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# Moving to Milwaukee

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## Introduction

Welcome to Brew City, prospective mover! You're standing at the beginning of what could be an exciting new chapter in your life. Moving to Milwaukee offers not only the allure of a vibrant urban landscape filled with charm and character but also the warmth and hospitality that come with the Midwestern way of life. Sure, you might have heard stories about our famous cheese and beer, but there's so much more to unpack about this city (and yes, pun intended).

Milwaukee, perched gracefully on the western shore of Lake Michigan, strikes a unique balance. It's a bustling hub rich with history, a brewing heritage that will quench more than your thirst, an arts scene that'll leave you inspired, and let's not forget those summer festivals that keep the city buzzing with energy throughout the warmer months. All of this, coupled with the kind of livable affordability that's ever-elusive in bigger metropolises, makes it plain to see why so many are choosing to call this city home.

As you prepare for this move, we encourage you to leave behind all the generalized moving advice you've been bombarded with. Let's dive into what really makes Milwaukee tick, from its eclectic neighborhoods where you can find your perfect nook, to navigating its job market, understanding the cost of living, and yes, even surviving those dreaded winter months with a smile on your face.

While this guide is your roadmap to settling in, a friendly reminder: laws, taxes, and regulations can be as ever-changing as the Wisconsin weather. Therefore, please be sure to consult official resources or local government sites for the most current legislation details. We wouldn't want your attempts to establish residency or vote for the first time to be sidetracked by some overlooked paperwork!

With an array of neighborhoods each offering its distinct vibe, choosing where to live can feel like the hardest decision you'll face. Fear not, for we shall embark on this journey together. Whether your heart is drawn to the bustling arts scene of the Historic Third Ward, the laid-back vibe of Bay View, or the family-friendly suburbs like Shorewood or Wauwatosa, there is a place in Milwaukee that's just right for you.

But Milwaukee isn't all work and no play. There's a world of opportunities waiting to be discovered—from dining at our award-winning restaurants, participating in widespread festival celebrations, or even taking a simple stroll down our picturesque RiverWalk. Each season brings its own charm and challenges, like embracing the brilliant colors of fall foliage or reveling in the joyous sounds of cheering sports fans echoing throughout the city.

So, dear future Milwaukeean, let's set forth on this grand adventure together, one that will have you intertwined with the heart and soul of this remarkable city in no time. Cheers to new beginnings in Brew City!

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## CHAPTER ONE: Finding Your New Nook: Neighborhoods in Milwaukee

Alright, let's talk turf. One of the first, and arguably biggest, decisions you'll make when moving to Milwaukee is where exactly to plant your flag—or at least, where to unpack your boxes. Milwaukee isn't just a city; it's a patchwork quilt of distinct neighborhoods, each with its own personality, quirks, and reasons why locals swear it's the best place to live. They call it a "City of Neighborhoods," and frankly, that's putting it mildly. Choosing can feel like trying to pick a favorite cheese curd at the State Fair – overwhelming, but ultimately delicious.

Navigating this landscape requires more than just a map; it requires understanding the vibe, the people, the amenities, and what life *feels* like block by block. Are you looking for the thrum of city life right outside your window, or do you prefer birdsong and the scent of freshly cut grass? Do you dream of walking to artisanal coffee shops, or is easy highway access your non-negotiable? Milwaukee's metro area offers the whole spectrum, from gleaming downtown high-rises to charming suburban enclaves that feel worlds away.

Let's start where the skyscrapers tickle the clouds: Downtown. This isn't one monolithic block; it's got its own internal geography. Think of it roughly split by the Milwaukee River. East Town leans towards the lake, boasting impressive architecture, proximity to museums like the stunning Milwaukee Art Museum, theaters, and some serious fine dining. It's where you'll find many of the taller residential buildings offering sweeping views of Lake Michigan, catering largely to professionals who enjoy a short walk to the office or the cultural scene.

Westown, the area stretching west from the river towards the Marquette University campus, has undergone a significant renaissance. Anchored by the Fiserv Forum – home of the Bucks and affectionately known as the "Deer District" – this area buzzes with sports fans and concert-goers. It's flush with hotels, newer apartment complexes, and redeveloped historic buildings, offering a slightly different, perhaps more event-driven energy than East Town. While redevelopment continues, it blends corporate headquarters with entertainment venues and growing residential options.

