

# 8 Great Neighborhoods in Tampa Bay

From the Latin Quarter to the beaches, this waterfront city has it all.

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These neighborhoods represent just some of the shades of vibrancy and charm that color the Tampa Bay area.



This colorful bungalow can be found in St. Petersburg's Historic Kenwood neighborhood.

## Historic Kenwood

Lying just west of downtown St. Petersburg, Historic Kenwood is on the National Register of Historic Places, an acknowledgment that the neighborhood contains one of the highest concentrations of bungalows in Florida, many of them dating to the 1920s.

This is a house-proud neighborhood of enthusiastic fixer-uppers of all ages who gladly share information and sources about restoration. The first weekend of November, the neighborhood hosts BungalowFest, a two-day tour of homes and gardens that celebrates the area's architectural richness. It's a diverse neighborhood with a hard-working and effective neighborhood association.



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Downtown St. Petersburg is pedestrian friendly with waterfront parks, shopping and restaurants.

## Downtown St. Petersburg

This is one of the most urban neighborhoods in the Tampa Bay area: restaurants, retail, office, commercial, two college campuses, several museums, many churches, hotels, plus waterfront parks and great views. More than 5,000 people live here, from young professionals to seniors moving out of big family

homes in other neighborhoods: in single-family homes and townhomes, apartments, midrise buildings and luxury highrises.

What others have to drive to (and fight for parking), residents of the Downtown Neighborhood Association walk to: fireworks on July 4, First Night celebrations on Dec. 31, a regular calendar of food, music and arts festivals, a branch library, City Hall, the courthouse, the city's famous 1917 Open Air Post Office, the wedding-cake Mediterranean Revival architecture of the 1926 Snell Arcade and a thriving Saturday morning greenmarket.



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Ybor City has a strong Latin influence and is one of three historical landmark districts in Florida.

## Ybor City

This is Tampa's "Latin Quarter," a mile from downtown, settled in the late 1880s by immigrants from Cuba, Spain and Italy. They worked in the cigar factories, some of which remain, where you can still buy hand-rolled cigars. Wander the

streets and you'll see some of the original wooden worker cottages, many of them remodeled and highly desirable.

Ybor (pronounced "E-bor") is one of three National Historic Landmark Districts in Florida. The area's ethnic origins are translated through the food: strong Cuban coffee, roast pork, boliche (sausage-stuffed beef roast), paella, Cuban sandwiches and more. Seventh Avenue is the main bar/club/entertainment strip. Centro Ybor is a shopping, dining and entertainment venue designed to attract the family trade.

Added residential development over the past 5 years has encouraged the community's growth into a 24/7 neighborhood, not just a weekend late-night venue. Every Halloween, thousands pour in for Guavaveen, a Mardi Gras-style celebration that includes kids' activities and a parade, the Mama Guava Stumble, that's heavy on outrageous costumes. An electric trolley will take you from Ybor to downtown via the Channel District an emerging loft community that includes the cruise port, the Florida Aquarium and the Tampa Bay Times Forum, an NHL hockey arena and entertainment venue.

## West Tampa

West of downtown and east of the West Shore business district lies West Tampa, which in its heyday boasted more cigar factories than Ybor City. It also produced more cigars than anywhere else in the world. Near the downtown and West Shore employment centers, this emerging neighborhood is close to the upscale International Plaza and Bay Street and minutes from the Tampa Bay Times Forum, major hospitals and cultural centers. Twenty years ago it was predominantly Hispanic and African-American.

Today, "it's rapidly transitioning to being very diverse, with lots of Caucasians and Asian-Americans," says former city council member Ed Turanchik, who was instrumental in the development of InTown Homes, an award-winning redevelopment plan featuring single-family homes whose classic designs blend well with the original homes in the neighborhood. Buyers range from first-time 20- and 30-somethings to downsizing empty-nesters to single female heads of household. Stop in at the West Tampa Arts Center, an old cigar factory with 25 working studios and a gallery.

