nileGUIDE
ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP

Bob Jagendorf

Top 10 Free Things To See & Do

Florida Keys, Key West, 1 Day

Table of contents:

Guide Description 2
Itinerary Overview 3
Daily Itineraries 4
Florida Keys Snapshot 7
Key West Snapshot 13

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: Florida Keys parks, beaches and iconic landmarks are what add to the special character of the islands. Visitors revel in the natural resources and plentiful sun, sea and surf. Here are some (hard to pick only ten!) of the unique -and free- places to add to the photo album.

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Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Key West, Florida Keys

Mallory Square
Magnificent sunsets and great shopping

Southernmost Point in the Nation
Mile Marker Zero on the Overseas Highway

Seven-Mile Bridge
World's longest segmental bridge, an icon of Marathon

Sombrero Beach
Palm-lined, remote beach, with clear waters, near Seven-Mile Bridge

Hurricane Monument
Monument to 1935 hurricane fatalities

Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site
Discover a different hammock

Harry Harris Park
Picnicking, playgrounds and sports fields at a waterfront beach

Perky's Bat Tower
Weirdly wonderful diversion

Anne's Beach
Beach and free municipal park in Islamorada along US1

Smathers Beach
Key West's longest beach

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Day 1 - Key West, Florida Keys

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: +1 305 296 4557
http://www.mallorysquare.com/

location:
300 Duval St
Key West FL 33040

1 Mallory Square

editor

DESCRIPTION: Located by the historic Key West waterfront, this open-air marketplace and entertainment complex is a great place to start or end your visit to Key West. Known for its magnificent sunsets, the area is also home to many shops, including Shell Warehouse, Key West Sponge Market and Caribbean Cargo. The Square also features daily entertainment, which includes guitar music, juggling, and animal performances. Local sightseeing tours also depart from the Square. Call for additional information. © wcities.com

location:
Corner of Whitehead & South Streets
Key West FL 33040

2 Southernmost Point in the Nation

editor

DESCRIPTION: Before you head back home, be sure to make your way to the corner of Whitehead and South streets. Why? Because geographically it is the southernmost point of the United States. You'll know you're in the right spot by the posted sign proclaiming the site's fame, and by the street vendors selling souvenirs and conch shells. Believe it or not, standing here you are closer to Cuba than Miami; from here, it is 150 miles north to Miami and only 90 miles south to Cuba. If you are so inclined, hang out until the evening, as this is also a great place to watch the sun set. © wcities.com

contact:
tel: +1 800 352 5397

location:
Mile Marker 47 to Mile Marker 40
Marathon FL 33050

3 Seven-Mile Bridge

editor

DESCRIPTION: Although this isn't a traditional attraction, it's the only way you're going to get to Key West, and it's also one of the wonders of Florida. While it falls a bit short of seven miles, this amazing span bridges the Middle and Lower Keys and has nearly 40 expansion joints. As you cross, with the Gulf of Mexico on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other, you can see the Old Seven Mile Bridge, now on the National Register of Historic Places. © wcities.com

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contact:
tel: +1 305 292 4560

location:
End of Sombrero Beach Road
Marathon FL 33050

4 Sombrero Beach

DESCRIPTION: Dog-paddle in the shallows, or float lazily on a raft perfecting your enviable tan. Marathon's own Sombrero Beach - complete with playground - is a 12.6-acre beautifully landscaped beach with walkways, picnic area, and roped swimming area. And, it's free! It closes at dusk, but during weekends it's all about a pick-up game of volleyball, BBQ's, or a quiet day with a book during the week. Beaches in the Keys are a rarity because it is a chain of coral islands - with the exception of Bahia Honda State Park in the Lower Keys, NOTHING rivals this location for sand between the toes. © NileGuide

editor

contact:
tel: +1 800 352 5397

location:
Mile Marker 82, Oceanside
Islamorada FL 33036

5 Hurricane Monument

DESCRIPTION: Hurricanes are nothing new in these islands but the hurricane that occurred in 1935 is still known as the Great Labor Day Hurricane. Hundreds died in the 20-foot wall of water that crashed over the islands. They are commemorated here at this stone monument that pictures palms bending in fierce winds. Under the tiled mosaic at the base of the monument are buried many of those who died in that ferocious storm, the worst in Florida hurricane history. There is no admission fee. © wcities.com

