

LOCAL

# Stuart, Vero Beach, Fort Pierce make list of best U.S. cities for snowbirds, zoombirds



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Three Treasure Coast cities are among the top 15 best places for snowbirds and zoombirds, according to a survey that factored weather, housing, recreation, health and safety for 215 U.S. cities.

Vero Beach was second, Fort Pierce was third and Stuart was 12th on the list compiled by StorageCafe, a national online platform to search for storage. Forty-two Florida cities were in the top 100.

For the Treasure Coast cities, the survey cited the availability and affordability of seasonal homes, as many more new housing developments that cater to a retirement lifestyle have emerged in the past few years.

Snowbirds are typically retirees over 55 from northern states who winter in Florida. Zoombirds are remote workers of any age who have been flocking here from all over the U.S. since COVID hit.

## Why do snowbirds flock to Vero Beach, Fort Pierce and Stuart?

These are some of the reasons the survey says each city stands out from October to March:

### Vero Beach

- Over 60% of vacant housing for seasonal use
- Budget-friendly housing compared to other places
- Average 67.2 degrees, 57 inches rain, 34 air quality index
- 1.6% crime rate
- Ranked second for golf course access
- Shopping and dining, especially downtown
- 120 Mbps internet speed
- McKee Botanical Garden and Riverside Theatre

### Fort Pierce

- Over 70% of vacant housing for seasonal use

- \$147,000 median home price
- 25% less expensive rent than state median
- Average 67.4 degrees, 54 inches rain, 37 air quality index
- 2.6% crime rate
- 1,000 square feet of park space per capita
- 160 Mbps internet speed
- Manatee Observation & Education Center, St. Lucie County Aquarium, FAU Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute and Heathcote Botanical Gardens

## **Stuart**

- Over 60% of houses for seasonal use
- Abundance of housing, including for RV travelers
- Average 69.6 degrees, 64 inches rain, 40 air quality index
- 2.4% crime rate
- Strong golf culture
- Access to health care

Here's all the criteria StorageCafe used in its survey:

- Climate (average temperature, rainfall and air quality from October to March)
- Availability of homes and rentals for seasonal use
- Cost of housing
- Availability of RV parks
- Beaches within a 10-mile radius
- Park space per capita
- Golf courses per capita
- Number of restaurants
- Safety
- Healthcare (Medicare pricing for new patients and availability of hospitals, medical professionals and other organizations)
- Local internet speed
- Self-storage prices

## **Other top cities for snowbirds, zoombirds**

- **1:** Venice, Florida

- **4:** Naples, Florida
- **5:** Lake Wales, Florida
- **6:** Mission, Texas
- **7:** Apache Junction, Arizona
- **8:** Tarpon Springs, Florida
- **9:** Fort Myers, Florida
- **10:** Clermont, Florida

## **Why Port St. Lucie didn't make the list**

On the Treasure Coast, many more new housing developments are catering exclusively to people over 55, whose population has grown by 18% to 302,116 since 2018, according to census estimates.

The online search website 55places.com lists 43 age-restricted communities on the Treasure Coast.

Port St. Lucie's western and southwestern regions have exploded with new housing developments that cater to retirement lifestyles since COVID hit, but StorageCafe said it didn't have enough data to rank the city in its survey.

Riverland, for example, said it has sold over 3,000 homes since 2018. Its two- and three-bedroom homes range from \$400,000 to \$700,000.

Octogenarian Erick Marcus, who moved there with his wife in 2020, said he loves the amenities, which include dog parks, restaurants, swimming pools, tennis and pickleball courts, soccer and softball fields, and arts, fitness and culture centers.

"There's so many things around here," he said. "They just opened three new restaurants here last week."

About 57% of Riverland residents are from outside Florida, especially the Northeast, Midwest and California, said GL Homes spokesperson Jill DiDonna. The rest are from Florida, especially South Florida, she said.

Among them is Andrea Stoodley, 83, from Hollywood, California. She bought a three-bedroom home for \$345,300 in April 2019.

“My late husband and I visited Florida in the '70s and decided there was no other place to live because it was snowing over the holidays in New York, where we lived,” she said.

Tesoro Club, another new development in southwest Port St. Lucie, said it is attracting mostly retirees and healthcare workers.

The gated country club community sells luxury homes for \$500,000 to \$4.5 million, and amenities includes spas, restaurants, fitness centers and two 18-hole championship golf courses.

“The Treasure Coast is absolutely booming with homebuyers from the Northeast, the Midwest and throughout South Florida wanting a vibrant lifestyle and their own private piece of paradise,” Tesoro Club co-owner Tim Jones, a real estate investor from New York, said in a news release.

## **Zoombirds are remote workers**

U.S. remote workers increased 120% to over 24 million from 2020 to 2022 because companies allowed employees to work from home because of COVID, according to StorageCafe's analysis.

Many moved to Florida and the Treasure Coast. This changed the demographics of the traditional snowbird, Beach Life Premier Team founder Mitchell G. David said in StorageCafe's report.

To cater to them, online home rental companies VRBO, AirBnB and HomeAway began listing full office setups with isolated work rooms, cybersecurity and uninterrupted internet access, he said.

“These young snowbirds make up about 25% of the Miami real estate transactions,” he said.

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