



Golden days on the Gulf Coast at Naples

Naples, which is located on the Gulf of Mexico between Miami and Fort Myers, in Southwest Florida, has long lured those to its sub-tropical climate, pristine beaches and glorious sunsets.

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

The Naples of today is a prosperous, thriving community, whose residents take real pride in their town, keeping it remarkably clean and attractive and very safe.

Naples is also a major 'snowbird' destination for those looking to escape the winter conditions in the northern states.

This all helps sustain the plethora of fine dining restaurants, designer boutiques and art, craft and give shops that so enhance a short stay here.

www.paradisecoast.com

Ashley Gibbins
Commissioning Editor
AllWays traveller





Fifth Avenue, Naples

A lasting love affair with Naples

By Ashley Gibbins

Whenever it's known I am a travel writer, an inevitable statement is invariably followed by an inevitable question.

What a great job you have, always on holiday, ha? Followed by : So where is your favourite place in the whole world?

While I will happily acknowledge there are worse ways to scrape together a living, I tend to stall on the destination question.

I explain, sincerely, that it is not the place it's the people that makes travelling the rewarding experience it is.

The more one travels, the more one appreciates that people are all the same.

Welcoming to strangers, keen to share experiences and often helpful well beyond what one has any realistic right to expect.

Meeting someone, albeit briefly, in a bar, café or gas station; on a bus or at the beach results in those vignettes that make travelling so invigorating and rewarding.

A glutton for Florida

However, and if pushed, I will confess to being a glutton for Florida.

The glorious weather (outside of the oppressive summer months), the stunning beaches and the American culture all appeal greatly.

Look beyond the theme parks and there are so many other nuggets in the Sunshine State just waiting to be explored.

One of these is undoubtedly Naples, which offers all one could wish for in a sunshine destination, be it sand, sea and seabirds, sophisticated dining, or beer and a bite at a bar; culture and historical relevance.

The Paradise Coast

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



It is a fitting description and I am proud to be an unashamed cheerleader for this stretch of Florida's Gulf Coast.

Enjoying the finest things in life for a short while

Naples proudly lays claim to being America's most affluent community (Manhattan is its wealthiest city) and, as such, has long attracted those with the bucks to enjoy the finest things in life.

A string of sumptuous, multi-million dollar mansions, often second or third homes, straddle the Gulf Coast and banks of the intercoastal waterways.

And other, very desirable permanent residences fan out from these.

Naples has also long been a 'winter roost' for rich snowbirds fleeing the snow and arctic temperatures that sweep the northern states of the USA.

And while the owners of the most staggeringly opulent properties are seldom there, and the snowbirds are seasonal, they both pay the taxes that underpins the areas economic prosperity.

This gives the city authority the incentive and funding needed to keep Naples meticulously clean, while lavish landscaping makes it a delightfully attractive place.

And finally, there is no pressure to allow a commercial clutter of concessions to clutter the pristine Naples Beach.

This affluent community also underpins the designer retail, arts and culture and fine dining to be found here.

This is, of course, is a real bonus for travellers visiting Naples, provided you avoid the peak seasons, when the place can get very crowded and prices reach their zenith.

All along Fifth

Much of what the visitor will enjoy in Naples can be found in Downtown Naples, and along - or just off - Fifth Avenue South.



Third Street South

Fifth Avenue runs for just under a mile from its gateway at the intersection with the Tamiami Trail to Naples Beach.

The boulevard is lined with towering palms and lush landscaping that fronts art galleries, designer clothing, jewellery and classy gift stores, and ice cream parlours.

There is also a quite staggering choice of sophisticated fine dining restaurants, with each offering alfresco seating on the sidewalk - and happy hour offerings during the low seasons.

A serene pleasure

Strolling Fifth in early evening is a genuinely serene pleasure.

The setting suns golden glow creates an almost mystical feel before darkness falls and the lights that string the palms sparkle into life.

