Operations director

Al Mayers said the reports were started to provide air travelers with important updates during Northwest Airlines contract negotiations. The reports include cancelled and delayed flights information. The reports air during drive times except during play-by-play sports broadcasts.

CYCLING CLASSIC

The Harbor Springs Cycling Classic is Saturday, May 30. The annual tour begins three miles north of Harbor Springs at the Birchwood Inn and travels M-119, one of the most scenic Lake Michigan shoreline roads. To accommodate a range of cycling

ability, rides of 20 miles, 40 miles and 100 kilometers are planned. For information and lodging packages, call the Birchwood Inn at 1-800-530-9955.

SAFE BOATING

The Michigan Boating Industries Association is offering, free to the public, the 1998 edition of the Michigan Boating Annual (\$7.95 value) and a safe boating kit as part of National Safe Boating Week, May 16-22. The Boating Annual is designed for boaters who travel and travelers who boat as it highlights different ports around the state. The publication offers a listing of

U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Power Squadron and local sheriff's departments and other boating services. The boating safety kit includes information designed to help boaters operate their vessel responsibly and in accordance with the U.S. and Michigan regulations. The theme of this year's National Safe Boating Week focuses on flotation devices. The slogan is: "Wear Your Life Jacket - Boat Smart From the Start." To receive your free copy call (734) 261-0123 or stop in or write to the MBIA at 31395 Five Mile, Livonia, MI 48154-6109.

How to become an exchange student

The May 3 Travel section featured a story by Caitlin Kihka of West Bloomfield on her year as an exchange student in Finland. Here is some information if you are interested in becoming an exchange student.

There are many opportunities to live in various countries as an exchange student for a summer, a semester or a school year. Planning a year or more ahead allows students to plan their school schedules to incorporate the experience better. Several established programs include:

■ Youth for Understanding, based in Washington, D.C., offers summer, semester and

year programs in 30 countries. Costs range from about \$3,000-\$3,500 for many summer programs to \$5,700-\$6,100 for academic year programs. Deadline for summer and fall departure applications is April 1, while winter departure applications are due Oct. 20. Early fall applications for the following year allow the best choice of countries, possible scholarships and early-bird discounts. YFU also sponsors foreign students coming to the United States and is actively seeking host families for the 1998-99 school year. Call 1-800-TEENAGER for information.

■ American Field, based in New York, offers similar programs. In addition, a summer language study/home stay program is offered in five countries. Contact AFS at 1-800-237-4636.

■ Rotary International sponsors year-long exchanges to 75 countries. Students apply to local Rotary clubs through written applications and interviews. Students pay their own round trip transportation and insurance costs while Rotary provides educational expenses and a monthly allowance. Call Rotary International at 1-847-868-3000 for a local contact.

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