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SIX
REASONS
TO

LOVE

IT HERE

WELCOME TO THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS OF JACKSONVILLE

WRITTEN BY **MARY WANSER**

Welcome to the historic districts of Jacksonville! What an exciting time to get acquainted with the River City, as 2022 marks its bicentennial celebration. Not only that, but it is Zillow's No. 2 pick for hottest housing market this year and Bankrate's No. 2 pick of best places to live in the state and No. 10 in the nation.

Called JAX or DUUUUUUVAALL! by locals, Jacksonville is the seat of Duval County and Florida's most populous city. But rather than feeling like an impersonal metropolis, the city retains a cozy suburban feel brought by its historic neighborhoods, its beautiful beaches and many areas in between.

No matter which side of the St. Johns you've chosen—whether Westside's Riverside, Avondale, Ortega and Murray Hill or Southside's San Marco, St. Nicholas, and San Jose—the historic neighborhoods are the gems of Jacksonville. Those who live here, work here, and play here have a long list of reasons why they chose to lay down roots of their own. The following are six in a mix of many.



2. URBAN MIX

1. HISTORIC HOMES

Heritage homes are plentiful here. They are valued for their architectural style, unique features, or connections to historical events and people.

One of the area's oldest homes is a private residence built in 1854 that still stands on Greenridge Road; the pre-Civil War era home of imposing Georgian architecture once served as the main house for the Red Bank plantation and is considered an enduring symbol of the Old South. Marabanong, meaning 'paradise' in the Maori Polynesian language, is a Victorian style, Queen Anne design historic mansion on River Point Road built in 1876. Talbot Avenue, in Avondale, has a home that was built there in 1898 for its proximity to rail service.

There are private residences that once housed the most elite of society, like the Jacobethan Revival style home on River Boulevard that was built in 1928 for Leon Cheek, head of the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company, which later became the Maxwell House Coffee Company. Lane-Towers House is a riverfront mansion that was built in the Tudor Revival style as one of the largest homes in Jacksonville in 1928. Its opulence includes 14-foot ceilings, a gold leaf ceiling in the breakfast room, and a secret room behind a particular piece of paneling that can be accessed with a bobby pin. A 1929 residence of more than 9,000 square feet of Mediterranean Revival style architecture had been the home of John H. Swisher and sons, business owners of King Edward cigars, which became the most popular brand in the world.

The historic homes of the area are not all freestanding. The John Gorrie, for example, is a structure of ornate Mediterranean Revival architecture erected in 1923 and named for the physician who invented artificial ice, which he used to cool feverish patients. The building initially served as a junior high school but has since been converted into a multi-residence dwelling, its classrooms renovated as condominiums.

Epping Forest, the 15,000-square-foot riverfront mansion built in 1926 with underground tunnels, was originally the estate of Alfred duPont and Jessie Ball duPont. Nearly six decades later, it turned private yacht club, and it remains so today. Its history includes having been used as a meeting place for the likes of the Vanderbilt and Carnegie families as well as Presidents such as Anwar Sadat and Gerald Ford. Its construction is a stunning mixture of Gothic, Spanish Renaissance, and Baroque architectural styles.

Additional architectural styles that can be spotted throughout the historic districts of Jacksonville include American Bungalow, Colonial Revival, and Prairie School. Mediterranean Revival and Art Deco designs from the 1920s and 30s can be found too. Left are even a few Sears Catalog houses built from kits, pieces of Americana.

History abounds here. The area is replete with homes and other structures that have been added to the National Register of Historic Places. There are local organizations dedicated to preserving and protecting them amid progress—the Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP) and the San Marco Preservation Society (SMPS).

But Jacksonville's historic districts aren't exclusively for the well-to-do, and historical should not be mistaken for old fashioned. Mixed among the nostalgic grandeur are apartment and ranch-style rentals, quaint cottages, and all the contemporary amenities one could hope for.