You won't be hungry for long in this neighborhood. The West Tampa Sandwich Shop, at 3904 N. Armenia, (813) 873-7104, has "the best *cafe con leche* in

town," Turanchik says, or try Arco Iris, a Cuban-Chinese restaurant, at 3328 W. Columbus Drive, (813) 879-1357.



Robert La Follette/VisitTampaBay.com

Residents of Downtown Tampa enjoy an impressive collection of parks and pedestrian-friendly play areas, including Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park (pictured).

## Downtown Tampa and Channel District

A burgeoning downtown Tampa and its adjacent Channel District have been steadily building an eclectic blend of modern and classic, nature and technology, sports and the arts. Within a 2-mile radius, residents can take in an NHL game or top artist live in concert at the Tampa Bay Times Forum; catch a traveling Broadway production at the Straz Center for the Performing Arts or an independent film or classic at the historic Tampa Theatre; visit one of a half-dozen museums, art galleries and the world-class Florida Aquarium; or run, bike or walk an impressive collection of parks and pedestrian-friendly outdoor play areas, among them Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park, Lykes Gaslight Park, and one of the city's most recent additions, the Tampa Riverwalk.

And that's not even mentioning the opportunity to shop and dine at dozens of businesses in this growing community with an array of sophisticated living space options available to make being in or around downtown Tampa a possibly permanent lifestyle decision.

## SoHo/Hyde Park

For young professionals seeking a more contemporary, trendy environment and one that suggests work, home and play can be just steps away from each other, chic urban SoHo may be the place. The community combines a variety of entertainment options nestled in between elegant loft living and South Tampa's nearby affluent metropolitan community Hyde Park.

At its center, lies a hub of outdoor, post-work party fun Hyde Park Village, which offers nature lovers a beautiful park with trees, benches and plenty of room to roam in this pet-friendly environment, topped off by a centerpiece, a mesmerizing fountain which sits at the center of the village consisting of various shops, restaurants, movie theaters, a fitness center and professional service boutiques laid out in this homey yet hip neighborhood. And lying just on the outskirts, residents can end each evening just as they begin each morning, with a stroll, jog or bike ride along the 4.5 mile stretch of sidewalk known as Bayshore Boulevard, one of Tampa's signature roads.

## Seminole Heights

This bohemian community can be the ideal setting for those who enjoy finding an antique piece and refurbishing or recycling something old to serve a brand new purpose. A peaceful neighborhood composed primarily of renovated bungalows and an eclectic mix of housing styles, Seminole Heights offers residents easy access to gourmet hot spots and shabby chic retailers with a unique charm and quaintness not often found in metropolitan areas. Seminole Heights is home to some of Tampa's most lauded, established little culinary gems like the nearly 60-year-old Bo's Ice Cream and the infamous Taco Bus, serving cheap, authentic Mexican cuisine at all hours of the day – and we mean, all. The Bus is now open 24/7!

Artists and the patrons who love their work can have a blast at the Phoenix Glass Studio and Gallery with live glass-blowing demos and check out other art events, historic home tours and Second Sunday Morning Markets to get to know their community better.

# Gulfport

Everyone seems to use the word "funky" to describe this town between St. Petersburg and the beaches. Maybe it's the housing – lots of bungalows (including several Sears, Roebuck kit houses from the 1920s), Queen Annes and concrete-block houses from the 1950s and 1960s

Maybe it's the small-town atmosphere that invites strolling down Gulf Boulevard or along the waterfront.

Or perhaps it's the shops and restaurants: an old-fashioned mercantile with a little of everything, chic designer shops, or the Backfin Blue Cafe, a celebrated eatery with glorious crab cakes.

Maybe it's the mix of artists, business folk, longtime residents and newcomers, or the laid-back, tolerant atmosphere. The houses painted in bright colors, the friendly beer joints and the views across Boca Ciega Bay certainly don't hurt.