editor

contact:
tel: +1 305 451 1202

location:
Old State Road 905 &
Highway 905
Key Largo FL 33070

6 Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site

DESCRIPTION: Not a place in which to swing, a hammock is a kind of island created around the roots of mangrove trees, which grow in shallow water. As it grows bigger over decades, the hammock becomes home to animals and plants as it continues to grow. At this site, rescued years ago from development, live endangered species. You can hear all about them and about the creation of a hammock on guided walks available by arrangement through rangers at Pennekamp Park. There's no admission fee. © wcities.com

editor

contact:
tel: +1 305 852 7161

location:
MM 93.5
Key Largo FL 33037

7 Harry Harris Park

DESCRIPTION: Whether you're discovering Key Largo, which sprawls across more than 10 miles or just passing through on your way to one of the other Keys, a stop at Harry Harris Park, mile marker 93.5 oceanside, makes for a pleasant visit.
At this waterfront park, you can walk the beach, give the children a break in the toddler playground, join a game at the sports field or enjoy lunch on a covered picnic table for a lazy afternoon of sun, sand, wine, cheese and watersports.

editor

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Entry is free Mondays through Fridays. On weekends, children age 12 and under are free.
© wcities.com

contact:
tel: +1 800 352 5397

location:
Mile Marker 17
Lower Sugarloaf Key FL 33042

8 Perky's Bat Tower

editor

DESCRIPTION: One of the Keys' early dwellers, Richter Perky, tried to combat mosquitoes, which were big as bombers and numerous as mangrove roots, with known enemies of the mosquito: bats. In 1912, he built a big tower but the bats weren't having any part of this belfry and just never bought into that batty condominium project. Here it stands, however, just quirky enough to be part of the Keys and just quirky enough to find its way onto the National Register of Historic Places. There is no admission charge. © wcities.com

contact:
tel: +1 305 852 2381
http://www.islamorada.fl.us/newsite/parks_recreation/default.asp

location:
Mile Marker 73.5
Islamorada FL 33036

9 Anne's Beach

editor

DESCRIPTION: You'll see this delightful park as you travel the Overseas Highway. It's just a half-mile south of MM 74 and stretches alongside the ocean, making it a popular stop for a brief stop, sunning and swimming. You can also set up a picnic here and enjoy the quiet tropical environment. A winding boardwalk that passes through short, leggy mangrove trees also offers a scenic stroll. There is no admission fee. © wcities.com

location:
West end of S Roosevelt Boulevard
Key West FL 33040

A Smathers Beach

editor

DESCRIPTION: This strip of sand is one of the best-known beaches in Key West. Named after a former governor, it is just west of the airport and, at two miles long, it is the island's longest strip of silica. This beach is an excellent choice if you have children. With plenty of parking, restrooms, concession stands, chair rentals, picnic tables, watersport rentals and more, everything you need to have a great day in the sun is right at hand. The beach was hit hard by a hurricane in 1998, but it has recovered well and is flourishing once again. © wcities.com

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Florida Keys Snapshot

Local Info

Situated between the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, the Florida Keys occupy a unique geographical location whose ocean breezes keep temperatures moderate year-round. The islands are linked together by the Overseas Highway, the southernmost leg of U.S. Highway 1 that's sometimes called the Highway That Goes to Sea. A modern day wonder, in 2009 the the Overseas Highway was named anAll-American Road by the National Scenic Byways program administered by the Federal Highway Administration. It is the only roadway in Florida with that designation, and only one of 30 other roadways in the nation with the prestigious title.

A Florida Keys vacation means a great getaway to one of the most unique, relaxing places on earth as well as a haven for tasty seafood cuisine. We're ready to welcome all visitors in a traditionally friendly and laid back manner.

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History

More than a Century of Conservation

Visitors are drawn to the Florida Keys to experience the islands' priceless natural resources. Protection of these resources began more than a century ago, demonstrating the region's commitment to environmental stewardship and a resolve to preserve them for future generations.

In 1908 theKey West National Wildlife Refuge was designated. The refuge incorporates more than 2,000 land acres, all designated wilderness, as well as more than 200,000 acres of marine waters co-managed with the state of Florida.

Accessible only by boat, the refuge is largely composed of unpopulated islands and marine waters located immediately west of Key West. A few islands have sandy beaches that provide critical nesting habitat for sea turtles. Many of the refuge's beaches, including those at the Marquesas Keys, are open during daylight hours for wildlife-oriented recreational uses such as wildlife observation, nature photography and environmental education. The waters around the refuge's islands and flats are prime territory for fishing, wildlife viewing, diving and snorkeling.

