

# PETERGREENBERG.COM

An Insider's Guide to Travel: News, Tips, Information & Inspiration

**SIGN UP**

for more news, tips and exclusive content in our free newsletter.

**TRENDING NOW:** Soft vs. Hard Luggage MH17 Flying Over Conflict Areas Travel Gear Hidden Oahu Save on International Calls Ice Cream

[HOME](#) [ABOUT PETER](#) [TRAVEL TOPICS >](#) [VIDEOS >](#) [RADIO](#) [STORE](#) [ISRAEL: THE ROYAL TOUR >](#)

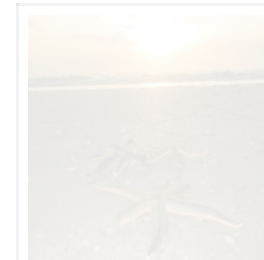
SOUTH

## Downtown Surprises in Naples and Fort Myers, Florida

Posted by PeterGreenberg.com on March 11, 2014 at 7:03 am

Share on: [f](#) [t](#) [g+](#)

You may also like:



Peter Greenberg Worldwide-Fort



Peter Greenberg Worldwide-

Don't limit yourself to the beach when you visit southwest Florida's Gulf Coast. There are plenty of cosmopolitan pleasures just a few blocks away. Lynn Langway surveys the up-and-coming downtown areas of Naples and Fort Myers, where first-rate new restaurants and other diversions are well worth a visit.

### **Naples: Foodie's Delight**

In Naples, Florida, all avenues still lead to the wide white beach.

But, just two blocks east, in one of Florida's most walkable downtowns, you'll find scores of intriguing galleries, boutiques, and restaurants.

This chic little city—population 20,000 within city limits—has blossomed into a serious dining destination in recent years. Since 2010, at least four ambitious restaurants with celebrated chefs have opened on Fifth Avenue South, joining a growing menu of foodie hotspots. (The latest headliner, Avenue5, looks glamorous enough to give Miami a run for its mojitos.)



My husband and I spent several days happily eating our way around downtown this winter, without ever encountering an overcooked "Floribbean" cliché. We enjoyed delectable dishes at Barbatella (crisp thin-crust pizza), Mereday's (sticky toffee pudding), and Bleu Provence (juicy grilled mussels). But, our two favorite dinners delivered it all: savvy service, thoughtful choices of by-the-glass wines, and delicious, creative food.

At [Osteria Tulia](#), opened in 2013, the standouts included crunchy tidbits of fried pig's ears—really!—and splendid pastas, notably the braised rabbit with gnocchi, topped off with a



Travel Today:  
Naples, Florida



Radio Guests –  
Naples, Florida –

PLAY ALL THE GOLF YOU WANT  
UNLIMITED Golf Package  
from \$219  
per person/night

**KINGSMILL**  
Resort  
WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

[Book Now >](#)

PLAY ALL THE GOLF YOU WANT  
UNLIMITED Golf Package  
from \$219  
per person/night

**KINGSMILL**  
Resort  
WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

[Book Now >](#)

caramelized roast pear for dessert. Just north of 5<sup>th</sup>, the charming [IM Tapas](#) served soulful tastes of Spain: tender zucchini blossoms stuffed with goat cheese, succulent slices of Iberian ham and chorizo, and spicy octopus.

Both Naples and Fort Myers are close to peerless parks where you can sweat off a few hundred calories hiking, biking, and paddling. Check out: [Everglades National Park](#), Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, and Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (for more on those natural beauties, see "[Five Birding Hospots.](#)")

We opted for a guided 2-hour kayak tour at [Rookery Bay Reserve](#), one of the few pristine mangrove forests in North America. Naturalist Randy McCormick made this magical place come alive, from the mud to the mangroves to the great blue heron flapping overhead. We saw 15 species of birds in this National Estuarine Research Reserve without even trying—along with an amorous pair of bottlenose dolphins doing what comes naturally.



There's more to explore at The Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens. This former roadside attraction, called "Jungle Larry's," was saved from demolition by county voters and transformed into an active, appealing zoo (notice the giant Toucan that used to lure drivers to stop.) Local artists show their best work at the Naples Art Association's von Liebig Arts Center downtown, and you can admire the Chihuly glass ceiling and special exhibits at the Baker Museum.

