

2018
edition

MacDill Air Force Base

Moving Toolkit



The most up-to-date info
for your **2018 PCS!**

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ABOUT MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE

About

We all dream of moving to a place where we can live like we're on vacation all year round. The place where you can embrace your inner beach bum, enjoy friendly neighbors, and soak up some first-class entertainment, whether that means arts, culture, or a round of golf. For those of us lucky enough to get an assignment to MacDill Air Force Base, that's exactly what awaits!

MacDill is located four miles southwest of Tampa, Florida. It is home to the United States Air Force's 6th Air Mobility Wing, United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), United States Marine Forces Central Command (USMARCENT), United States Special Operations Command Center (USSOCCENT), the 927th Air Refueling Wing of the Air Force Reserve, as well as many support entities such as the 6th Medical Group.

First established in 1941 as Southeast Air Base, Tampa, it was renamed MacDill Field in honor of World War I aviator Colonel Leslie MacDill. Shortly after the creation of the Air Force in 1947, MacDill was again renamed as MacDill Air Force Base. MacDill has a long history as an aviation training facility. During World War II, 50,000 to 120,000 Airmen were trained at MacDill, and nine of our twelve combat groups flying B-26 "Marauders" in Europe during that time were trained at MacDill. Those trained at MacDill had the lowest loss rate of any Allied bombers.

MacDill has remained an active aviation base for most of its history. The runway was closed for a brief time in the early-to-mid-1990s due to base realignment measures. However, its aviation mission importance was quickly recognized after the runway shut down, and it is now home both to KC-135s and C-37As as well as to 3,000 professional Airmen. With all the various entities that call MacDill home, the base employs about 15,000 people and is a significant contributor to the economy in Tampa. Due to its current mission, active duty members may see longer hours than at other bases.

For military families PCSing to the area, schools and commute times (and costs) are numbered as the top two considerations when deciding where to live. While some prefer to live on base in the privatized military housing available, many choose to live off

base in order to have access to more desirable schools. Those who choose to live on base rank commute time as the number one reason why they made that decision, while those who live off base list school options as their number one decision factor.

Tampa has much to offer, whether you live on or off base. A city rich with culture and all the conveniences of a big city, combined with a mild climate and casual atmosphere, makes a tour at MacDill a welcome location for many. Plus, being only an hour from Disney World and Universal Studios means you can sneak in a visit whenever you want, or you can just relax on the beach and let the sun and the surf carry your troubles away.



About

Tampa, Florida is a city rich in history yet with a pulse in the modern day. Roughly 380,000 people call this city by the bay home. Bordered by two bodies of water, the Old Tampa Bay and the Hillsborough Bay, Tampa enjoys a flat terrain (the highest point is 48 feet above sea level) with the picturesque Hillsborough River flowing through downtown. Its proximity to the water as well as its geographic location in central Florida give Tampa a humid, subtropical climate with average year-round highs between 70 and 90 degrees (°F) and lows from 52 to 76 degrees (°F).

Although its location might suggest a propensity toward tropical storms and hurricanes, Tampa has rarely suffered major effects from any big storm. However, due to climate change, a rapidly growing population, and developmental growth, many experts consider the Tampa Bay area to be one of the most vulnerable regions in the world.

Tampa has long been a populated area. Thousands of years ago, indigenous peoples called the Tampa Bay area home. Though the arrival of Spanish explorers resulted in a decreased native population, the area was largely left alone until the United States purchased Florida from Spain in 1821. At that time, a U.S. military post was established in the present-day downtown area, and the population remained largely unchanged until the late 1880s when phosphate was discovered south of the city. To this day, Tampa Bay remains a major phosphate exporter.

In addition to phosphate, cigars and the railroad put Tampa on the map. At one time Tampa was known as the “Cigar Capital of the World.” In 1904, a group of local businessmen staged the first Gasparilla Pirate Festival in honor of local mythical pirate José Gaspar. The festival included a mock pirate invasion, which is still re-enacted each year in late January or early February. Today, Tampa’s skyline is filled with skyscrapers, and much of its architecture can be described as post-modern.

Tampa offers a variety of different neighborhoods with a little something for everyone. Whether you want to live downtown near the pulse of the city, in quaint towns, or in family-friendly areas, you can find it in Tampa. With museums, historical sites, three professional sports teams, several colleges and universities, and attractions such as Busch Gardens and Lowry Park, Tampa offers an endless supply of activities for all ages that can be enjoyed year-round. You can take a quick trip to see the world’s most famous mouse or wizard—they’re both only an hour away—or enjoy watersports and the beach just a short drive from home.

Lastly, any discussion of Tampa must include a mention of its non-human residents: the alligators. Alligators are prevalent throughout the city, especially near water. Tampa is an ecologically minded city, and its reptilian residents are afforded an expectation of peaceful coexistence. With this in mind, please be vigilant when enjoying the many outdoor activities available and always, always obey all posted notices.



Neighborhoods

Tampa Bay is home to some truly beautiful neighborhoods full of exciting opportunities whether you choose to live on or off the installation. Many military families choose to live off base, but commute times can be up to one hour long and most likely involve tolls or travel expenses above and beyond the cost of gas. While MacDill AFB is a significant employer in the Tampa Bay area, it is by no means the largest one; some communities may or may not understand and offer amenities that cater to the military lifestyle. Some schools have great military-centric programs in place, but don’t expect it to be the norm.

