

SO YOU WANT TO LIVE IN ... DELRAY BEACH

Nestled among the bustling cities of South Florida's east coast, Delray Beach holds its own with pristine beaches and a downtown with buzz



Clockwise: Delray Beach's two-mile-long public shoreline, a year-round draw; making friends at one of the town's many art festivals; a white egret, one of Delray's varied wildlife sightings



UNDER THE TWINKLING lights that wrap tall palms along Atlantic Avenue, a band strikes up at a corner bar, inviting flip-flops- and board shorts-clad surfers in for a closer listen. The laughter of diners resonates from a nearby pub, while the hum of a boat motor on the Intracoastal Waterway approaches. In typical weekend fashion, Delray Beach is hopping with activity. "The downtown area is much more alive than it used to be years ago, but it still manages to feel like a close-knit small town," says Cathy McNellen, a 30-year resident of Delray Beach.

That's a description the city—which has been nicknamed South Florida's "Village by the Sea"—strives to maintain, with small, locally owned boutiques and cafés, a walkable downtown district, and well-preserved historic beachfront cottages. (There are no high-rise condos here, due to restrictions on building heights.) With a good range of housing options in town, Realtor and resident Brian Pearl says prices start at about \$400,000 for a quaint cottage, and go upwards of \$2.5 million for a new home with ocean views.

Adirondack chairs painted with tropical scenes line the brick sidewalk through town, inviting passersby to sit and chat. The camaraderie continues during Delray Beach's frequent outdoor festivals—from farmers' markets to craft fairs—in the up-and-coming arts district, Pineapple Grove. "Artists will often invite you into their studios to watch them work," says Todd L'Herrou, managing director of the Delray Beach chamber of commerce.

As for McNellen, she says that living in Delray Beach has changed her plans for ever returning to her hometown in the Midwest. "I definitely see myself staying here forever because of all the great friends I've made," she says. "It's a gem of a city and a wonderful place to live."



WHY WE LOVE IT ...



From left: Alfresco dining at RACKS Fish House + Oyster Bar; surfboard-toting beachgoers crossing a boardwalk over grass-covered dunes to the shore

1 BICYCLES TRUMP CARS.

Thanks to Delray's bike trails and compact downtown area, residents often choose to flit about town on two wheels (or two feet). For longer commutes, flag down an open-air Delray Downtowner taxi, a free transportation service.

2 THE SPORTS The town's 8,200-seat tennis stadium plays host to the annual Delray Beach Open by the Venetian Las Vegas tournament. Its popularity has made Delray Beach a hot spot for other pro-level sporting events, including beach volleyball and extreme cycling.

3 THE PARTY NEVER STOPS.

Whether you're escaping the afternoon sun inside a tiki hut at the beachfront Sandbar or enjoying a happy hour lychee martini at the swanky Buddha SkyBar, staying social at all hours here is easy.

4 THE NATURE CENTERS Just five minutes from downtown, the Morikami Japanese Gardens transport you to a world of beautifully manicured waterfalls and greenery. Nearby, the Sandoway House Nature Center features a seashell museum and an observation deck for gazing out over the picturesque dunes.

THE ESSENTIALS

MAIN STREET

In downtown Delray Beach you'll find the historic Doc's All American, a 1950s-style soda fountain that serves famously good root beer floats. Shops like Hands Office Supply (which began as a supply store in the 1930s) sell unique souvenirs and artwork.

RESTAURANTS

At RACKS Fish House + Oyster Bar, shellfish connoisseurs can watch fresh, tender oysters get shucked and kettle-steamed right before their eyes. Deck 84 offers a killer Key lime mahi mahi and prime Intracoastal Waterway views.

BEACH

Two miles of pristine sand and turquoise water make up Delray Beach's public, lifeguard-protected beach, where locals laze under cabanas (for rent on the shore), rally friends for a volleyball game, or watch the sands for nesting sea turtles.

ACTIVITIES

Delray Beach Watersports rents paddleboards, snorkel gear, and 16-foot catamarans from a post on the sand. Off the shore, locals can practice their swings at the Delray Beach Golf Club, or on the courts at the Delray Beach Tennis Center.

JUST VISITING? Seagate Hotel & Spa's especially spacious rooms include comfy living areas, breezy terraces, and marble bubble-jet tubs built for two. Rates start at \$165; theseagatehotel.com.

READY TO MOVE IN?



Waterfront Wonder

4 bedrooms, 7 baths
6,081 square feet • \$3,495,000
DETAILS: British West Indies-style home with built-in outdoor grill and fireplace, heated pool, and private dock on the Intracoastal
NEIGHBORHOOD: Delray Isle
MLS #RX-9964262; langrealty.com



Modern Estate

5 bedrooms, 4½ baths
5,218 square feet • \$1,399,000
DETAILS: New home with sleek, modern finishes, spacious great room, and separate guesthouse
NEIGHBORHOOD: Lake Ida
MLS #RX-9960578; trulia.com



Tropical Treat

4 bedrooms, 3 baths
1,532 square feet • \$870,000
DETAILS: Historic cottage surrounded by beautiful, tall palms; just steps from Atlantic Avenue
NEIGHBORHOOD: Esplanade
MLS #RX-9992199; langrealty.com