Happy hour cocktails

Then it's time for cocktails, with the happy hour in the *Trulucks* piano bar highly recommended, before dining alfresco.



Natural beauty at its very best

If Fifth Avenue, and Third Street, offer suave sophistication, Naples beach offers natural beauty at its very best.

Stretching along 10 miles of the Gulf of Mexico, it is regularly listed among the world's top beaches.

The warm, clear blue waters of the Gulf lap a wide expanse of white sand and, in the distance, the iconic Naples Pier offers a 'compass point' for a relaxing stroll in the company of the scampering, scattering sand dippers.

This wooden fishing pier, which has been a landmark since 1888, provides a grandstand for watching the pelicans dive and dolphins circle.

Come evening this is also the place to enjoy the magnificence of a Florida sunset.

Head in the other direction, along the beach and the wooden struts of a one time smaller jetty provide resting places for more pelicans, cormorants and egrets.

Third Street

From Naples Pier it is but a short walk to Third Street, which provides similar amenities to Fifth in equally alluring fashion.



Tin City : a counterpoint to Fifth Avenue

Tin City, which sits on the Gordon River and is but a short stroll from the Tamiami end of Fifth Avenue, offers a complete contrast to the affluent sophistication on its doorstep.

It comprises a cluster of tin roofed wooden buildings that, in the 1920s, formed the heart of the Naples' fishing industry that included clam shelling, oyster processing, boat construction and ship maintenance operations.

With the traditional sea faring activities falling away, Tin City fell into decline until the late 1970s, when seven of the old buildings were converted to become "The Old Marine Marketplace at Tin City".

Though there have been ups and downs since then, Tin City retains a colourful, authentic and ramshackle charm and offers a mix of 'one of a kind' shops, bars and restaurants

The resurgence of Tin City, particularly in recent years, is due in no small measure to the continuing commitment of the Old Naples Waterfront Association.

The Association looks to highlight the historical relevance of Tin City while also promotes the waterfront here as a resident and visitor attraction.

This passionate groups of traders and business folk have galvanised city authority support for Tin City and introduced a layer of annual events there that enhance its attraction for visitors.

The Stone Crab Festival



A highlight among these is the Naples Stone Crab Festival, which marks the opening of Stone Crab Season in October.

We visited Naples in the immediate aftermath of hurricane Irma and though the structures at Tin City suffered more than most from the brunt of the storm, the Association and members were working around the clock to get everything back into shape and open again as quickly as possible.

www.stonecrabfestival.com
www.tin-city.com



On the water with Pure Florida

One of the driving forces in the Old Naples Waterfront Association are Captain Lance Julian and his son Harry, who are both passionate about conservation and operate *Pure Florida* from the dockside here.

With its second base in Fort Myers, *Pure Florida* has 19 vessels providing a range of co-excursions that bring together maritime and local history with fine sightseeing.

Pure Florida offers sightseeing and sunset cruises, jet boat and fishing trips and boat and jet ski rental.

Our time on the water with the guys from *Pure Florida* was a fun, fascinating and hugely interesting treat.