Stay at the affordable [Cove Inn](#), an attractive condo hotel with well-stocked kitchens and

balconies overlooking the marina. Walk everywhere, and try the excellent eggs and pancakes at the timeless Cove Inn Coffee Shoppe, where the waitresses and cooks still talk diner-speak. For more luxurious charms, the elegant [Inn on Fifth Avenue](#) has an inviting pool, spa, and sleek décor.

### **FORT MYERS: Rescuing the riverfront**

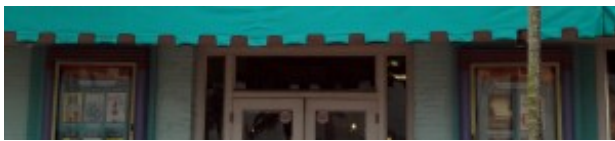
Thomas Edison fell in love with Fort Myers back in 1885, when it was still a rowdy cow town. Snapping up nearly 14 acres along the Caloosahatchee River to build a second home, he became one of Florida's first snowbirds, wintering here along with famous friends like Henry Ford (who bought the house next door), and tire tycoon Harvey Firestone.

They'd never recognize this city of 65,000 now. The manicured [Edison and Ford](#) estates have become a fascinating museum and one of America's most popular historic home sites.

Downtown, the acclaimed [Florida Repertory Theatre](#) and frequent festivals—for art, music, even tattoos—draw thousands of visitors to an area that used to be deserted at night (by day, this county seat swarms with lawyers and government workers.) After a few false starts, a \$50 million restoration project has finally taken hold over the last 5 years, restoring and repurposing the old warehouses and bank buildings of the River District with new restaurants, shops, galleries, condos, and hotels.



To appreciate the transformation, ramble around the colorful turn-of-the-century architecture and 1920's brick streets and courtyards with Gina Taylor, a former museum director who now leads engaging walkabouts for [True Tours](#). A lively—and accurate—storyteller, Taylor populates the old



warehouses and bank buildings with a picaresque cast of merchants, hustlers, and ballplayers who came to town for adventure and success. (You'll still see ballplayers at the

spring training camps for the Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins.)

Learn more at the Southwest Florida Museum of History, an old railroad depot now filled with an eclectic collection of artifacts ranging from dinosaur bones to a ferryboat that was the only link to the rest of Florida until 1904, when the railroad arrived. Wander the appealing displays at the Art League of Fort Myers and the Arts for ACT Gallery, and stop for a key lime pie gelato at the Downtown Bagel & Deli.

Several old buildings have been recycled into popular restaurants. At Ford's Garage you can chow down on good burgers and microbrews; a Model A hangs suspended over the bar. Firestone's, a former fish-packing plant, now has a rocking rooftop bar and grill room. We enjoyed our best dinner at the handsome Twisted Vine Bistro, with soaring ceilings and a wall of wines. Try the tasty pan-grilled trout and yellow snapper.




If you just can't stay away from the seashore, Fort Myers Beach is about 16 miles away and Sanibel about 23 miles—including lots of seasonal traffic jams. Or, get out and paddle with the pelicans on a kayak tour of local waters with [Gaea Guides](#).

Stay at the stylish [Hotel Indigo](#), which rises from the site of the old post office, once slated to become a parking lot. Opened in 2009, this modern hotel with requisite rooftop pool and bar was planned to dovetail with its surroundings. The lobby even sports a multicolored tile floor that almost matches the 1927 original.

*By Lynn Langway for PeterGreenberg.com*

# Comments

1 comments



[Comment](#)




**Albert Kaplan** · University of Georgia


To see a recently discovered photo of Thomas Edison at 18 years of age, send me an email at [albertkaplan@cox.net](mailto:albertkaplan@cox.net), and I will let you know how to view it.


[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · March 11 at 10:14pm


 Facebook social plugin

## You may also like:

- 

Peter Greenberg Worldwide—Fort
- 

Peter Greenberg Worldwide—
- 

Travel Today: Naples, Florida
- 

Radio Guests – Naples, Florida –

 [Tweet](#) 5

 [Like](#) 16

 0

Cover Your Trip With **Travel Insurance!**

[LEARN MORE](#)  **TRAVEL GUARD**



**Worldwide Partners Directory**

 **Medjet Assist. | eNews**  
Travel, Destinations, Health & Safety

*Free Subscription*



[CONTACT US](#)

[SIGN UP FOR DAILY OR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER](#)

[READ PETER GREENBERG'S ORIGINAL TRAVEL DETECTIVE® BLOGS](#)

[RSS FEED](#)

Copyright © 2014 — Peter Greenberg Travel Detective. All Rights Reserved.