

Tips for Travelers Flying into Tampa International Airport

*Presented by Edward Ringwald,
Interstate275Florida.com webmaster*

Welcome to the Tampa Bay region! With three great cities – St. Petersburg, Tampa and Clearwater – plus 20+ miles of beautiful beaches of the Gulf of Mexico from Clearwater Beach to Pass-A-Grille and Ft. DeSoto Park, I am glad you chose our area of our great state of Florida to vacation, to do business or to decide on living in our area. Whatever your desires are, you will find plenty to see and do in the Tampa Bay metropolitan area.

Most visitors usually arrive by way of airplane, passing through the World's Finest Airport, [Tampa International Airport](#). In this discussion I will show you how to navigate through the World's Finest Airport in order to get to where you want to go in the Tampa Bay region.

Arrival at Tampa International Airport

More than likely you will see the outline of our three principal bridges crossing Tampa Bay – Courtney Campbell Causeway, Howard Frankland Bridge and Gandy Bridge – as your plane descends for touchdown and pulls into the gate at Tampa International Airport. Once your plane pulls up to the gate you will exit through a jetway – a small bridge between the plane and the gate - to go into the airside building.

Once inside the airside building follow the signs to board the tram – which is called the airside shuttle – to go to the main terminal building called the Landside terminal building. Depending on your airline you will follow a color code, Red or Blue, to the escalator which will lead you to the first floor and the baggage claim area for your airline.

Keep in mind that once you pass the demarcation point within the airside – which is marked with more than adequate signage – you will have to re-enter through security. This is something you may want to keep in mind if you have to speak with a representative from your airline upon arrival.

For our International Visitors

Should you arrive on an international flight such as British Airways from London's Gatwick Airport or any other international flight and you did not go through United States preclearance, you will step into Airside F and be directed to United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in order to clear immigration and customs. You will retrieve your baggage just before you clear customs, as CBP officials have the right under United States federal law to inspect your baggage.

Be sure that you have your proper documentation in order before you approach the CBP booths. Proper documentation depends on your nationality, but it will be at least your passport. Some countries are part of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) in which citizens of select countries can travel to the United States without a visa. For those of you that your country is not part of the VWP, you have to get a visa in advance of your arrival.

CBP officers will check your documentation which includes your passport, your U.S. visa (if required) as well as your customs declaration. You may be asked for documentation that will prove that your visit to the United States is just that – coming to visit and not intending to immigrate. Having items such as a hotel reservation confirmation (with the street address of the hotel you are staying at) as well as return tickets back home at the conclusion of your stay should be helpful.

You may also be asked to open your baggage if the CBP officer requests it. The CBP officer is well within his or her rights to ask you, as that request carries the full force of United States federal law. After all, CBP officers are federal law enforcement officers.

After everything is said and done, the CBP officer will stamp your passport which will contain among other things your admission date. The CBP officer will also do a quick scan of your passport that will create an electronic version of the Form I-94 if you are from a country other than a Visa Waiver Program country or Canada. Recently CBP has transitioned from the paper Form I-94 to the electronic Form I-94 for travelers that arrive via air or sea; however, if you arrive on the land border the paper Form I-94 continues to be issued. Electronic Form I-94's can be viewed by visiting CBP's I-94 website at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/>.

After you clear immigration and customs you will want to have your baggage transported from the immigration and customs area at Airside F to the baggage claim area on the first floor of the landside terminal building; there are no carts available in any of the airside and you are not permitted to take a cart onto the airside shuttles. Take advantage of this opportunity; this service is free.

Now if you are coming from an international location where you have gone through United States CBP preclearance (such as Canada and a few other places), *you will not have to clear customs and immigration when you land.* You will simply exit the airplane, board the airside shuttle and proceed to the baggage claim area on the first floor of the landside terminal building to claim your baggage like you would a domestic USA flight.

Proceed on the escalator to the 1st Floor and the baggage claim area. Once you retrieve your baggage from the baggage claim area where you go next depends on which ground transportation option you select or if someone is picking you up.

Rental Cars

Tampa International Airport's Rental Car Center is now open for business!

To get to the Rental Car Center, simply proceed from the airside shuttle exit to the area between the shuttles for Airsides B and C. This is where you will take the SkyConnect train from the landside terminal building to the Rental Car Center facility. The train ride is only five to seven minutes and you don't have to wait for

shuttle buses. Once you arrive at the Rental Car Center station simply proceed to the rental car company of your choice.

Airport Shuttle Service

The primary provider of airport shuttle service is SuperShuttle Tampa Bay, as well as a few other companies providing service to outlying areas such as Sarasota or Spring Hill. SuperShuttle Tampa Bay maintains a booth if you need a ride to your hotel from the airport; be sure you have the address of your hotel handy so that the agent on duty can charge you the correct fees and have you board the correct vehicle. Fees depend on your destination but are much cheaper than a taxicab if you are on a budget.

Shuttle Services Operated by your Hotel

Many hotels, especially those within close proximity of Tampa International Airport, operate a shuttle service which will take you directly to your hotel. Check with your hotel to see if this service is offered.

There is a phone located in the baggage claim area that will put you in touch directly with your hotel to arrange for pickup. As a backup, have your cell phone and the number of your hotel handy.

Taxicab Service

The primary provider of taxicab service is either Yellow Cab of Tampa or United Cab. Simply proceed outside to the arrival drive and press one of the buttons marked or advise the attendant on duty (the attendant will be standing behind a lectern) to call a cab. The next available driver will pick you up and take you where you need to go. Fares depend on your destination; for example a taxi ride from Tampa International Airport to downtown St. Petersburg would probably run you about \$25 to \$30. *There is a minimum fare when you take a taxicab from Tampa International Airport; keep this in mind.*

Moreover, taxi travel from Tampa International Airport to a destination in downtown Tampa (including Tampa Union Station, the Amtrak station in Tampa) is a flat \$25 as of 2014. Rates and fares are subject to change.

Uber Ridesharing

As soon as you have collected your baggage from baggage claim on Level 1, open the Uber app on your smartphone and request your Uber pickup. When you open your Uber app you should be greeted with a "Welcome to Tampa International Airport" message and the app will walk you through the steps to request your Uber ride.

