




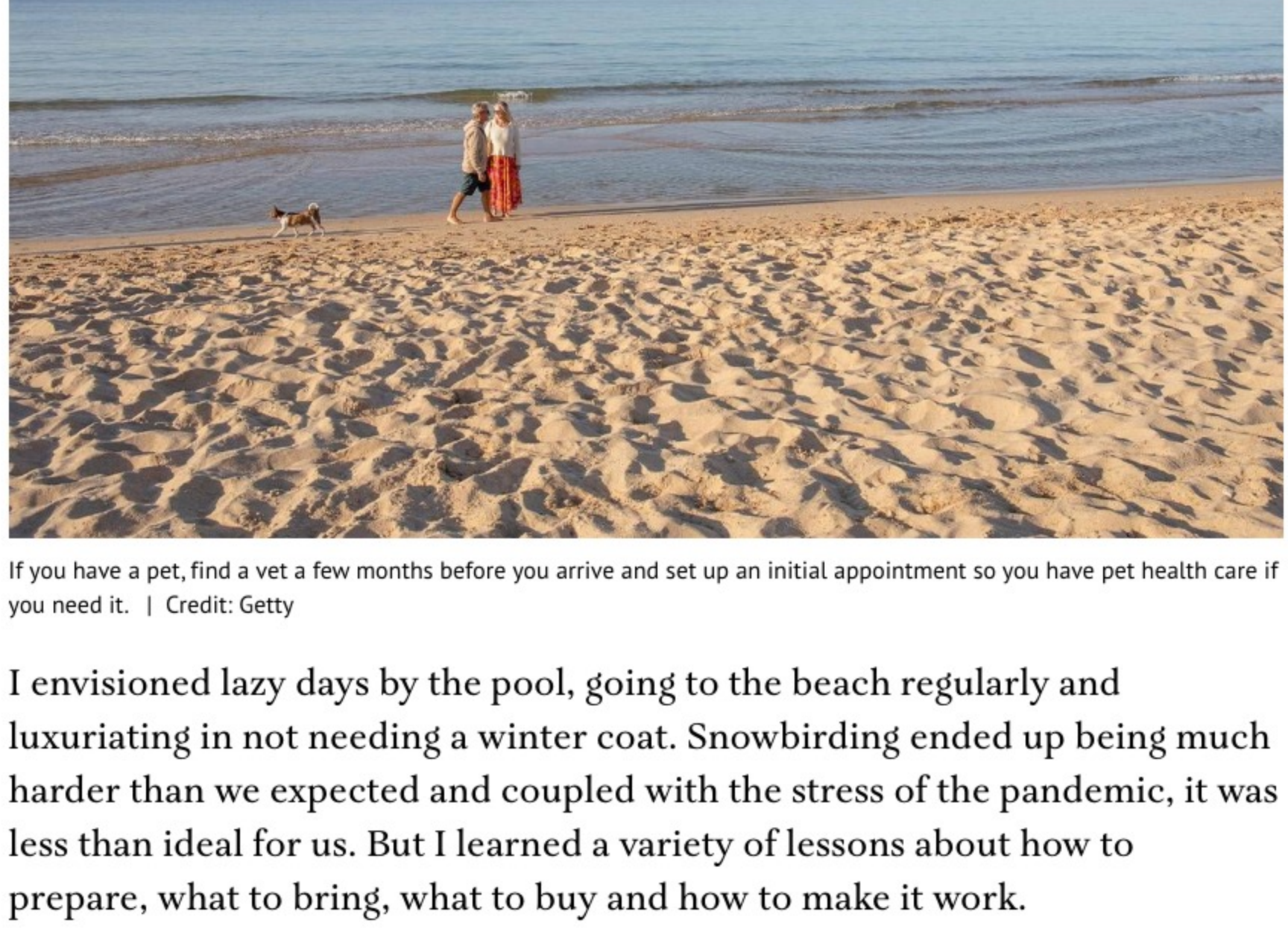
Learn from the Mistakes I Made as a Snowbirder

An unequipped kitchen, lack of work space and pet issues were just a few of our challenges

By [Brette Sembler](#) | November 18, 2022 | [Travel and Adventures](#)

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After 50 years of Buffalo winters, my husband and I were ready to try something new. My grandparents were snowbirds and my parents have also been for many years. Why not us? So, in February of 2020 we rented a house in Naples, Florida, for one month. In 2021, we rented a different house for January through March.