Living downtown means unparalleled access. Fancy a stroll along the scenic RiverWalk? It's right there. Need to catch a show or grab dinner at a trendy new spot? You're likely minutes away. The convenience is undeniable, especially if you work downtown. However, this convenience comes with the usual trade-offs: noise levels can be higher, parking is often an expensive headache (expect to pay for a spot in

your building or a nearby garage), and green space is more curated (think pocket parks rather than sprawling fields). Housing is primarily condos and apartments, often at a premium compared to other neighborhoods.

Just north and east of downtown lies the sprawling, energetic East Side. Hugging the lakefront and home to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), this area is a vibrant mix of students, young professionals, families, and long-time residents. It's not easily defined by one single characteristic because its sub-neighborhoods each have their own flavor. You've got the legendary Brady Street, an eclectic and historic strip known for its dense concentration of bars, vintage shops, diverse restaurants, and a certain bohemian flair that refuses to fade. It hums with activity day and night.

Further north along the lake, you'll find areas like Downer Avenue, offering a slightly more sedate, upscale experience with charming boutiques, cafes, a historic movie theater, and beautiful, older apartment buildings and grand homes. North Avenue, especially near the Prospect Avenue crossroads, serves as another entertainment hub with bars, restaurants, and the iconic Oriental Theatre. The housing stock here is wonderfully varied, ranging from grand Victorian mansions and stately apartment buildings dating back to the early 20th century to more modest duplexes and newer condo developments.

The East Side offers fantastic access to Lake Park, a jewel designed by Frederick Law Olmsted (of Central Park fame), complete with winding paths, stunning lake overlooks, lawn bowling, and the North Point Lighthouse. Bradford Beach, the city's main swimming beach, is also right there, drawing huge crowds in the summer. While parts definitely cater to a younger crowd thanks to UWM, don't mistake it solely for a student ghetto; many areas boast quiet, leafy streets and a strong sense of community, attracting those who appreciate historic architecture and urban living with lakeside perks.

Heading south from downtown, crossing the river, you'll find the Historic Third Ward. If the East Side is vintage charm meets youthful energy, the Third Ward is sophisticated chic meets artistic flair. Once a bustling warehouse district decimated by fire in 1892 and rebuilt, it fell into neglect before undergoing a dramatic transformation. Today, it's arguably Milwaukee's most stylish neighborhood, packed with art galleries, theaters (including the Broadway Theatre Center), high-end boutiques, interior design studios, and some of the city's most acclaimed restaurants.

The Third Ward is also home to the Milwaukee Public Market, a must-visit indoor market offering everything from fresh seafood and artisanal cheeses to prepared foods and wine. The architecture is a defining feature, with beautifully restored Cream City brick warehouses converted into stunning loft apartments, condos, and office spaces. Living here means embracing a very walkable, urban lifestyle. You're steps from downtown, the lakefront Maier Festival Park (home to Summerfest and ethnic

festivals), and endless dining and shopping options. It attracts professionals, empty nesters, and anyone who appreciates history blended with modern design. Expect higher rents and property values reflective of its desirability.

Just southwest of the Third Ward, Walker's Point is a neighborhood that's rapidly evolved from industrial grit to culinary and nightlife hotspot. It retains an edgy, industrial-chic vibe with many former factories and warehouses finding new life. This is where foodies flock - the neighborhood boasts an incredible density of outstanding restaurants, covering everything from award-winning fine dining to inventive taco joints and classic diners. It's also a hub for craft breweries, distilleries, and is known for its vibrant and welcoming LGBTQ+ nightlife scene along S. 2nd Street.

Walker's Point offers a diverse mix of housing, including converted lofts, new apartment buildings, and older single-family homes and duplexes, particularly on its western edges. It feels younger and perhaps a bit more experimental than the polished Third Ward, attracting artists, chefs, entrepreneurs, and those looking for a dynamic urban environment that still feels grounded. Development is ongoing, meaning you might find construction alongside established favorites, but the energy is undeniably exciting. It offers a slightly more affordable entry point to trendy city living compared to the Third Ward.