You will see the price for your Uber ride on the app and it is charged to the credit card you placed on file when you first set up your Uber account. No cash monies are ever exchanged between you and the Uber driver; even your tip to the Uber driver is all done through the app.

As soon as you confirm your Uber ride, the driver will contact you to confirm which part of the airside you need to be picked up from (red or blue) and which airline. As

your Uber driver will pick you up from the arrival area on Level 1, be sure you are ready to go as the Uber driver is not permitted to wait for you in the arrival drive.

Charter Buses

If you are traveling as a group and your group will be riding on a charter bus, your bus will be waiting for you in the ground transportation waiting area. Simply proceed to the ground transportation waiting area and follow the instructions from your charter bus company. This also applies for those taking a charter bus to the Port of Tampa to embark on a cruise.

Public Transit

As Tampa International Airport is located in Hillsborough County, the provider of public transit is Hillsborough Area Regional Transit, more known to Tampa Bay region residents as HARTline. HARTline operates a system of public buses throughout Tampa and Hillsborough County with connections to St. Petersburg and Clearwater via the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority, or PSTA. In addition, HARTline operates the streetcar service between the Ybor City entertainment district and downtown Tampa. The HARTline stop at Tampa International Airport is located at the east end of the red baggage claim next to Baggage Claim Belt No. 15 (that's the baggage claim area for Southwest Airlines); there you can view the route map and schedule.

Public transit in the Tampa Bay region is spotty in some areas and not much is available on the weekends save for the major routes. For this reason, and especially if you have baggage with you, use of a taxi cab, Uber or renting a car for the duration of your stay is highly recommended.

Someone is meeting you

Due to enhanced airport security instituted after the tragedy on 11 September 2001, only ticketed passengers are allowed at the airdises. However, if you have a specific need to meet your party at the gate (such as children traveling alone), you will have to get a gate pass which is issued by the airline involved. Remember to bring government issued photo ID¹ in order to receive a gate pass. Otherwise, you may meet your party either at the Landside terminal building (3rd Level) or the Baggage Claim area (1st Level).

Another option is the cell phone lot located adjacent to the economy parking garage. To get there take the exit for the Post Office and follow the signs to the cell phone lot. Once at the cell phone lot there is an electronic message board showing what flights have arrived; simply monitor the board for your party's incoming flight. Once the message board states that the flight has arrived, TIA authorities recommend a wait of 20 minutes to allow time for transit through the terminal and baggage retrieval.

Waiting for your party in the arrival drive is not permitted. The airport police will inform you to move your vehicle if you are not actively loading in the arrival drive. Same thing goes for the departure drive as well. So, you may want to avail yourself

¹ Government issued photo ID includes: Passport, US Passport Card, drivers license or state issued ID.

of the cell phone lot or the short-term/long-term parking garage; after all, the first hour is free!

Exiting Tampa International Airport and getting to your destination

OK, now that you have your luggage together and you got your rental car with you, you are ready to navigate the highway network of the metropolitan Tampa Bay region to get where you need to go! Whether it's your first time here in the Tampa Bay region or you are a repeat visitor, navigating our highway network can be a challenge especially for the uninitiated. But you will make it to where you need to go!

Obviously the first thing you will do is to exit the airport. While you are on Tampa International Airport territory there are signs marked leading you to the airport exit.

If you have not been to the Tampa Bay region in the past few years, you will notice that things are different as far as exiting the airport is concerned. Ramps have been reconstructed and getting to Tampa, St. Petersburg or Clearwater is different than what you were used to, not to mention the opening of the Rental Car Center located by the Economy Parking Garage. But take heart: More better and larger signage has been installed that will assist you in getting where you want to go.

By the way, for our British visitors coming into the Tampa Bay region on British Airways please be aware that Florida as well as the rest of the United States drives on the right side of the road just like continental Europe. Rental cars will have the steering wheel on the left front side of the vehicle, hence the name "left hand drive". This will take some getting used to but you will make it! The terms Motorway and Interstate Highway mean the same thing.



If you are headed to Clearwater via FL 60 or north via the Veterans Expressway (FL Toll 589): Be sure to use the right lane marked for FL 60 west and FL Toll 589 north.

If you are headed to St. Petersburg: Use the left lane and take the flyover that goes to your left. This will place you directly onto Interstate 275 southbound to St. Petersburg. (NOTE: There is no exit between the entrance of the left flyover and Exit 32, FL 687/4 St N in St. Petersburg, so be careful!).

If you are headed to Tampa: Use the center or right lane and take the flyover that goes to the right. This will place you onto FL 60 east which will take you to Interstate 275 northbound to Tampa. Also use the flyover to the right to reach Cypress Street as well as FL 616 east, Spruce Street.²

The Metropolitan Tampa Bay Region Highway Network

Three principal Interstate highways and a number of other major highways make up the basic highway network of the Tampa Bay region:

Interstate 275: At 59 miles long, Interstate 275 is the major Interstate highway that runs through the metropolitan areas of Tampa and St. Petersburg. The Howard Frankland Bridge is a bridge connecting Tampa with St. Petersburg crossing Tampa Bay while the Sunshine Skyway Bridge is a scenic cable-stayed bridge offering panoramic views of Tampa Bay as well as connecting St. Petersburg and points south such as Bradenton and Sarasota. In St. Petersburg two spurs serve the downtown St. Petersburg area, Interstate 375 and Interstate 175.



Interstate 275 shield commonly seen in the Tampa Bay region

Interstate 75: Part of the major north-south Interstate highway that runs from its national northern terminus in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan to its national southern terminus in Miami at the Palmetto Expressway (FL 826), Interstate 75 runs east of the Tampa metropolitan area proper and serves the communities of Sun City Center/Ruskin, Riverview, Brandon, Temple Terrace as well as New Tampa. Interstate 75 in Florida is 472 miles long.

² Use Spruce Street to reach International Plaza (an upscale shopping mall adjacent to Tampa International Airport) or Raymond James Stadium.

