

What to Look for When You Visit a Potential Retirement Destination

When you visit a place that you are seriously considering moving to, here are some things to consider. Some of these factors are objective, but many are subjective. Not all of them may be important to you.

You may wish to print a copy for each place you are considering and use the spaces provided to note your observations.

The purpose of these suggestions is to prompt you to discover what it will be like to live in an area on a day-to-day basis, to the greatest extent possible. Remember, you're not going as a tourist.

Potential retirement destination: _____

Go to the grocery stores and shopping malls and notice the selection and prices.

Notice whether most shopping centers are fully occupied, or if there are a lot of empty storefronts and abandoned buildings.

When you go to stores and shopping centers, are there security guards? If so, they are there for a reason.

If you're a churchgoer, visit a church of your faith.

If you are an avid reader, visit the local bookstores and libraries. The library is a very useful stop, because in addition to books it is likely to have a lot of other information about the community. See if it offers programs or classes that might be of interest.

Visit the local senior center and learn what services they offer.

Ride the public transit.

Evaluate the ease of walking or riding a bicycle.

Eat at the local restaurants, not the national chains or tourist-oriented places, unless you are most likely to eat at the chains once you move there. Do you have to ask for a key to use the restroom?

Drive throughout the area and get a feel for the neighborhoods. Once you have identified neighborhoods where you could envision yourself living, how close are stores, restaurants, and medical facilities?

Tour a few homes for sale or apartments for rent in neighborhoods where you think you might live if you were to move there.

Gather some local publications that are distributed for free at the entrances to grocery stores, restaurants, or other well-traveled places. Learn what issues concern local residents and what local activities are mentioned. What kind of events or festivals does the area have? Publications that contain local real estate listings are useful as well.

Talk to some local residents if you can. Ask what they like most and least about living there. Try to gauge the extent to which they are welcoming of outsiders.

Find a few assisted living facilities or nursing homes and see whether they are places you would want to live someday in the future if necessary. Walk into the local hospital and look around.

Depending on your interests, try to determine what local clubs and organizations exist. For example, if you're into community theatre, what are the options?

Depending on your interests, are there outdoor recreational options that will satisfy you? Are the public amenities, such as roads and parks, well maintained? Does the area have a litter problem?

Notice the age and condition of houses and buildings. Especially in older cities, is the area staying rejuvenated, or does everything seem old and tired?

Is there a lot of graffiti?

Do you see a lot of homeless people and beggars?

What things are there to see or do on an ongoing basis? What is there to explore within 100 miles? Keep in mind that many attractions are places you will visit just once, or perhaps only occasionally when you are entertaining out-of-town guests. Places like museums, galleries, or other attractions where the displays change over time will provide more interest in the long run.

What other impressions of this place have you formed?