The historic neighborhoods lend suburbia to Jacksonville without sacrificing the conveniences and urban vibe of a big city. Beside the lush lawns and gorgeous gardens are several sections zoned for mixed land use. Without a particular urban-suburban divide, most areas within the historic districts of Jacksonville are highly walkable. You can live, work, and play while avoiding a long commute. That's another reason to love it here.

Walkability comes with health benefits. In some areas, the streets are curved and tree-lined, in others, winding with grassy medians. Take advantage of flat terrain amenable to getting in your daily steps.

Residents appreciate the bike-friendly and pedestrian-friendly proximity of historic houses, trendy restaurants, and specialty shops. Admire the architectural diversity as apparent in businesses as it is in nearby homes, adding even more character and charm to the historic districts. Prime examples can be seen at the Shoppes of Avondale, Five Points, Edgewood Avenue, San Marco Square, and St. Nicholas Town Center.

The mixed-use development enhances the public good overall and is beneficial for the economy. It appeals to residents and to business owners alike. One reason is for the foot traffic that such an area attracts. The residential-commercial fusion brings vibrancy to businesses in evenings and on weekends when they might otherwise have been closed if situated within a purely commercial district. Residents and visitors gather in the historic neighborhoods seven days per week.



If you're a foodie, there are dining options galore! Wander from the formal and refined of Blue Fish to the quaint and cozy of Biscottis in a single block. Stroll from one ethnic eatery to the next on the same street, like from Japanese Fuji Sushi to Taverna's take on authentic Italian ingredients in the San Marco Square. Dine indoor or out. Balance out your tastebuds afterwards with dessert from Dreamette's walk-up window, the area's oldest ice cream stand, built in 1948.

If java's your joy, sip your way through the neighborhoods' sidewalk cafés and craft coffee bars. There's another kind of craft brew here too—a booming beer scene. Take a self-guided tour along the Jax Ale Trail of the two dozen craft breweries and ale houses across the city.

If shopping is your bag, the historic districts will seem like heaven. Independent retailers are as popular as our locally owned restaurants. Find one-of-a-kind pieces, no matter what you're in the market for. Vintage clothing boutiques are a modern trend; try Avenue Antiques or Castaways. Walk from The Looking Glass to Antique Emporium for nostalgic furniture. For home goods, The Spice and Tea Exchange or Wick: A Candle Bar are places to start your exploration of the historic, walkable shopping and dining options in Jacksonville.

3. AFFORDABILITY

With all that Jacksonville, Florida has to boast about, you might find it surprising to learn of its attractive affordability rankings as compared to other large cities within the nation and within the state.

As measured by the cost-of-living index, Jacksonville is overall 6% less expensive than the national average, says Payscale.com, while life in many other major U.S. cities costs more than the national average. Houzer.com agrees. That silver lining incorporates at least three categories—housing, utilities, and healthcare.

Even though housing prices are up across the entire state, the Florida Association of Realtors says that Jacksonville's median house price is more affordable than in several other major Florida cities. Nationwide, per Payscale, Jacksonville's housing expenses are 13% lower than average and its utility prices 3% lower. Healthcare costs, too, are ranked as more affordable in Jacksonville, albeit slightly. Statistics compiled by iStorage.com indicate that's the case as compared to the national as well as statewide averages of other major cities.

Moreover, Florida is one of seven states that does not levy any personal income tax. So, a larger percentage of what you earn remains in your pocket. Bankrate.com says that according to 2021 rankings from the American Legislative Exchange Council, four of the top 10 states with the strongest economic outlook do not charge an income tax. Part of that might be because those states attract more workers. Jacksonville's edge in the job market comes as well from its diversity of business. Some of the key local industries include financial services, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and military/defense contracting.

Jacksonville is a city of opportunity, and many who have chosen the historic districts as home have adopted the motto "JAX—it's easier here!" The economic strength of the area comes, in part, from entrepreneurial investment, particularly in the retail and restaurant sectors. You needn't go far to find a unique boutique or a family-owned eatery.

For those on a budget, Jacksonville has several farmers' markets around town that are overflowing with locally grown goods sold at reduced prices. Jacksonville also has an extensive list of charitable organizations that bless those in need and appeal to those seeking giving opportunities.