Interstate 4: Another Florida based Interstate highway running from its western terminus at Interstate 275 in Tampa to its eastern terminus at Interstate 95 in Daytona Beach for 132 miles, Interstate 4 runs basically across the state until it reaches Orlando and then it turns in a northeastward direction to its eastern Daytona Beach terminus. Interstate 4 is the route most travelers take to access the Orlando area attractions such as Disney World, Sea World and Universal Studios Florida from the Tampa Bay region.

US 19: Part of a major highway running the gulf coast of the state, US 19 serves the western half of the Tampa/St. Petersburg area such as New Port Richey, Port Richey, Tarpon Springs, Clearwater, Largo, Pinellas Park as well as St. Petersburg. The section of US 19 from 126 Av N in Pinellas Park to FL 580 north of Clearwater is freeway standard and more sections of US 19 are either freeway standard or in the process of being upgraded to freeway standard. A spur of US 19, Alternate US 19, serves the downtowns proper of Clearwater and Largo as well as Seminole.

US 41: Part of a major highway that basically parallels Interstate 75 throughout Florida, US 41 serves communities such as Land O' Lakes (which is north of Tampa) as well as the communities on the eastern shore of Tampa Bay such as Apollo Beach and Ruskin. In Tampa a spur of US 41 serves the downtown Tampa area as Business US 41. South of Tampa US 41 becomes part of a highway called the Tamiami Trail which runs from Tampa to Miami. The scenic part of the Tamiami Trail is between Naples and Miami offering a spectacular view of the Everglades.

If you decide to take an excursion to Miami by way of the scenic Tamiami Trail, it is recommended that you do so during daylight hours. The section of Tamiami Trail (US 41) from Naples to Miami is two lanes and cell phone coverage is believed to be unreliable in the area compared to Alligator Alley to the north if in the event you need assistance.

US 301: Part of a major highway running from the Georgia state line near Jacksonville to its southern national terminus in Sarasota, US 301 is basically a four-lane highway with some two-lane sections and travels through the communities of Dade City, Zephyrhills, Riverview, Parrish and south to Bradenton and Sarasota.

US 92: Paralleling Interstate 4 from its western terminus at 4 St N and 5 Av N in downtown St. Petersburg to Daytona Beach, US 92 is basically a two-lane highway with the obvious exception of the metropolitan areas US 92 runs through. The Gandy Bridge carries US 92 over Tampa Bay connecting St. Petersburg with Tampa.

Lee Roy Selmon Crosstown Expressway (FL Toll 618): Running the southern portion of Tampa and into downtown Tampa and eastward to Interstate 75 and Brandon, the Lee Roy Selmon Crosstown Expressway – named after the former Tampa Bay Buccaneers player – provides travelers with access from the Brandon area to the Ybor City Historic District and downtown Tampa and vice versa, as well as a connection to St. Petersburg via the Gandy Bridge (US 92/Gandy Blvd) as the highway's southern terminus is at Gandy Boulevard. A reversible high level bridge open during the morning and afternoon rush hours provides commuters with quick and easy access between Brandon and downtown Tampa.

Veterans Expressway/Suncoast Parkway (FL Toll 589): Opened in 1994 and 2000 respectively, this 56-mile toll highway connects Interstate 275 and Tampa International Airport with destinations on the Nature Coast such as Spring Hill and

Brooksville in Hernando County and Crystal River in Citrus County via a connection with US 98. An express lane section on the Veterans Expressway was recently opened.

FL State Road 60: A cross state highway from Clearwater Beach to Vero Beach on the Florida East Coast, FL 60 provides travelers with access to the heart of Central Florida including communities such as Bartow and Lake Wales. FL 60 is known by several different names in the Tampa Bay region alone: Gulf To Bay Blvd. in Clearwater, Kennedy Blvd. and Adamo Drive in Tampa, and Brandon Blvd. in Brandon. The Courtney Campbell Causeway carries FL 60 over Tampa Bay connecting Tampa with Clearwater.

Speaking of Florida state roads, all Florida state roads are marked with a distinctive shield outlining the state of Florida. This is important to remember especially if you are flying in from out of state.



Example of a Florida state route shield

How do I get to...

St. Petersburg and the beaches of southern Pinellas County (St. Pete Beach, Treasure Island, Madeira Beach, the Redington Beaches and Indian Rocks Beach): Follow the airport exit to Interstate 275 south for St. Petersburg. Once on Interstate 275 south cross the Howard Frankland Bridge; where you will want to exit depends on your destination:

<i>If your destination is:</i>	<i>You may want to use this exit:</i>
Downtown St. Petersburg (The Pier or SunDial (formerly BayWalk))	23A – Interstate 375 east. Proceed to end of highway and follow signs.
Downtown St. Petersburg (Tropicana Field or Mahaffey Theater)	22 – Interstate 175 east. Exit at 8 St S for Tropicana Field or proceed to end of highway for Mahaffey Theater.
Downtown St. Petersburg medical facilities (Bayfront Medical Center and Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital)	22 – Interstate 175 east to 6 St S. Exit at 6 St S and turn right. All Children’s is on your left and Bayfront is on your right.
University of South Florida St. Petersburg Campus	22 – Interstate 175 east to end of highway. Turn right at 2 St S and go south one block to campus.
Indian Rocks Beach	31 – Ulmerton Road/FL 688 west
Indian Shores	28 – Gandy Blvd/FL 694 west through Pinellas Park and Seminole.
Lealman or Kenneth City	26 – 54 Av N west. Lealman is one mile ahead while Kenneth City is three miles away from Interstate 275.
Madeira Beach, the Redington Beaches or the VA Medical Center at Bay Pines	25 – 38 Av N west. Proceed to Tyrone Blvd. (Alternate US 19) and turn right.