If you have a pet, find a vet a few months before you arrive and set up an initial appointment so you have pet health care if you need it. | Credit: Getty

I envisioned lazy days by the pool, going to the beach regularly and luxuriating in not needing a winter coat. Snowbirding ended up being much harder than we expected and coupled with the stress of the pandemic, it was less than ideal for us. But I learned a variety of lessons about how to prepare, what to bring, what to buy and how to make it work.

Clothing

We brought primarily summer clothing (because it was Florida!). However, given that the weather was absolutely freezing for several weeks, I didn't have enough warm clothes at all and wished I'd brought more long sleeves, pants, and socks. On some mornings, I ended up wearing my winter coat which I'd used on the drive down.

I brought all of my bathing suits and given that we had a pool, this was smart, so I could rotate through them. You need more than a couple if you're using them daily.

Takeaway: Bring more warm clothes than you think you need and know that you can't overpack swimsuits.

Kitchen

I knew I couldn't live without one good knife and a small assortment of my favorite herbs and spices, so I brought these with me and those were good calls. But I was unprepared for the barebones kitchens.

Neither house we stayed in had:

- Grill tools or a grill pan for fish or veggies
- Enough kitchen towels and potholders
- Small bowls for snacks or small portions
- Salad spinner
- Large drinking glasses (12-16 oz)
- Pitcher
- Nonstick pans that were in good condition
- Large coffee mugs
- Plastic food storage containers
- Food storage bags, foil or plastic wrap

I bought all of these items at dollar stores, discount stores and HomeGoods and left them in the house when I went home.

Takeaway: If you like to cook, bring your must-haves with you and plan to supplement the kitchen with dollar store or discount store finds. Order basic supplies (salt, sugar, flour, tea,

coffee and perishables) by [Instacart](#) delivery the day you arrive (put the list in before you leave home).



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Bathroom

We filled our prescriptions before we left, then transferred them to a branch near where we stayed for refills. This strategy worked seamlessly. I brought my hair dryer, but the house had one. Local stores did not carry some of the basic drugstore brand beauty products I use, so I ended up ordering online. The houses each had one bottle of soap, no tissues and one roll of toilet paper in each bathroom. We were lucky in that there were plenty of nice towels as well as beach towels.

Takeaway: Order Instacart delivery of paper products and must-have bathroom items for delivery when you arrive so you don't have to pack them and can have the items on your doorstep.

Office

I set up all of our household bills so I could pay them online. I didn't think to bring envelopes, packing tape, stamps, or scissors and needed all of those items and had to buy them. We both brought our laptops and work files and planned to work while we were there, but neither house had desks or office chairs. I tried working at the dining room table and it just wasn't comfortable. We bought a used desk, folding table, and two office chairs from a charity shop and donated them when we left.

Takeaway: Working from someplace is not the same as vacationing, so you have to make sacrifices or plan to buy what you need to work effectively.

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Mail

Although our bills were set up online, I needed to get the mail. You can only have your mail held for 30 days. If you forward it, the USPS will not forward third class (such as magazines: they actually throw them out). If you pay for a premium forwarding service, they will send all of it, but it is very expensive. The post office lost things and it took longer than promised for them to forward mail.

Takeaway: The least expensive and simplest option is to have someone at home collect your mail and mail it to you in a flat rate box once a week. Or plan to buy magazines at stores and just have first class mail forwarded.

General Household Living

We completely underestimated how hard it would be to live long-term in a house that was not our own. It's one thing to stay in a hotel or AirBnB for a week, but something else to live with someone else's furniture, beds and linens for three months.

We bought a small recliner and armchair with a footstool at a charity shop so we could sit comfortably, and donated them when we left.

The bed hurt my hips, so I bought a thick mattress topper and wished I'd brought one set of nice sheets as well as my own pillow.

The living room had one slippery sectional (very uncomfortable) and no recliners. We bought a small recliner and armchair with a footstool at a charity shop so we could sit comfortably and donated them when we left.

The house came with basic cable and internet, and we were able to watch our own streaming services. However, shows we regularly DVR were not included, nor was a DVR, so we ended up paying a small amount to upgrade so we could DVR and see our favorite shows.

We anticipated eating outside on the lanai and converted the dining table into a workspace. Unfortunately, it was mostly too cold or too hot to sit out there to eat most nights, so we crammed into a corner of the dining table to eat.