www.purefl.com

The Parrott at Tin City

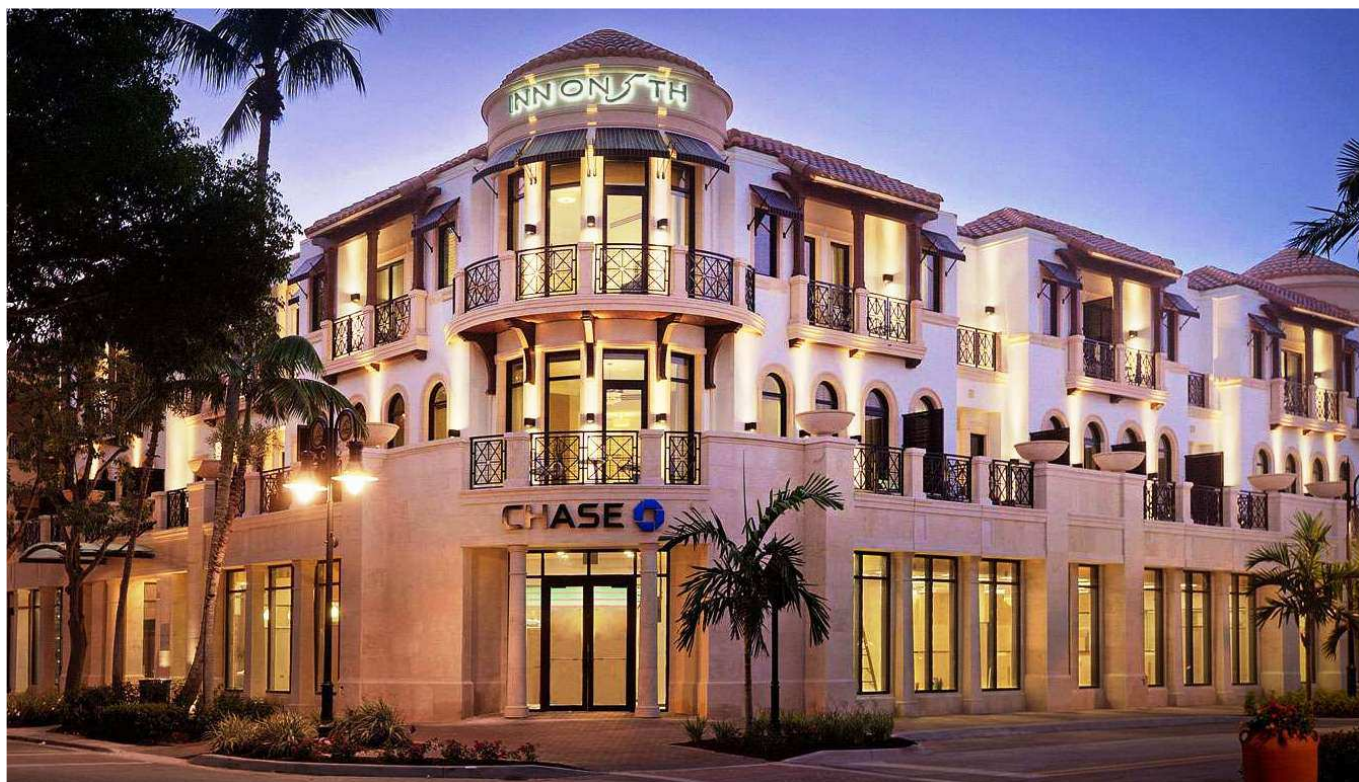
And finally, at Tin City there is the Parrot bar and grill, which is the epitome of everything one could wish for in a good time, laid back, no frills, casual dining bar.

Great local cold craft beer, an excellent fish sandwich and home fries that are just something else and all at pleasingly reasonable prices.

The Parrot opens before most other places in Naples and serves into the early hours.

With its eclectic mix and weatherworn appearance adding to the attraction, the Parrot is a real visitor's 'local'.

www.theparrotbarandgrill.com



One of the finest four star properties in the world

By Ann Mealor

Contemporary, sophisticated and elegant, the Inn on Fifth Club Level Suites are a perfect fit with Naples and glamorous Fifth Avenue.

I have stayed at the Inn on Fifth a number of times and love its traditional Florida charm and the warm welcome I always receive.

The stylish sister

The Suites, its stylish, new sister property, is situated directly opposite and offers just as warm a welcome as the Inn and a standard of service that is second to none.

The Forbes Travel Guide four star rating that the Inn & Suites has secured for the third consecutive year, is testament to the quality and high standards that all visitors can expect and experience.

The four star rating plaques that are proudly displayed in the Inn's reception proclaim it to be *One of the finest four star properties in the world.*

That is not an overstatement.

Right on Fifth Avenue

We stepped straight off Fifth Avenue into the Suites where we were checked in and looked after by our very efficient concierge.