Sunken Gardens	24 – 22 Av N east to 4 St N, then right on 4 St N and Sunken Gardens will be on left side of 4 St N
Treasure Island	23B – 5 Av N – but proceed straight ahead to Central Avenue and then go west on Central Avenue
South Pasadena and St Pete Beach	23B – 5 Av N – but proceed straight ahead to Central Avenue and then go west on Central Avenue to Pasadena Blvd. Left at Pasadena Blvd.
St. Pete Beach and Pass-A-Grille	17 – FL 682 west via Pinellas Bayway (50 cent toll for Bayway) to Gulf Blvd.
Tierra Verde and Ft. DeSoto Park <i>(As of January 2012, there is a \$5.00 entrance fee for Ft. DeSoto Park)</i>	17 – FL 682 west via Pinellas Bayway (50 cent toll for Bayway). Left at FL 679 and proceed south across first bridge for Tierra Verde and second bridge for Ft. DeSoto Park (35 cent toll is collected on the second bridge)
Pinellas Park	28 – Gandy Blvd/FL 694 west. You will come into Pinellas Park as you cross the US 19 overpass. Name changes from Gandy to Park Blvd. at US 19.
Seminole	28 – Gandy Blvd/FL 694 west. Proceed through Pinellas Park for about three miles. Name changes from Gandy to Park Blvd. at US 19. You are in Seminole when you arrive at Alternate US 19 intersection.
Largo	31 – Ulmerton Road/FL 688 west to Roosevelt Blvd./FL 686 west. Bear right onto FL 686. Name changes from Roosevelt Blvd. to East Bay Drive at US 19 interchange.

Clearwater, Clearwater Beach, Belleair Beaches: Follow FL 60 west which will take you across the Courtney Campbell Causeway. The Courtney Campbell Causeway is a scenic parkway offering a great view of Tampa Bay on either side as you make your way to Clearwater. Once you see the overpass for the Bayside Bridge you are in Clearwater and FL 60 is also known as Gulf To Bay Blvd. The second overpass will be for US 19 as you head west on FL 60.

For Clearwater Beach, Sand Key and the Belleair Beaches continue west on FL 60 and follow the signs to the beaches. You will cross the newly opened Memorial Causeway Bridge on your way which is a majestic high bridge offering a spectacular view of the beaches as you head west. The end of FL 60 will be a roundabout and it is strongly recommended that you be in the proper lane before you approach the roundabout. For Sand Key and the Belleair Beaches you will go south on Gulf Blvd. and Sand Key will be signposted before you approach the roundabout.

If you're looking for the Clearwater Marine Aquarium – the home of Winter the Dolphin and where the movies *Dolphin Tale* and *Dolphin Tale 2* were filmed – it's located off of the Memorial Causeway just before you get to Clearwater Beach. Coming from Tampa, head west on FL 60 across the Courtney Campbell Causeway into Clearwater, cross the newly opened Memorial Causeway Bridge and turn right at the first traffic signal, Island Way. Once on Island Way, turn left onto Windward Passage and you cannot miss it.

Tampa:

Downtown Tampa including the Tampa Convention Center and the Amalie Arena (formerly the St. Petersburg Times Forum): Use Interstate 275 north to Exit 44, which is the Ashley, Tampa and Scott Street complex. Once in Downtown Tampa follow signs to your destination.

Ybor City: Use Interstate 275 north to Exit 45B, which is Interstate 4. Continue eastbound on Interstate 4 to Exit 1, which is 21st Street and 22nd Street. You want to turn right onto 21st Street as you exit Interstate 4. Proceed south to 7th Avenue, which is Ybor City's main street. Parking is available in nearby parking garages which you can access by following the signs. *Ybor City can get quite congested on Saturday nights as well as special events, so plan ahead. An option well worth considering is parking in one of the parking garages in downtown Tampa and taking the TECO streetcar to Ybor City in order to avoid congestion in the Ybor City area on Saturday nights as well as during special events.*

By the way, if you are looking for the well known Columbia Restaurant, it's located on 7th Avenue between 21st Street and 22nd Street. Parking for the Columbia Restaurant is either valet from 7th Avenue or you can self-park in their lot behind the restaurant, just across the railroad tracks.

Tampa Union Station (Amtrak): Use Interstate 275 north to Exit 44, but go straight onto Scott Street and follow it to Jefferson Street. Right on Jefferson Street to Cass Street. Left on Cass Street to Florida Avenue, then right on Florida Avenue across the railroad tracks. Tampa Union Station will be on the left.

Places served south of Tampa on Amtrak's Silver Star include Lakeland, Winter Haven, Sebring, Okeechobee, West Palm Beach, Deerfield Beach, Ft. Lauderdale, Hollywood and Miami. Please consult [Amtrak's web site](#) or Amtrak at 1 (800) USA-RAIL for information on train schedules and fares, as their information is constantly updated.

Brandon: Use Interstate 275 north to Exit 45B, Interstate 4. Continue eastbound on Interstate 4 to Exit 9, which is Interstate 75. Go southbound on Interstate 75 to Exit 257, which is FL 60. Turn left onto FL 60 and Brandon is straight ahead with the Brandon Town Center (a regional shopping mall) on your right as you go east on FL 60.

Or, you can use Interstate 275 north to Exit 45B, Interstate 4, and take the connector to the eastbound Selmon Crosstown Expressway, which will take you to Interstate 75 as well as Brandon and the Brandon Town Center. *Remember, the Selmon Crosstown Expressway is a cashless toll road which means tolls are collected by either SunPass or by your vehicle's license plate. More on that later.*

University of South Florida's Main Campus: Use Interstate 275 north to Exit 51, which is FL 582/Fowler Avenue. Go east on Fowler Avenue for about 3 miles and the campus will be on your left.

Busch Gardens: Use Interstate 275 north to Exit 50, FL 580/Busch Boulevard. Go east on Busch Boulevard for about 2.5 miles and Busch Gardens will be on your left. Follow signs for parking.

New Tampa community: Recommended route is to use Interstate 275 north to Exit 45B, Interstate 4 east. Continue on Interstate 4 east to Exit 9, which is Interstate 75. North on Interstate 75 to Exit 270, which is Bruce B. Downs Boulevard and the main street for the New Tampa community (you will not see New Tampa on any signs on the interstates, so be prepared!).

Or, continue north on Interstate 275 to Exit 53, which is Bearss Avenue. Eastbound on Bearss Avenue until you get to the end of the road, which will be Bruce B. Downs Boulevard. Turn left onto Bruce B. Downs and it will take you to New Tampa as well.

Citrus Park Town Center Mall: Take the Veterans Expressway (FL Toll 589) north to Exit 9, which is Gunn Highway. Left on Gunn Highway and the mall will be on your right.