The Key West National Wildlife Refuge, along with theGreat White Heron National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1938, are the last of the offshore raccoon-free islands in the lower Keys that provide safe nesting and breeding areas for great white herons and other migratory birds and wildlife. White herons are North America's largest wading bird and, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are found only in the Florida Keys and on the South Florida mainland.

Stretching from Key West to just north of the Seven Mile Bridge in the Middle Keys, the refuge features more than 375 square miles of open water and islands in the Gulf of Mexico. Visitors' primary access is by kayak, canoe or shallow-draft boat, although the refuge manages lands on Upper Sugarloaf and Lower Sugarloaf Keys that are accessible by car.

For several decades, leaders and citizens of Big Pine Key and the Lower Keys — located from the west end of the Seven Mile Bridge to just outside Key West — have advocated the responsible utilization and preservation of the abundant terrestrial and marine wildlife there. This commitment to conservation has earned the region the title of theNatural Keys.

The Lower Keys are home to theNational Key Deer Refuge, established in 1957 to protect and preserve habitats for wildlife, most notably the diminutive Key deer. A subspecies of the Virginia white-tailed deer, Key deer range in size from 45 to 80 pounds fully grown.

Today the refuge encompasses more than 8,000 acres of prime Key deer territory ranging from Bahia Honda Key to the eastern shores of Sugarloaf Key, out to the edge of the Gulf of Mexico. It is also a stopping point for thousands of migratory birds each year, and a winter home for many North American bird species including the roseate tern and peregrine falcon.

Within the refuge are two interpretive nature trails. The Jack C. Watson Trail, named after the first refuge manager and a passionate protector of the Key deer, winds through pinelands into a tropical hardwood hammock. A second wheelchair-accessible route meanders through pine rocklands to a small wetland area.

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Hotel Insights

Between Key Largo and Key West you'll find a variety of tropically comfortable accommodations, from simple to luxurious.

Options range from large resorts with several hundred rooms and a host of amenities to middle-size properties with fewer than 100 rooms to small family owned and operated motels, small resorts and cozy, romantic bed and breakfast-style accommodations. Choose from single rooms, cottages, suites and townhouses suitable for large families.

Key West

Accommodations in Key West include inns where residents claim there are ghosts, picket-fenced mansions, large hotels with every amenity, cheap hostels with a few handsomely-or whimsically-appointed rooms, campgrounds, and guest houses. The lodgings are as numerous and varied as the fish in the seas that surround this enchanting island.

If you would like to stay in a large and elegant there are several options: Pier House Resort and Caribbean Spa, Wyndham's Casa Marina and La Concha, all have historic ambiance. The Hyatt Key West is a great contemporary resort with excellent amenities. Smaller but select accommodations include Curry Mansion and Victorian Island City House. The Marquesa Hotel is elegant and has a 1884 grace. Also, Key Lime Inn is know for its Bahamian ambiance.

Key Largo

If you like big hotels with a restaurant, bar, pool, beach, and a host of water sports, the lively Key Largo Bay Resort and Holiday Inn Resort& Marina are the most popular. At the Holiday Inn, that famous film craft, the African Queen, of Humphrey Bogart/ Katherine Hepburn fame, offers sailings.

For a less conventional hotel, Jules' Undersea Lodge is a unique accommodation where you dine and sleep underwater while rainbow-hued fish drift past your window!

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The United States' only living coral barrier reef, the third largest barrier reef in the world, parallels the 126-mile chain of the Florida Keys. The extraordinary reef ecosystem, much like a tropical rainforest, supports a unique diversity of plants and animals.

To protect a portion of this reef,John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park was established in 1963 as America's first underwater preserve.

The park hosts more than a million annual visitors, offering them numerous opportunities to observe abundant wildlife through recreational and educational experiences. These include scuba diving, snorkeling, kayaking a water trail and walking along a boardwalk through plentiful tropical hammocks of gumbo limbo, strangler fig, tamarind, wild coffee and mahogany trees.

Pennekamp is incorporated into theFlorida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, widely regarded as a national treasure, which was established in 1990 by the United States government.

The sanctuary encompasses 2,800 square nautical miles of coastal and oceanic waters and submerged lands. Not only does this area surround the entire land mass of the Florida Keys, it also includes vast stretches of Florida Bay, the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean.

The creation of the sanctuary allows for the management of the region's special ecological, historical, recreational, and esthetic resources. Within its boundaries lie mangrove islands, historic shipwrecks filled with rare artifacts, tropical fish and other marine life.