Continue south along the lakefront, and you'll land in Bay View. If you're seeking a strong sense of community, a slightly more laid-back vibe than downtown or the East Side, and charming residential streets, Bay View might be your spot. It has fiercely loyal residents who cherish its independent spirit, local businesses, and relative affordability. The neighborhood is characterized by its abundance of well-kept bungalows and duplexes, often with welcoming front porches, giving it a cozier, more traditional neighborhood feel than the loft-heavy districts.

Kinnickinnic Avenue (just "KK" to locals) serves as the main artery, lined with unique shops, cozy cafes, popular bars with great patios, and diverse restaurants. Bay View boasts excellent parks, including the expansive Humboldt Park, known for its summer concert series "Chill on the Hill," and South Shore Park, which features a popular Saturday farmers market, a beach, a marina, and the South Shore Terrace beer garden offering stunning lake views. It draws a mix of families, creative types, and young professionals looking for a balance between city access and neighborhood tranquility.

Heading back north, just across the river and overlooking downtown from a bluff, is Brewer's Hill. This historically significant neighborhood is named, unsurprisingly, for the brewery barons who once built grand homes here. It's known for its beautifully restored Victorian houses, offering impressive architecture and often fantastic city views. Its proximity to downtown is a major plus, and it sits adjacent to the massive redevelopment of the former Pabst Brewery complex, now home to apartments,

offices, hotels, and event spaces, adding new amenities to the area. It offers a quieter residential feel while still being very central.

Venture slightly northwest of Brewer's Hill and you plunge into Riverwest, a neighborhood celebrated for its bohemian spirit, cooperative ethos, and strong community engagement. If you're looking for progressive politics, thriving community gardens, quirky local shops, independent music venues, and a population that actively participates in neighborhood life, Riverwest delivers. Housing here tends to be more affordable, dominated by bungalows and duplexes, making it attractive to artists, musicians, students, and families seeking a diverse and unpretentious environment. It prides itself on its unique character and resistance to homogenization, fostering a distinct counter-culture vibe within the city.

While the East Side, Downtown, and South Side neighborhoods get a lot of attention, don't overlook the residential areas stretching west from the downtown core. Neighborhoods like Merrill Park, Martin Drive, or Washington Heights offer attractive options, often featuring sturdy brick bungalows, duplexes, and single-family homes on tree-lined streets. These areas provide a more traditional city neighborhood feel, potentially at a more accessible price point than some of the trendier districts, while still offering good proximity to downtown, parks like Washington Park (with its iconic bandshell), and local amenities. They often boast active neighborhood associations and a diverse mix of residents.

Now, let's shift gears and venture beyond the City of Milwaukee's official borders into the surrounding suburbs, which are a huge part of the metropolitan area's identity. Moving to the 'burbs here doesn't necessarily mean sacrificing character or convenience, as many inner-ring suburbs offer vibrant downtowns and easy city access. The choice often comes down to priorities like school districts, housing style, lot size, and commute tolerance. The metro area sprawls across several counties, primarily Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington, each with its own tax structure and feel.

One of the most sought-after suburbs is Wauwatosa, affectionately known as "Tosa," located immediately west of Milwaukee. It strikes a wonderful balance between suburban tranquility and urban accessibility. The heart of Tosa is its charming village center, packed with independent boutiques, restaurants, cafes, and pubs, creating a walkable, lively hub. It's renowned for its excellent public school system, a major draw for families. Beautiful parks line the Menomonee River Parkway, offering ample green space and recreation. Housing runs the gamut from historic Tudors and bungalows in East Tosa to larger, newer homes further west. Its proximity to the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center complex also makes it popular with healthcare professionals. Tosa offers a high quality of life but comes with a correspondingly higher price tag for housing compared to the city proper.

Just north of Milwaukee, hugging Lake Michigan, are the adjacent villages of Shorewood and Whitefish Bay. These "North Shore" communities are consistently ranked among the best places to live in Wisconsin, largely due to their top-tier public schools. Both villages boast walkable downtown districts along Oakland Avenue (Shorewood) and Silver Spring Drive (Whitefish Bay) with shops, restaurants, and essential services. They offer a strong sense of community, stately homes on tree-lined streets, and easy access to both the lakefront and downtown Milwaukee via Lake Drive. Housing costs here are among the highest in the metro area, reflecting the desirability and excellent school reputation. They appeal to families and professionals seeking an established, high-quality suburban environment.