International Plaza: Take FL 616 east which is also known as Spruce Street. Go east on Spruce Street to Westshore Boulevard and take a left. You cannot miss it.

Sun City Center: Use Interstate 275 north to Interstate 4, then east on Interstate 4 to the Selmon Crosstown Connector and follow signage for eastbound Selmon Crosstown Expressway to Brandon. Follow the Selmon Crosstown to its terminus at Interstate 75 and go south on Interstate 75 to Naples. Proceed south on Interstate 75 for about 17 miles to Exit 240A, which will be FL 674 east to Sun City Center. The community will be straight ahead as you go east on FL 674. *Remember, the Selmon Crosstown Expressway is a cashless toll road which means tolls are collected by either SunPass or by your vehicle's license plate.*

The Communities of the North Suncoast:

This includes the communities of the northern Tampa Bay region such as Tarpon Springs, New Port Richey, Port Richey, Spring Hill, Brooksville and Crystal River. You will want to use the Veterans Expressway/Suncoast Parkway (FL Toll 589) to assist you in reaching these destinations. Due to the great distances involved allow yourself plenty of time to reach these communities.

Tarpon Springs: Use the Veterans Expressway to Hillsborough Avenue (be sure to stay to the right to avoid paying a toll). West on Hillsborough Avenue to US 19 (the road name changes to Tampa Road in Oldsmar at the Pinellas County line), then north on US 19 to Tarpon Avenue. Left on Tarpon Avenue to all Tarpon Springs attractions including the Sponge Docks.

New Port Richey: North on the Veterans Expressway to Exit 19, FL 54 and west on FL 54 to US 19. Proceed north on US 19 to New Port Richey.

Port Richey: North on the Veterans Expressway to Exit 27, FL 52 and west on FL 52 to US 19. Proceed south on US 19 to Port Richey. Or you may follow the directions to New Port Richey as mentioned above as the two cities are next door to each other on US 19.

Spring Hill: North on the Veterans Expressway to Exit 41, Spring Hill Blvd. Left on Spring Hill Blvd. and proceed west.

Brooksville: North on the Veterans Expressway to Exit 46, FL 50. Go east on FL 50 to Brooksville. Or, you may use Interstate 275 north through Tampa to Interstate

75 north and follow Interstate 75 north to Exit 301, FL 50 and US 98 and proceed west on FL 50 to Brooksville.

Crystal River: North on the Veterans Expressway to its terminus at US 98. North on US 98 to US 19 (the two highways merge with each other) and continue north to Crystal River. You'll pass through Homosassa Springs on your way.

Again, allow plenty of time to travel to the above North Suncoast destinations due to distance and traffic conditions you may encounter.

Bradenton and Sarasota (including the Florida Railroad Museum):

You have two choices of routes from Tampa International Airport:

Via Interstate 275 through St. Petersburg: South on Interstate 275 through St. Petersburg and you will cross both the Howard Frankland Bridge and the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. There is a \$1.00 toll charged for the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. After the Sunshine Skyway Bridge continue south on Interstate 275 to its terminus with Interstate 75 and continue south on Interstate 75.

Via Interstates 275, 4 and 75 through Tampa: North on Interstate 275 until you reach Exit 45B, which is Interstate 4. East on Interstate 4 until you reach Exit 9, which is Interstate 75. Follow Interstate 75 south from there. Or, once you get onto Interstate 4 from northbound Interstate 275 take the exit to the Selmon Crosstown Expressway and follow it to southbound Interstate 75. *Remember, the Selmon Crosstown Expressway is a cashless toll road which means tolls are collected by either SunPass or by your vehicle's license plate. More on that later.*

Whatever route you take, follow the signage to the exit of your choice. The route through St. Petersburg on Interstate 275 south is shorter; however, the alternate route through Tampa is included as described above especially if in the event the Sunshine Skyway Bridge is closed.

Florida Railroad Museum, Parrish: The best way to the Florida Railroad Museum from Tampa International Airport is to use Interstate 275 south through St. Petersburg and across the Sunshine Skyway to Interstate 75 northbound to Tampa. Right after you transition off of Interstate 275 onto northbound Interstate 75 you will exit at County Road 683, which is Exit 229 to Parrish.

Or, follow Interstate 275 north to Interstate 4 which will lead you to Interstate 75 either by way of Interstate 4 or the Selmon Crosstown Expressway as described earlier. Once on Interstate 75, go south for 25 miles to County Road 683, which is Exit 229 to Parrish. The alternate route to the Florida Railroad Museum through Tampa is included if in the event the Sunshine Skyway Bridge is closed.

Head east on County Road 683 for about five miles to US 301. Go south on US 301 for about a quarter mile to 83rd Street East (the museum is adequately signposted here). East on 83rd Street East (you will see a former Post Office on the corner) and the museum's ticket office and gift shop will be in front of you. 1950's era train rides are offered on the weekends at 11 AM and 2 PM with special events scheduled throughout the year; check the museum's website at frfm.org for more information.

Outlying Florida Attractions:

Disney World including The Magic Kingdom, EPCOT and Disney Studios: North on Interstate 275 to Exit 45B, which is Interstate 4. The exit for Disney World is 62 miles from Interstate 275 and you will want to exit at Exit 62.

Sea World: North on Interstate 275 to Exit 45B, which is Interstate 4. You will be headed towards Orlando and you will want to exit at Exit 71.

Universal Studios: North on Interstate 275 to Exit 45B, which is Interstate 4. You will be headed towards Orlando and you will want to exit at Exits 75A or 75B. This exit is known as FL 435 or Kirkman Road. Follow the electronic signage as to where to exit as you approach Universal Studios.

Legoland Florida: North on Interstate 275 to Exit 45B, which is Interstate 4. Head east on Interstate 4 to Exit 27, which will be the Polk Parkway (FL Toll 570) to Lakeland and Winter Haven. East on the Polk Parkway until you reach Exit 14, FL 540 (Winter Lake Road) and continue east on FL 540 through Winter Haven. Legoland will be on your right and the attraction is well signed.