Takeaway: A rental unit will not have all the comforts of home, so have a small budget for things you may need to supplement.

Pets

One of the most challenging aspects of our trip was that we brought our two golden retrievers. The homes we stayed in did not have fenced yards. We went to a dog beach and a [dog park](#) regularly, however both dogs consistently picked up germs and got sick, over and over, so we finally had to stop going. This meant more walks and we had to buy flashlights for night walks.

Finding a vet who could see us was nearly impossible. We ended up at the emergency service and eventually were able to become patients at a clinic nearby after several weeks' wait.

Takeaway: Find a vet a few months before you arrive and set up an initial appointment so you have pet health care. Be prepared to deal with dog park issues or plan for long daily walks.

Lifestyle




We thoroughly enjoyed having a pool and swam nearly every day. We stayed close enough to the beach so that we could ride the bikes we'd brought to get there. This was an unplanned stroke of luck because we primarily went to the beach at sunset or weekends when parking was impossible to find. Some lots required resident stickers while pay-per-hour lots filled up before 10 a.m. If we hadn't had bikes, it would have been impossible to easily access the beach.

We missed our friends and family and felt isolated and alone in a place where we knew no one. Some people were unwelcoming. Traffic was a challenge, with all the other snowbirds in town, making it hard to get anywhere.

Planning activities such as boat tours, kayaking, day trips and hikes gave us things to look forward to and filled our free time.

Takeaway: Stay somewhere near friends or family so you have a social network. Research beach access in advance. Plan activities so you don't focus on the people you miss.

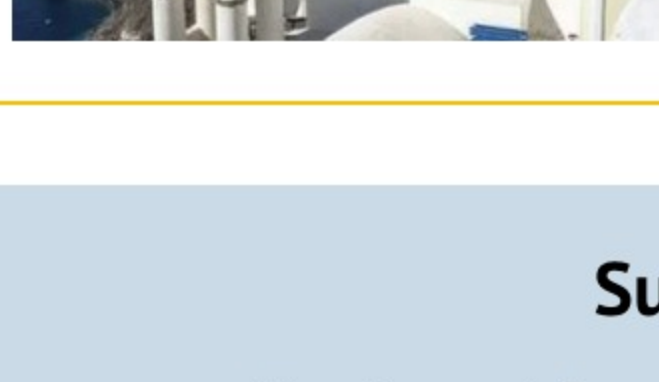
Snowbirding is not a vacation. Actually, living in a rental home or condo is much different than a short trip. Planning ahead and buying things you can't live without can make the experience more pleasant and enjoyable.

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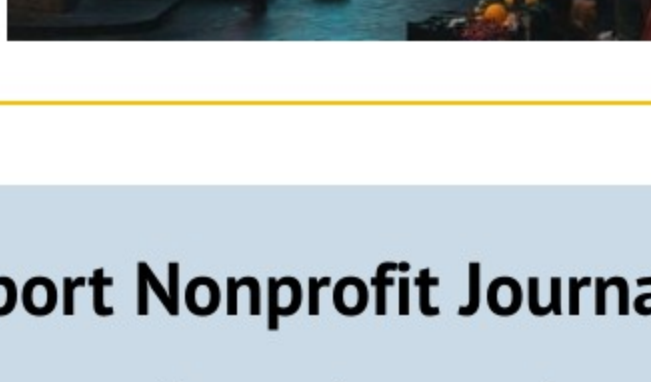
Brette Sembler [Brette Sembler](#) is the author of many books about divorce, child custody, business, health, food, and travel. She writes online content and does indexing and editing. [Read More](#)

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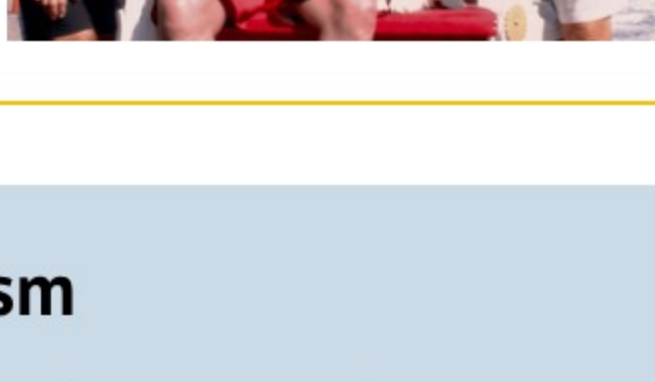
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