She made sure our cases reached our room whilst we enjoyed a cool drink in the club lounge.

Complimentary treats such as homemade cookies, crisps and popcorn are available for guests throughout the day along with tea, coffee and soft drinks.

Variety jars of Hershey chocolate sweets are also available for guests to dip their hands into whenever a sugar rush demands.

Not only did we enjoy all these little extras, but we took full advantage of the delicious all-inclusive dining available. Each morning we helped ourselves to a selection of cereals, toasted beignets, cream cheese, muffins, yoghurts and fresh fruit.



Breakfast on our balcony

We took our breakfast back to our room and ate it on our balcony whilst watching the world on Fifth Avenue go by. Every evening we made sure we were back at 5pm for cocktails and a selection of delicious hors d'oeuvres.

These consisted of cold meats, giant juicy prawns with a cocktail sauce, crisp crostini topped with tomatoes and onion and a selection of creamy cheeses.

At 8pm, a delightful mini dessert platter replaced the savouries, although guests could still enjoy complimentary wine, beer, fizz – in fact a full bar until 10pm.

No guest could ever go hungry or thirsty at the Suites – we certainly didn't!

Our room, a junior suite, was chic and spacious with black and white décor and soft furnishings in cream, gold and burgundy.

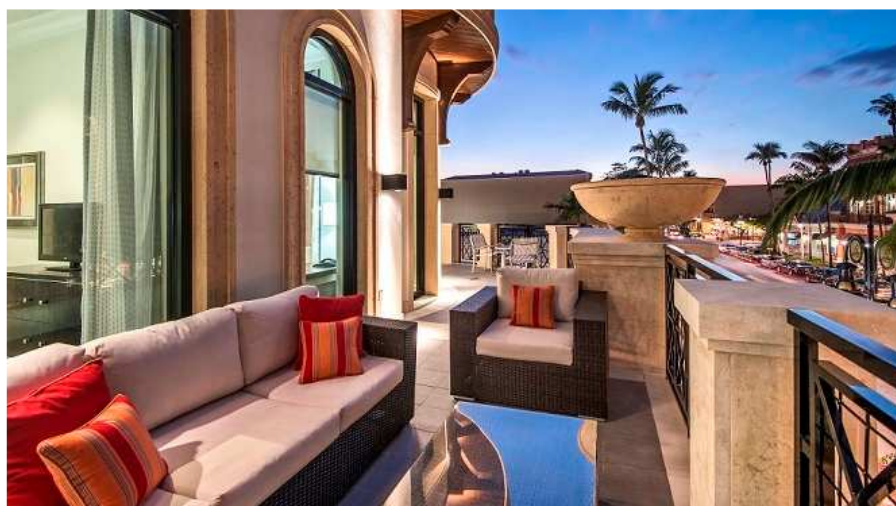
Colourful modern art hung from the walls.

Our bathroom was large and bright with an oversized shower and beautifully fragranced L'Occitane toiletries.

There was a spacious seating area with a comfortable sofa and all the modern comforts needed for a short, luxurious stay.

The pool and rooftop sundeck

As Club Level guests, we also had use of a private tropical rooftop sundeck and whirlpool, an ideal spot for late afternoon sunbathing or to chill-out and relax.



www.innonfifth.com

The Forbes Travel Guide ratings

When referring to hotels and resorts being 'award winning' it is important to know a little more.

Regarding the Forbes Travel Guide star rating system, Forbes itself is a global authority on luxury travel.

Its anonymous professional inspectors travel the world to assess hotels, restaurants and spas against up to 800 objective standards.

They inspect both service and facility and only the best properties in the world earn the Forbes Travel Guide *Five Star*, *Four Star* and *Recommended* status.

The Mobil Guide

It all started as the Mobil Travel Guide in 1958, which was the first Five Star rating system.