Navigating the Tampa Bay Region highway network

With a little forethought and preplanning, navigating the Tampa Bay Region's highway network can be easy for you. However, here are a few pointers you should keep in mind:

Plan your route with a map before you set out. That way, you know exactly where you are coming from and where you are going to. Remember, you have an additional resource by using Interstate275Florida.com as your guide to get you where you want to go in the Tampa Bay area; you can see the exits you will encounter before you set out especially if your journey involves Interstate 275 or the other interstate highways in the Tampa Bay region. If you rented a car your rental car company should give you a copy of a map of the Tampa Bay region or you can purchase one from a retailer. Additionally, if you have a smartphone chances are it has a mapping application with GPS capability, but ***please do not use your smartphone while driving.***

The peak traffic hours are usually between 6 to 9 AM and 4 to 7 PM Monday through Friday. On the weekends you may encounter periods of peak traffic especially in the vicinity of major sports venues such as Raymond James Stadium, the Amalie Arena (formerly the St. Petersburg Times Forum) and Tropicana Field. *This is something you may want to keep in mind if you have to be somewhere at a specific time, such as returning your rental car to catch your outgoing flight out of Tampa International Airport.*

If you are going from St. Petersburg to Tampa in the weekday afternoon, you may encounter heavy traffic on Interstate 275 north as you exit the Howard Frankland Bridge. *You may want to keep this in mind if your flight from Tampa International Airport departs in the weekday afternoon. Additionally, if your destination is not in the immediate vicinity of the Howard Frankland Bridge the Gandy Bridge (US 92) is a great alternative; if you need to reach Interstate 75 or the Brandon area you can use the Lee Roy Selmon Crosstown Expressway to get there (yes, the Crosstown is a toll road but it's worth it to beat the crowd).*

While we are on the subject of the Lee Roy Selmon Crosstown Expressway, you will notice that this highway is a toll road based on the open road tolling concept. What this means is that no cash is collected; in other words, you will not see toll collectors or toll booths anywhere on the Selmon Crosstown. The toll booths have been torn down as of late 2010.

If you also happen to drive the Selmon Crosstown from downtown Tampa to Interstate 75 or vice versa you will see the elevated express lanes. This is a three lane reversible direction road in which the direction goes from Brandon to downtown Tampa in the morning hours and the direction changes going from downtown Tampa to Brandon during the evening hours.

Should you drive the Selmon Crosstown Expressway without a SunPass your license plate is electronically captured using a digital image and you are billed for the toll which must be paid in a given amount of time or a traffic ticket may be issued. If you are driving a rental car your rental car company will bill you for the tolls incurred; check with your rental car company for more information.

Speaking of SunPass if you are going to be in the Tampa Bay Region for a week or longer you may want to consider investing in one. If you have an EZ-Pass³ from any of the member states (such as Maryland, for example) your EZ-Pass will *not* work in Florida resulting in an unpleasant surprise arriving in your mail in the form of a warning letter or a traffic citation. The SunPass website has more information and details on how to obtain one and you can access their website at <http://www.sunpass.com>.

As of 2014 a North Carolina Quick Pass and a Georgia Peach Pass will work on Florida's toll roads and bridges that accept SunPass.

To get up to the minute traffic information in the Tampa Bay Region a highly recommended resource is Florida 511, which is easily reachable on your cell phone simply by dialing 511. The system is completely voice menu driven and is easy to navigate. However, if you are near your computer you can access this information at the 511 Tampa Bay website at <http://www.fl511.com>. Additionally, the major media outlets feature traffic information during the morning and evening commute hours Monday through Friday; [Bay News 9](#) (a 24-hour local news channel in the Tampa Bay area) is well known for their traffic reports not only on the weekdays but on the weekends too.

If your destination involves the beaches of Pinellas County, be aware if you see one of these on the way to your beach destination:

³ This also includes toll tags from non-EZ-Pass states, such as FasTrak from California or GeauxPass from Louisiana.



This sign advertises that you are crossing one of the many drawbridges that connect the beaches to the mainland of Pinellas County. Most drawbridges in Pinellas County operate on a time schedule during the day (such as :20 past the hour) but Johns Pass Bridge operates on an "on demand" schedule which can result in traffic backups especially on the weekends. You may want to take this into consideration when planning your travels on the beaches of Pinellas County especially if you have to be somewhere at a given time.⁴

Florida Traffic Laws that you should know

When you are driving on the roads of the Tampa Bay region or anywhere else in Florida there is one cardinal rule to keep in mind: *The traffic laws of the State of Florida – not the laws of your home state – apply to you anytime you are traversing our great state.*

Speed Limits

Speed limits are as posted. On Interstate 275 the speed limits are as follows; I have listed the metric equivalents for the convenience of our foreign visitors:

70 mph or 110 km/h: Southern terminus to Exit 5 (US 19 south) and the Livingston Avenue underpass (north of Exit 53, Bearss Avenue) to the northern terminus.

65 mph or 105 km/h: Between Exit 5 (US 19 south) and the eastern end of the Howard Frankland bridge through St. Petersburg and from the Livingston Avenue underpass to in-between Exit 53 (Bearss Avenue) and Exit 52 (Fletcher Avenue).

60 mph or 100 km/h: North of Exit 52 (Fletcher Avenue) to north of Exit 50 (FL 580/Busch Blvd).

55 mph or 90 km/h: Between the eastern end of the Howard Frankland bridge and north of Exit 50 (FL 580/Busch Blvd), except for the 50 mph segment through downtown Tampa as described below.

50 mph or 80 km/h: Between Ashley Drive/Tampa Street (Exit 44) and Floribraska Avenue (Exit 46A) through the downtown Tampa area. 50 mph is the

⁴ For more information on the drawbridges of Pinellas County see DrawBridgeAhead.com.

speed limit on the downtown St. Petersburg feeders, Interstate 375 and Interstate 175, as well.

Within construction zones speed limits are as posted. Please make sure you reduce your speed to the speed limit within the particular construction zone you are traversing. Speeding fines are doubled for speed violations in a construction zone!

The Florida Move Over Law

A Florida law enacted recently requires you if in the event you see a law enforcement and/or a wrecker vehicle on the side of the road to move over to the next lane. If this is impractical or if you are on a two-lane roadway you must reduce your speed by 20 mph. This is a law for the protection of our law enforcement officers, firefighters/EMT's and emergency wrecker personnel. Violations are dealt with by issuance of a Florida Uniform Traffic Citation.