All of that's great news for residents! For visitors, the news is just as favorable. Jacksonville, Florida is one of the 15 Best Budget Travel Vacations by the Beach, according to Tripadvisor. And it's more than just nearby shore beaches that the historic districts of Jacksonville have in store for you.

4. YEAR-ROUND FUN

Another reason to love it here is that Jacksonville offers a treasure trove of year-round fun. With an average of 221 sunny days per year, outdoor activities are in abundance. The warm waves of the Atlantic shore are within a ½-hour drive of the historic neighborhoods. The St. Johns, Florida's longest river, is the central feature of Jacksonville. Its lazy northern flow invites bountiful fishing, boating, kayaking, and water bird viewing.

For those preferring activities on dry land, Jacksonville has the largest urban park system in the entire nation, more than 80,000 acres worth. Enjoy green spaces for picnicking, trails for biking, and paths for pet walking. Plan to visit over 2,000 animals and 1,000 plant species at Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens. Popular as well are gardening clubs.

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The city hosts more than 20 annual music and food events. One is the huge Jacksonville Jazz Festival that takes place every Memorial Day weekend. Spanning over 15 downtown blocks, the celebration honors all things jazz with free concerts and local food. The Jacksonville Taco and Tequila Festival features Mexican cuisine from local restaurants, tequila stations, craft margaritas, live music, and more—all in Riverside Park. San Marco rolls out a red carpet every year for the Jacksonville Film Festival, paying tribute to independent film makers across a wide variety of genres. Dozens of films are screened over the course of a weekend for an audience of local, national, and international festivalgoers.

Appealing to sports enthusiasts, Jacksonville has several of its own professional teams with local venues. The Jaguars of the NFL have TIAA Bank Field as their home stadium. Calling VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena home are the Icemen, a minor league hockey team affiliated with the New York Rangers; the Sharks, a professional indoor football team; and the Giants, a minor league basketball team. Hodges Stadium on the University of North Florida campus is popular for the Ospreys' soccer tournaments as well as track and field events. And there is no shortage of golf greens or tennis courts in Jacksonville, as country clubs number by the dozen.



Even when it's raining, there's lots to do in and around the historic districts. There are multiple cultural venues with theatre options for stage shows and movies. San Marco has two of note: Theatre Jacksonville, one of the oldest continually producing community theatres in the nation, and San Marco Theatre, opened in 1938. There's Sun-Ray Cinema at 5 Points and, downtown since 1927, the Florida Theatre. If your preference for fun is something more academic, Jacksonville has 21 public library branches throughout Duval County, including several

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within the historic districts. There are also neighborhood book clubs to join and writing workshops to attend.

Jacksonville's art scene is thriving. Vibrantly colored murals, masterpieces from the brushes of local artists, can be found adorning wood fences and concrete building walls throughout the historic districts. Attend the Riverside Arts Market every Saturday morning under the Fuller Warren Bridge where artists and artisans display and sell their original creations. For more formal art appreciation, visit the following top three of many more local museums.

Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens was ranked by Trips To Discover among the top 12 places to see art in all of Florida and has nearly 5,000 objects in its permanent collection. Jacksonville's MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville) features changing exhibition galleries along with permanent works and a children's area. The MOSH (Museum of Science & History) offers daily programs five days per week and is currently running through January 2023 a Bold City Bicentennial special exhibition on the third floor.

In celebration of the city's 200 years, don't miss an additional exhibit at City Hall that will run through the last day of December 2022 where you can learn the story of Jacksonville's formation as a town in 1882, the evolution of the historic neighborhoods, and the growth of the region into what it is today—the largest city by area in the contiguous U.S.

Jacksonville is a city filled with fun. There's never a dull day around the historic districts unless you want it to be. Interstates 10 and 95 running through Jacksonville make for easy travel to other destinations. But with all that's here, why would you want to?



MOCA'S - PROJECT ATRIUM: MAUD COTTER WAS FEATURED AT THE MUSEUM BACK IN 2022.