Today, the Forbes standard is seen as one of the most stringent in the hospitality industry, with its inspectors staying two nights and three days at each hotel to scrutinise every aspect of the visit before producing a very detailed appraisal.

www.forbestravelguide.com



With its *Four Star* rating, the Inn on Fifth is classed as an *exceptional property*, offering *high levels of service and quality of facility to match*.



Ocean Prime

Fine dining on Fifth Avenue

By Ann Mealor

There is a wonderful choice of restaurants along Fifth Avenue.

All offer alfresco seating on the sidewalk - and happy hour offerings during the off peak seasons writes Ann Mealor.

Two in particular that epitomise the fine dining and entertainment along Fifth Avenue are Ocean Prime and Truluck's Seafood, Steak and Crab House.

Ocean Prime

Steak, seafood and cocktails provide the perfect mix at Ocean Prime.

The restaurant is vibrant and busy with an energetic buzz.

On entering, we perused the menu and soaked up the atmosphere whilst sipping pink, gin cocktails.

The wine list was extensive with a many available by the glass.

Staff were friendly, efficient and very knowledgeable in answering questions about the food and wine.

For starters I chose the Point Judith Calamari with a sweet chilli sauce and candied cashews and Ashley the Lobster Bisque with a sweet corn fritter

My calamari was soft inside, crunchy outside and perfectly complemented by the piquant Thai dressing. It was a huge portion and would easily have served two.

The bisque was smooth and creamy and got a big 'thumbs up' from Ashley.

For mains I went for a steak, the filet mignon, with a delicately flavoured truffle butter sauce. I asked for it well cooked (no blood) yet still juicy and tender.

It came to the table prepared exactly how I like it – it was a real tastebud treat.

Delight on the plate

Ashley tucked into a delicious Chilean Sea Bass with whipped potatoes and a light, but incredibly *moorish* champagne truffle sauce.

It looked a delight on the plate and Ashley was *umming* and *ahhing* with satisfaction from start to finish.

We added a side of roasted Brussels sprouts that were crunchy with a smokey flavour.

We had to go light on the desserts as we had eaten our fill, so we both decided on a refreshing, and virtually calorie free (so we told ourselves) lemon sorbet decorated with a crisp almond tuille.

It was a grand finale!

www.ocean-prime.com

Truluck's



Truluck's is a genuine Naples favourite, with the happy hour in the piano bar the place to go for tremendous wines and cocktail's and delicious dishes - all at half price.

There's also the chance to enjoy the finest of piano entertainers.

The restaurant specialises in fresh crab from its own fisheries.

www.trulucks.com



Naples Botanical Gardens

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.

www.naplestrolleytours.com

The Naples Players

If you happen to be in Naples during one of its productions, check out the Naples Players who perform at the Sugden Theatre on Fifth Avenue.

A real community theatre group, their productions are of the highest calibre.

www.NaplesPlayers.org

Naples Botanical Gardens

These botanical gardens are a delight with 170 acres of gardens created by some of the world's 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



Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens 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

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

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 animal shows.

A rustic camping village has native teepees for campers.

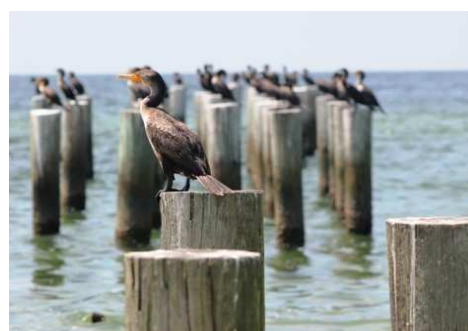
Every spring the tribe stages the Big Cypress Shootout, a three-day battle re-enactment and festival, which honours the Seminole's struggle to remain in their homeland during the 1830's, when the United States was attempting to enforce its policy of Indian removal.

www.semtribe.com

More information

www.paradisecoast.com

A snapshot of the Naples



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www.allwaystraveller.com



The International Travel Writers Alliance is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

www.itwalliance.com



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