DUI – Driving Under the Influence

The legal limit for DUI in Florida is .08.

If a law enforcement officer suspects you are under the influence, expect to be placed in handcuffs and taken to the county jail depending on the location where you are taken into custody. Expect to remain at the county jail until you are sober.

The penalty for a first occurrence of DUI is:

- Fine of at least \$500.00 and not more than \$1,000.00. Blow a blood alcohol level of .15 or more and the fines get steeper – at least \$1,000.00 and not more than \$2,000.00.
- 50 hours of community service.
- Driver's License taken away from you for six months. The State of Florida does not care if you are from out of state – our laws are our laws.
- Impoundment of your vehicle for ten days – your rental car company will not like it if their car gets impounded because of your misdeed and you will probably no longer be able to rent a car from your rental car company in the future.
- Jail term of up to six months at the discretion of the court. Blow a .15 and it's up to nine months. Imagine trading that hotel room for a cramped jail cell.
- Probation for up to one year.
- Penalties are more severe if bodily injury or death is involved (criminal charges escalate into felony criminal charges, which can mean heavier fines, commitment to the Florida Department of Corrections and permanent driver license revocation)
- Mandatory DUI school – no ifs, ands or buts.
- Attorneys fees.
- A record for DUI that follows you the rest of your life – Florida law prohibits withholding of adjudication of guilt on DUI charges. Try to explain that to a prospective employer or a Canadian immigration official if you try to take a trip to Canada, especially if you're an American citizen. Or, if you are an international traveler try to explain that to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as local law enforcement has already referred you as part of the booking process and the next thing you find out is that upon

completion of your jail or prison sentence (if imposed) for DUI you as a foreign national are not being released out the door – instead, you are released to the custody of an ICE officer who is processing the paperwork (and putting you on the next flight out of the United States) to have you excluded (read banned) from the United States for a set period of time or maybe for life.

The fact that you are from out of state or even a foreign tourist does not exempt you from Florida's DUI laws while you are visiting the Tampa/St. Petersburg area. ***Don't let your Tampa Bay region (or any other part of Florida) visit include a stay in the county jail – if you drink, don't drive!***

In Case Of Accident

Should you be involved in an accident, whether it may be on Interstate 275 or any other highway in the Tampa Bay region, do the following:

- If your vehicle is damaged but moveable, move your vehicle to the side of the highway. *This is for your protection and to help keep traffic moving.* Even one small minor accident on Interstate 275 can turn into a major backup in the matter of a few minutes.
- Render first aid to anyone who is injured.
- ***Do not leave the scene of an accident you may be involved into! In Florida, leaving the scene of an accident is a crime punishable by fines and/or imprisonment! The penalties for hit and run have recently been enhanced and some hit and runs are now felonies!***
- Call the Florida Highway Patrol on your cell phone by dialing *347 (that translates into *FHP). ***If there are any injuries, dial 911 to request paramedics.*** Nonetheless, give the 911 or FHP operator your location.
- The officer will complete an accident report and will give you a copy to keep for your records, especially for insurance purposes.
- If you are driving a rental car, immediately contact your rental car company for instructions. Be sure you have a completed copy of your accident report.

Right Turns on Red

Right turns on red are permitted in Florida, provided the way is safe after coming to a complete stop. However, be aware of signs where you are not allowed to make a right turn on red. Be careful around intersections with red light photo enforcement cameras.

Red Light Photo Enforcement Cameras

More and more cities in Florida are using red traffic signal enforcement cameras in an attempt to get motorists to stop for red lights. The equipment is placed at intersections where red light running is prevalent and the intersections themselves are marked with a "Photo Enforced" sign before the intersection.

No matter what car you have, whether it may be a rental or your own car, please be sure to approach all intersections, especially those with red light cameras, by reducing your speed so that you can stop if the light turns red. Red light camera enforcement is by the equipment taking a photo and short video of your vehicle and

sent to the police department having jurisdiction over the intersection in question. Citations issued are mailed to the owner of the vehicle.

If you happen to violate a red light at a camera equipped intersection and you are in a rental car, the citation is sent to the car's owner which will be your rental car company. Depending on the policies set by your rental car company, either 1) the rental car company will pay the citation and charge your credit card for the citation amount, or 2) notify the law enforcement agency that issued the red light camera citation to assign the citation to you; in that case you will receive a letter from the law enforcement agency along with a citation for the red light.

Aggressive Driver Encounter – "Road Rage"

Unfortunately, the Tampa Bay region has its share of aggressive drivers practically on the same level as Orlando and Miami/Ft. Lauderdale. These drivers have plenty of excuses, such as being late to work or hurrying home to catch the latest and greatest episode of *American Idol*. Should you encounter an aggressive driver:

- Do not engage the driver – you never know if the driver has a weapon
- Move out of the way
- Do *not* take the law into your own hands

Instead, get the tag number of the vehicle and the vehicle's description, if you can do so safely. Call the Florida Highway Patrol at *FHP (*347) and report the incident. Hopefully a trooper will be dispatched to apprehend the aggressive driver, hopefully before there is an accident. Additionally, if a weapon is ever displayed at you call 911 immediately!

Cell Phone Usage While Driving

It is against Florida law to text on your cell phone while you are driving. Violations are dealt with by issuance of a Florida Uniform Traffic Citation. Use of hands free functions on your cell phone and in your vehicle is highly recommended.

For More Information on Florida's Traffic Laws

The official Florida traffic laws are contained in Chapters 316 (State Uniform Traffic Control), 318 (Drivers Licenses) and 322 (Motor Vehicles) of the Florida Statutes. A copy of the Florida Statutes is available online at the website of the Florida Legislature at <http://www.leg.state.fl.us>. The information presented here is for the convenience of our visitors and should not be construed as legal advice. You may wish to consult with an attorney of your choice, especially if in the event you received a traffic citation and the fines are substantial.

Returning to Tampa International Airport for your return flight

When you return to Tampa International Airport to catch your return flight home here are a few recommended steps to make your exit from the Tampa Bay region a breeze.