© Maud Cotter, *without stilling*, 2017-2018, finnish birch ply, weights, 3.5 x 3.5 x 3.5 m, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2021. Courtesy the artist and domobaal. Photography by Denis Mortell.



5. WORLD-CLASS HEALTHCARE

To enjoy all that Jacksonville has to offer, it's imperative to remain in tip-top shape. Maintenance of mind and body and tending to overall wellness is a key attitude of those in the historic districts. No one likes to think of illness and accident, but if the unfortunate should occur, feel secure knowing that, in Jacksonville, you're in good hands. This is a city of world-class healthcare for the entire family at all stages of life, from prenatal to hospice. The following list of Jacksonville hospitals and health-related organizations is by no means exhaustive.

Baptist Health is a complete system of centers and services committed to physical, mental, and behavioral health. They underscore social responsibility and focus on preventing illness as much as servicing illness should it occur. MD Anderson is known throughout the area as cancer specialists. There are Wolfson and Nemours that focus on children, with a Ronald McDonald House nearby to accommodate their families. Ascension St. Vincent's is a trusted provider for primary and specialty care of children, adolescents, and adults. There's Mayo Clinic, where physicians, researchers, and educators collaborate to offer comprehensive care within a multitude of adult medical and surgical specialties. UF Health is another leader in the education of health professionals while providing quality care to patients. For acute care needs around the clock, there are three distinct locations of HCA Florida Memorial for maternity, cardiology, and orthopedic issues. Naval Hospital Jacksonville serves uniformed service members, military retirees, and their family members. Many turn to Community Hospice of Northeast Florida for palliative care and bereavement services.

There are also private medical and surgical practices as well as physician groups. Chiropractic, bariatric, and geriatric services abound. Blood banks and nursing homes in addition to centers for dialysis, imaging, rehabilitation, and mental health have homes here. Dental practices are plentiful and include cosmetics, endodontics, periodontics, and orthodontics. Health and fitness clubs are easy to find. There's body sculpting and stem cell regenerative therapies available too. Traditional pharmaceuticals and alternative modalities, there's access to both according to preference.

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6. COMMUNITY BOND


Jacksonville is a people-oriented city, and the historic neighborhoods are evidence of that. Each district expresses its own style and flavor, much like its inhabitants.

This region appeals to a diverse population. Residents consist of a range of ages from infants to those over 100 years old! It's not unusual here to see recent college graduates return to their childhood neighborhood, often on the same street, to raise their own children in the same vicinity. You'll meet young families buying starter homes from senior citizens who've lived in the same house for 30+ years. Single professionals live alongside these growing families as well as new retirees. They span an economic spectrum, and they come from ethnic backgrounds that cross borders all around the globe, adding to the city a robust cuisine, eclectic culture, and an assortment of languages.

Diversity on all levels is celebrated here. And amid the differences, there's a sense of community woven in the very fabric of the established, historic districts. The urban mix encourages business and social connections among these diverse groups of people. Neighbors become customers; clients become friends.

That sense of community is another reason to love it here in the historic districts of Jacksonville, not to mention all there is to see and do. With all that's happening here, it might be hard to keep track. To stay in the know, rely on The Resident Community News Group, a local family-owned publishing company. Their array of print and online publications serves as a conduit to the community.

Don't miss *The Resident Community News*, reporting about all the good that's going on around town. Two editions are distributed monthly, one on each side of the river, keeping the content hyper-local.

In addition to the monthly newspapers, there are two annual magazines to look forward to. Visit Circlescharityregister.com to read Northeast Florida's premier social datebook and charity register magazine. The slick, glossy annual publication provides insight and acts as a guide to philanthropy in town; it showcases black tie events, charity walks, features stories of triumph as well as giving opportunities that assist the nonprofit sector helping neighbors in need. And, of course, there's *Historic Life*, this community and newcomers guide that welcomes new residents and visitors, folks just like you, to the area. Just a few more reasons why those who live here, work here, and play here love it here! 



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