



Where Should I Retire?

We want to live in a medium-sized city close to the beach but without much traffic. Where should we retire?

Hi MarketWatch,

We are retired and currently live in North Georgia. We are looking to move within about 30 to 40 minutes of the beach, preferably near family in southern Virginia or the Tampa area.

We like warm weather, not a lot of traffic, and lots of outdoor activities and social groups. We also prefer to live in or near a medium-sized city with plenty to do. We prefer someplace not too conservative and religious. We can tolerate humidity but don't love it.

We are debt-free, have a few million, with a housing budget of \$850,000 to \$1 million. We're not really looking for just a 55+ community. We don't have children but don't want just seniors around.

Any ideas?

Melinda

Dear Melinda,

How is this for a radical suggestion: spend six months near family in Tampa (pick the least-humid six months and qualify as a state resident, thereby paying no state income tax) and then see the world? Spend a month or more in one spot, live like a local, and then regale your friends with your adventures during your six-month stints in Florida?

Or perhaps use that housing budget to buy two homes, one near each family member so you don't have to pick favorites? Just be sure to talk to everyone about how often you want to see them (and how often you expect them to drive to you). I'm a fan of the test run, so consider renting near each of them for a few months to determine whether that's what you really want.

Testing out a community during its least-appealing time, not just visiting as a tourist, is a smart strategy no matter where you are looking.

Can I also suggest you spend more time thinking about how important the beach is to you? Are you looking to gaze out on the water or actually feel the sand between your toes? Could a lake work as well?

If you want to go to the beach frequently and dislike traffic, consider getting yourself as close to the water as your housing budget allows.

Whatever you do, congratulations on having a budget that gives you a lot of flexibility. I've got three suggestions to get you started. I don't like to repeat myself, so [please check other "Where Should I Retire?" columns here.](#)

Morehead City, North Carolina



One of Morehead City's historic homes COURTESY CRYSTAL COAST TOURISM AUTHORITY

At 10,000 residents, Morehead City, the largest of the beach towns on North Carolina's Crystal Coast, also known as the southern Outer Banks, is smaller than what you've described. But hear me out.

Thanks to the beach, you may find more amenities than you expect in a county with just 70,000 people. The population swells with second-home owners and visitors, so you'll find plenty of restaurants and bars (though few box stores) as well as an aquarium and a maritime museum.

There's golf and fishing, of course, but also wreck diving that lets you explore boats and submarines submerged in the ocean.

The local hospital is in Morehead City; Carteret Health Care is the first facility in North Carolina to become part of the Mayo Clinic Care Network, giving it special access to Mayo Clinic expertise.

No question, the beaches are the reason to consider Carteret County, where about a quarter of the population is 65 or older. If not Morehead City, you could look at Emerald Isle, a beach town with golf carts on the streets, or historical Beaufort (not to be confused with a town in South Carolina with the same name but a different pronunciation—the North Carolina one is Bow-fort).

Wilmington is 2 hours away, and Raleigh is nearly 3 hours. Once the highway is upgraded to an interstate, Raleigh could be reachable in 2 hours.

Winter highs are in the mid-50s, and average summer highs are in the upper 80s.

The median list price for homes in Morehead City is \$359,500, and Carteret County boasts that it has the lowest county property tax rate in the state. Here's [what's on the market now in Morehead City](#).