Checking in for your flight

If you travel with a laptop computer or a smartphone or you have access to a business center with an Internet connection at your hotel, it is strongly recommended that you check in for your flight online the day before your return flight. Most major airlines offer online check in for your flight. For example, on Southwest Airlines you can check in online 24 hours in advance of your flight's departure.

Southwest Airlines passengers: If you have purchased the optional Early Bird Check-In your boarding position has been assigned at the 36 hour mark before departure. However, you still must check in beginning at the 24 hour mark before departure.

Returning your rental car



Allow plenty of time to get to Tampa International Airport due to Interstate 275 traffic and lines you may encounter once you are in the airport, especially the lines for the security checkpoint. Be aware of newly reconfigured ramps leading to the airport as a result of the recent airport interchange reconstruction projects.

If you are coming from St. Petersburg use Interstate 275 north to Exit 39, which will be FL 60 West; be sure to stay in the lane for Tampa International Airport!⁵ If you are coming from Tampa or points east use Interstate 275 south to Exit 39. If you are coming from Clearwater use the Courtney Campbell Causeway and follow the signs to the airport.

As soon as you enter Tampa International Airport on the access highway pay attention to the signs for rental car return at the Rental Car Center. Rental car return is accessed by following the signs for economy parking, then following signage for rental car return. Once you get on the ramp for rental car return, follow the signage for your rental car company.

⁵ Exits 39A-B from northbound Interstate 275 was recently reconfigured as Exit 39, which enables traffic to exit for Tampa International Airport, Clearwater, Veterans Expressway or Kennedy Blvd. Be sure to watch signage!

If you are using a taxi cab or shuttle service, be sure to make the appropriate reservations the night before your departure. If you are staying in a hotel the arrangements can be made for you, but be sure to confirm things beforehand to avoid unpleasant surprises.

If you are using Uber, use your Uber app on your smartphone to schedule your ride. As mentioned previously, prices are shown on the app and payment is made using the credit card you placed on file when you signed up for Uber. Once you schedule your ride, your Uber driver may call you to confirm your exact pickup location. Be sure to schedule your Uber ride so that you will arrive at the airport in plenty of time to check in and clear security.

If someone is dropping you off, consider using the Short Term Parking Garage. Besides, your first hour of parking is free but it was recently changed that after your first hour, parking charges begin from the time you entered the garage. You can also use the departure drive, but you must drop off your passenger immediately as no waiting is permitted.⁶

Getting to your flight

Most airlines – including Southwest Airlines – will let you check in for your flight beginning 24 hours prior to departure. Having checked in prior to arriving to the airport is preferred; if you have baggage to check in it will make the check in process easier for you.

If you are boarding an international flight (such as British Airways to London's Gatwick Airport), check with your airline as to when you have to check in and present yourself at the gate for departure. Once your airline collects your passport information this is sent to U.S. Customs and Border Protection which updates your electronic Form I-94 so that your departure from the United States is properly recorded. Citizens of countries that are part of the Visa Waiver Program as well as from Canada will not have electronic Form I-94s on record.

If you have baggage to check and/or need to check in for your flight at the airport: You will need to perform these activities at your airline's ticket counter located on the ticketing level, which is the second floor. After that you can then proceed to the transfer level on the third floor and to the airside shuttle that corresponds to your airline. Have your boarding pass and your government issued photo ID to show to the ticket checker as you board the shuttle and again to the TSA screener as you pass through security.

Again, check with your airline as to when you need to arrive to check in for your flight. If you are departing on an international flight, you will have to arrive earlier. The best time to check is the day before your flight by checking your airline's website or by calling your airline. This cannot be over-emphasized enough, especially due to heightened security.

⁶ *Bear in mind you will not be permitted to see your party depart at the gate, as the airside are restricted to ticketed passengers only. If you have a specific need (such as a child traveling alone), speak with your airline at the ticket counter about receiving a gate pass.*

*If you do not have baggage to check **and** you have checked in for your flight:* Simply proceed to the airside shuttle that corresponds to your airline. Have your boarding pass and your photo ID⁷ to show to the ticket checker as you board the shuttle and again to the TSA screener as you pass through security.

By the way, you can make the experience of clearing security much more enjoyable if you follow these tips, according to the TSA's website and based on my research:

1. Travel light – the less the better. Besides, most airlines only allow you one carry-on and one personal item, and personal items include laptop computers. Be sure to remove your laptop from its laptop bag and send both the laptop and your laptop bag as separate items through the X-Ray machine.
2. Know the 3-1-1 limit: 3 ounce or smaller containers of liquid or gel in a 1 quart size bag per 1 traveler (that's you) placed in the security bin for screening.
3. The less metal in your pockets (such as pocket change), the better. All you should have is your wallet, your car and house keys, and of course your boarding pass and photo ID.
4. Remove your shoes before you pass through the metal detector by placing them in a security bin. If the alarms go off then the TSA screener has to resolve the alarms by conducting a secondary inspection which can slow down the process.
5. *This cannot be over-emphasized enough: Inappropriate jokes and threats will not be tolerated. This includes any flippant remarks related to airport security, as TSA officers take these threats extremely seriously which can result in arrest by Tampa International Airport Police.*

The same thing goes for belligerent behavior directed at a TSA screener as well. However, if you run into a TSA screener who acts belligerent at you politely and professionally ask for the screener's name (all TSA screeners wear tags with their name and number) and ask to speak with a supervisor on duty. If this is not possible (such as having to catch your flight soon), you can also contact the TSA through their Contact Center at <http://www.tsa.gov/contact/index.shtm> or by phone at 1 (866) 289-9673.

Have a safe flight home and don't forget to come back soon!

Disclaimer: The inclusion of any business name does not imply endorsement by Edward Ringwald; it's provided simply as a service for our Tampa Bay Region visitors arriving by air.

Written by Edward Ringwald, Webmaster
EdwardRingwald.com, Interstate275Florida.com and DrawBridgeAhead.com

© 2007-2019 Edward Ringwald – All Rights Reserved Worldwide
Revised February 2019

⁷ For domestic flights, photo ID includes passport, passport card, driver's license or state issued photo ID. For international flights, a passport (passport book format for American citizens) is mandatory.