If you head further west into Waukesha County, you'll find Brookfield. This is a larger, more sprawling suburb known for its strong school system (Elmbrook Schools), extensive retail presence (including the regional Brookfield Square mall and the newer Corners of Brookfield lifestyle center), and numerous corporate offices. Housing primarily consists of single-family homes, often on larger lots than you'd find in the inner-ring suburbs. While it lacks the centralized, walkable downtown of Tosa or Shorewood, it offers abundant amenities, space, and a highly-regarded quality of life favored by many families and professionals. It feels distinctly more suburban than Tosa or the North Shore.

Looking south of the city, near Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport, Oak Creek has experienced significant growth and development in recent years. Once considered a more distant suburb, it's now a bustling community offering a mix of older neighborhoods and extensive new housing developments. The arrival of major retail anchors like IKEA and the development of Drexel Town Square, a mixed-use downtown-style center with shops, restaurants, apartments, and a civic center, have transformed the area. It provides relatively affordable housing options compared to the North Shore or Waukesha County hotspots, access to lakefront parks, and increasing diversity. Its location offers convenience for airport access and commuting south towards Racine or north to Milwaukee via I-94.

Traveling further north into Ozaukee County along I-43, you encounter Mequon and its neighbor, the village of Thiensville. These communities offer a more suburban or even semi-rural atmosphere, characterized by larger homes on spacious lots, horse farms, and preserved natural areas. They are known for their high-performing school district and offer a quieter lifestyle while still maintaining relatively convenient access to downtown Milwaukee (typically a 20-30 minute drive without traffic). Mequon is geographically large and diverse, while Thiensville offers a small, charming village center along the Milwaukee River. This area generally commands higher home prices and appeals to those seeking more space and top-rated schools, willing to be a bit further from the city's core.

Of course, this barely scratches the surface. There are dozens of other municipalities in the four-county area, each with its own character. Consider Greendale, a designated National Historic Landmark known for its unique history as a planned "greenbelt" community during the New Deal era, offering charming, modest homes and a quaint village center. Or Franklin, another growing southern suburb offering a mix of housing and good schools. West Allis, adjacent to Milwaukee and Wauwatosa, offers more affordable housing stock and hosts the Wisconsin State Fair. New Berlin, in Waukesha County, provides suburban living with numerous parks and industrial centers.

Choosing the right neighborhood is deeply personal. Think about your daily commute – how tolerant are you of traffic on I-94 or fighting for street parking? What's your budget? Housing costs vary dramatically between, say, Riverwest and Whitefish Bay. What kind of lifestyle are you seeking? Do you crave the constant buzz of the Third Ward, the family-friendly atmosphere of Tosa, the bohemian vibe of Riverwest, or the quiet streets of Mequon? How important is walkability versus having a large yard? Do you need access to specific amenities like the lakefront, certain types of nightlife, or top-tier schools (which we'll cover in more detail later)?

Perhaps the best advice is to spend some time exploring *before* you sign a lease or mortgage. Drive around different areas. Park the car and walk the streets. Visit during the day and again at night, on a weekday and a weekend. Pop into a local coffee shop or tavern and strike up a conversation (Milwaukeeans are generally friendly folk). Check out the local grocery stores and parks. See how long the actual commute takes during rush hour. Online research is helpful, but nothing beats experiencing the feel of a place firsthand.

Think about your stage of life and what might be important in the next few years. A young single professional might prioritize nightlife and walkability, while a family with young children might focus on schools, parks, and safety. Empty nesters might seek walkability, cultural amenities, and lower maintenance living. Thankfully, the Milwaukee area's diverse offerings mean there's likely a neighborhood that aligns well with your specific needs and desires.

Don't be afraid to consider areas that might not have initially been on your radar. Sometimes the perfect nook is found just a few blocks away from the neighborhood you first researched. Talk to potential colleagues, friends, or family who already live here. Real estate agents specializing in relocation can also offer valuable insights based on your criteria. Finding your place is part of the adventure of moving, and Milwaukee offers a rich and varied landscape for you to discover your new home base.

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