As Iowa's capital city, Des Moines is a hub of government action, business activity, arts, and cultural affairs. Des Moines began as a settlement adjacent to Fort Des Moines, a military post established at the point where the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers merge.

Des Moines' Neighborhoods

In the heart of the downtown area is the Court District, one of Des Moines' oldest downtown neighborhoods. The Court District hosts the Downtown Farmers’ Market, one of the country’s largest outdoor markets, and also houses the Civic Center, home to the Des Moines Symphony, local and Broadway theater, and other performances; Principal Park, home to the Iowa Cubs (baseball); and the Science Center of Iowa, with its Blank IMAX Dome Theater. Historic office buildings and shops have been converted into restaurants, nightclubs, pubs, and coffee shops. Residential lofts and apartments are located above and throughout the Court District. Downtown Des Moines has an extensive, three-mile system of climate-controlled enclosed walkways that connect buildings in the Court District with buildings in the Western Gateway, considered the city’s entry corridor. The Western Gateway has a mix of office, condominium, and apartment buildings. Other downtown attractions include the Art Gallery, Hoyt Sherman Place, the Ballet Des Moines, Des Moines Art Center Downtown, and several venues for theater and concerts.

Many neighborhoods surround the downtown. Connected to downtown by the Principal Riverwalk’s 1.2-mile loop of paths and bridges over the Des Moines River, the East Village offers a blend of historic buildings, restaurants, boutiques, and other retail establishments plus condominiums and apartments. Attractions include the Iowa State Capitol, State Historical Museum, Des Moines Botanical Center, and Simon Estes Riverfront Amphitheater. Sherman Hill, a designated historic district, has been experiencing a renaissance as many of the Victorian, Queen Anne, Italianate, and Turn-of-the-Century Four Squares homes of the neighborhood are being restored to their previous stature. The Drake neighborhood offers turn-of-the-century homes, some on the National Historic Register; coffee houses; locally owned restaurants; an art-house movie theater; grocery stores; specialty shops; and a weekly summertime farmers' market. Beaverdale is known for its distinctive Tudor-revival brick homes, nicknamed “Beaverdale Bricks,” on small urban lots. The Mondamin Presidential Neighborhood is a culturally diverse neighborhood that contains mostly single-family, owner-occupied homes. Most new neighborhood construction is occurring on the south and northeast sides of the city.

Parks and Recreation

Des Moines has 73 parks with many amenities, including basketball, tennis, and volleyball courts; soccer, baseball, and softball fields; a BMX track; boat and bicycle rentals; disc golf; horseshoes; ice skating; soap box derby track; and aquatic centers. The Blank Park Zoo has 104 different animal species and 1,484 animal specimens in its care.

In addition to the Iowa Cubs baseball team, Des Moines hosts the Iowa Chops (hockey) and the Iowa Energy (basketball) at the Wells Fargo Arena and the Iowa Barnstormers (arena football) at the Wellmark BlueCross & BlueShield Field.

Education

Des Moines public schools educate approximately 31,000 students in 63 facilities: 38 elementary and early education, 10 middle schools, 5 senior high schools, and 10 special programs. High schools include traditional programs, accelerated programs, vocational training, and programs for students with moderate and severe disabilities. The Des Moines Schools Home Instruction Program is an alternative K-12 educational program available for all families who choose to home-school their children.

Undergraduate and graduate studies are available at Drake University and Grand View University. Des Moines Area Community College and AIB College of Business are 2-year colleges. Mercy College of Health Sciences offers nursing and other health careers at the associate and bachelor level. In addition, Upper Iowa University offers courses and degrees at a Des Moines extension campus.

Des Moines University is a postgraduate medical school that offers degree programs in osteopathic medicine, anatomy, biomedical sciences, podiatric medicine, physician assistant studies, physical therapy, post professional physical therapy, public health, and health care administration.

Health Care

Des Moines is served by 6 acute-care hospitals, including a pediatric hospital, with over 1,470 staffed acute-care beds. The city’s health care facilities also include an inpatient psychiatric hospital and a Veterans Health Administration medical facility with acute, psychiatric, and substance abuse inpatient care.