Most of the area neighborhoods are designed to enhance family opportunities and create a warm sense of community involvement. Whatever type of environment you are looking for can be found in the greater Tampa Bay area. Many military families clamor to get into the privatized housing on the installation, but the wait list is often extensive! The most popular off-base neighborhoods amongst military families are roughly 25 to 30 miles from MacDill.

BASE HOUSING

MacDill offers privatized military housing for those stationed there. Housing is usually full, and it's common to find yourself on a waiting list. The commute time for service members who live on base is the only commute option guaranteed not to involve additional expense in tolls or public transportation costs. At this time, MacDill does not offer transportation reimbursement for those who choose to live off base. MacDill also houses on-base DoD schools. The schools offer easy registration for students and have a clear understanding of the unique challenges faced by military children.

Big Plus

- Living on base means a short commute, with no additional costs.
- Base amenities and activities will be within close proximity.
- Renovated, newer housing is available.

Things to Consider

- Shopping and dining opportunities are farther away, which is a consideration when deciding to live on base.
- Spouses who work off the installation will face commutes.
- Wait lists for housing can be prohibitively long.



OFF-BASE HOUSING



FishHawk Ranch, Lithia

FishHawk Ranch is a planned community 30 miles east of MacDill. Designed to offer families everything they need in a neighborhood, FishHawk is filled with reputable schools, resort-style pools, a lake house, and numerous trails and parks. There's also shopping and dining opportunities galore. If you opt to live in FishHawk, you may find little reason to venture onto base unless absolutely necessary. This family-friendly town is designed to be navigated by bike or foot, resulting in easy access to all amenities. FishHawk Ranch is conveniently located near I-75, and the HART Commuter Express Bus also has stops nearby and runs several times a day to and from MacDill.

FishHawk is a sought-after community, and real estate prices reflect that fact. It can be hard to find a home as they don't stay on the market very long and rentals move extremely quickly. If you know you want to live in FishHawk, contact a real estate agent to begin the housing search before you PCS, especially if you are looking to rent.

Big Plus

- FishHawk boasts some very reputable schools, according to the military spouses we spoke to.
- This family-friendly town has a significant military family population.
- Convenient shopping and dining opportunities abound.
- Residents have easy access to the HART Commuter Express Bus, I-75, and Tampa-area attractions.

Things to Consider

- Living here will come with long commute times (up to one hour, one way) with additional costs involved.
- The real estate in this area is more expensive.
- Lithia isn't a military-specific town, so residents and schools may not understand the military lifestyle.

OFF-BASE HOUSING

BayShore/ Ballast Point, South Tampa

Set on the site of a Civil War battlefield, Bay Shore and Ballast Point are two popular neighborhoods in the South Tampa area. Located north of MacDill and west of Hillsborough Bay, they offer a quiet, historic, scenic side of the Tampa Bay area. Ballast Point, in particular, is considered the “hidden gem” of Tampa, with more affordable housing and resident-friendly street configurations. These neighborhoods are family friendly, with desirable schools, plenty of open spaces, and a fantastic view of the Tampa skyline visible from the Ballast Point Park. While Bay Shore and Ballast Point are in an older, more established part of the area, new development is happening at a faster rate than in other parts of the city.



Big Plus

- These neighborhoods afford residents a reasonable commute to MacDill (approximately 30 to 40 minutes).
- Home to multiple parks, including one located right on the water (Ballast Point), this area is quite family friendly.
- Desirable schools are a big reason military families choose to live here.
- The homes in this area are more affordable and hold their value well.
- A historic, neighborhood feel abounds in this region.

Things to Consider

- There aren't as many shopping and dining opportunities in this area.
- Not all houses are assigned to a desirable school.
- New development brings with it construction noise and inconvenience.
- Commute costs are a factor when choosing to live in this part of Tampa.



OFF-BASE HOUSING



River Hills/Twin Lakes, Valrico

Valrico is another community east of MacDill that is steeped in tradition and history. Once the scene of numerous cotton plantations, Valrico has since grown up to be an area that offers slightly older homes and a quieter feel than its neighbor Lithia. Bordered by Brandon to the west, Bloomingdale to the southwest, and FishHawk to the south, the Valrico area offers close proximity to shopping and dining and is close to State Highway 60. Beautiful public lands such as Lake Michaela and Zeina Park offer stunning scenery and outdoor activities.

Commute times to MacDill are, you guessed it, long—averaging 35 to 65 minutes—and involve tolls. While schools overall have a good reputation, do your research. Overcrowding alters the clear-cut zoning boundaries, and you'll want to double-check which school your child would be attending. This area also has a significant number of magnet and charter schools, which are great options to consider if the traditional schools aren't really doing it for you. Transportation is your responsibility should your child attend one of these specialized schools. Keep in mind that 82% of residents own their homes, so if you are looking to rent, this area may be highly competitive.

Big Plus

- Magnet schools are in close proximity.
- Neighborhoods have an established feel.
- Nearby Tampa-area attractions provide lots of recreation and entertainment opportunities.
- Overall, the area has desirable schools and is family friendly.
- The availability of larger, more reasonably priced homes offers more bang for your buck.

Things to Consider

- The commute to MacDill is long and involves tolls.
- School boundaries can make a big difference, so do your research.
- Real estate may not be as varied as other neighborhoods.
- Schools do not necessarily offer any military-transition programs for students.