Divers and snorkelers worldwide are drawn to the Florida Keys to view the extraordinary reef ecosystem within the sanctuary.

Islamorada

If you want world-class accommodations, Cheeca Lodge is known for attention to detail and a great golf course. If you would like a smaller resort there are several options, including Pelican Cove Resort, Hampton Inn& Suites and Howard Johnson Lodge at Holiday Isle. If you would rather have a party-loving hotel the El Capitan at Holiday Isle is for you.

Called the Sportfishing Capital of the World, Islamorada's presence on the water is unmatched. The Keys' commitment to conservation also extends to fishing practices. Catch-and-release fishing, followed by size and bag limits, and more recently bans on gill nets and fish traps in state waters, have enabled fish stocks to stabilize and grow.

In fact, it was in the Florida Keys that the catch-and-release ethic became a way of life for saltwater anglers. Backcountry game fish such as bonefish, tarpon and permit were the first game fish to be released on a regular basis. Soon to follow were snook and redfish, though a few are still kept for food.

On the ocean side of the island chain, local charter boat captains were the original leaders in releasing billfish — marlin, sailfish and swordfish. Today's Keys captains are leading the way in releasing extra"food" fish like dolphin(mahi mahi), grouper and snapper. They teach their anglers to"limit their kill" instead of"killing their limit."

As a result, pelagic(migratory ocean fish), flats and reef species are plentiful throughout the Keys, and world records attest to healthy and productive fisheries.

Like the creation of wildlife preserves and sanctuaries, the promotion of environmentally responsible angling is a crucial element in the Keys' longstanding commitment to conserving and protecting the region's natural resources.

Marathon and the Middle Keys

The largest resort is Hawk's Cay, where you can swim with resident dolphins. Amenities also include four pools, sauna, beach, sailing, tennis, putting green, ecology tours and children's programs. Or for a more laid-back resort go to Conch Key Cottages. Although, there are dozens of smaller hotels and inns peppered throughout the islands of the Middle Keys, including Grassy Key.

Marathon is known as the Heart of the Keys but also the boating destination of the Keys, attracting families galore. One of the not-to-miss events and much-anticipated feasts in Marathon is the Original Marathon Seafood Festival, an annual giant celebration of the sea that takes delectable aim at the tummy every March.

Bahia Honda and the Lower Keys

At the posh Palm Island Resort, you can shower under the sky in enclosed but open-air élan. An award winner for its ability to combine rusticity and elegance, casual and formal, you won't miss telephones and televisions.
© NileGuide

Restaurants Insights

Stretching more than 100 miles into the open ocean, the Florida Keys can boast early settlers ranging from Bahamian fishermen to Cuban cigar makers and New England merchants. In such a rich melting pot, it's natural that the indigenous cuisine incorporates diverse and delicious influences- with a reliance on an abundant array of fish and seafood harvested from surrounding waters.

Among the favorites areKey West pink shrimp, a delicacy generally considered sweeter than other crustaceans. Whether sautéed in scampi, battered and fried, nestled atop salad or pasta or simply steamed and served with savory sauces, Key West pinks rank among the most popular of the Keys'"natural resources."

Stone crabs, renowned for their sweet and succulent meat, also are a popular delicacy. Because nearly all of the crab's meat is contained within its grapnels, these are the only portions of the crustacean that are harvested. Once the claws are removed, the crab is returned to the sea where, over the course of up to two years, the claws regenerate. It is for this reason that stone crabs are considered a renewable resource, and the Florida Keys are responsible for nearly 60 percent of the state's overall harvest.

The molluskconch(pronounced konk) is impossible to pass up and is served in many forms: lime-kissed salad, spicy chowder and golden deep-fried fritters among them. Conch chowder can either be tomato-based or white, but don't expect to find any consistency of recipes from one restaurant to another. Keys eateries pride themselves on creating unique interpretations of classic dishes, and you're sure to find the delicious treat at annual seafoodfestivals.

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Unlike stone crabs, lobsters found in the Keys are clawless. Known asspiny lobster, they offer sweet and tender meat.Local restaurants often serve them steamed or boiled with drawn butter- or their meat might be made into salad or served with exotic sauces. Lobster season runs from August 6 to March 31.

Key West

Key West is known for its amazing seafood and there are great restaurant all around the city. A& B Lobster House naturally serves some of the best lobster around. If you want oyster head to Alonzo's Oyster Bar. The trendy Nicola Seafood has a wide selection of seafood and a romantic atmosphere.

Chefs from Europe added some intriguing touches to it all and, voila, such award-winning restaurants as Pisces and Louie's Backyard.

Cuban cigar makers who settled here generations ago and whose descendants remain brought their distinctive cuisine with them:picadillo, ground beef and raisins; thick, strongcubano coffee; and sweet, fried banana-like plantains. Bahamians, who have created a colorful Bahamian village right in the middle of Key West, brought their akee fish and rice, their rum and their pigeon peas. Try the flavors at Blue Heaven and Caribe Soul.

If you an aficionado of Ernest Hemingway, a stop at Captain Tony's Saloon and Sloppy Joe's is required. Ernest Hemingway was said to frequent these bars.

Key Largo

Besides well-known restaurants scattered throughout the Keys, perhaps the most fun is stopping into some rustic little find and discovering a memorable meal you'll be discussing for many a day to come. Flamingo Seafood Bar and Grill is not well known, but services a delicious catch of the day. Gus' Grill is another laid back restaurant that serves seafood. For a casual, biker- and party-friendly atmosphere the Alabama Jack's is the place to go.

Islamorada

You can taste the freshness of the seafood at Marker 88. You can select from Cuban and Spanish food, Italian and Mediterranean, although the best is the fresh seafood from local waters that can't be beat. For a romantic dinner the Atlantic's Edge provides views of the ocean and a candlelight meal.

Bahia Honda and the Lower Keys

The Dining Room is an elegant restaurant where you can dine on seafood. In the Lower Keys, you can find some well-known watering holes such as the rustic ambiance of No Name Pub. Pizza pies are out of this world- if you can find the pub, that is! It's world-famous, so don't miss out.

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Nightlife Insights

There's more to the Florida Keys than meets the eye, yet visitors often overlook an array of hidden treasures and colorful locales. Exploring the ones listed here can enrich and deepen virtually anyone's enjoyment of the region's colorful culture and character. Visitors from around the world are drawn to the Florida Keys to experience the island chain's priceless natural resources. Protection of these resources began a century ago, demonstrating the region's commitment to environmental stewardship and a resolve to preserve them for future generations.

Outdoor Activities

Whether you choose to tour on a glass-bottomed boat or snorkel or scuba tank, an underwater world of amazing beauty awaits in John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, America's first undersea park and home to 78 square miles of coral reefs. The park recently celebrated its50th birthday on December 10, 2010. Hiking trails and a visitor's center with exhibits and a 30,000-gallon floor-to-ceiling aquarium are among the other diversions of this not-to-be-missed park.

At the Theater of the Seas, you can swim with dolphins, sea lions or stingrays or become a trainer for a day, putting creatures of the sea through their paces. In the Middle Keys, the Dolphin Research Center offers another opportunity for swimming with dolphins.

At the Windley Key Fossil Reef State Geologic Site on Windley Key, you can see what a coral reef looks like when it's left high and dry, and visit middens left behind by the earliest Native American residents of the keys, who clearly knew a good thing when they saw it. Looe Key Reef is home to a beautiful coral reef, and Bahia Honda State Park offers sand dunes, waters as clear as a teardrop, and views that go on forever.

For an offshore adventure, explore Indian Key State Historic Site, ferrying over on the twice-daily ferry or paddling your own canoe—well, kayak—to the island, where you will learn of murder and mayhem on this 10.5-acre islet. Or try a visit to the 280-acre Lignumvitae Key State Botanical Site, a hardwood forest that was the home and gardens of a millionaire who put it all together in 1919 in such style that the site is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Museums

The Keys has a long and fascinating history and you can learn more about it at the many museums scattered amongst the islands. The Custom House Museum provides a detailed history of Key West's history. Fort East Martello Museum and Gallery is dedicated to Key West historical artifacts. The museum also has exhibits dealing with the daily life for earlier Key West inhabitants.

If you would like to know about specific portions of the island history, then Key West Shipwreck Historeum is the place to go. At the museum, you learn about how some islanders would dive for shipwrecked goods. Learn about the ill-fated Henry Flagler's railroad at Flagler Station Over-Sea Railway Historeum. If you want to know more about how the Bahamians influenced the Key West culture, the Lofton B. Sands African-Bahamian Museum provides fascinating artifacts, such as letters and clothing.

Theaters

If you would like to enjoy the theater while in the Keys you have plenty of options. The historical Waterfront Playhouse has a modest theater and shows quirky and well-known productions, includingCat on a Hot Tin Roof andThe Best Man. Another small theater that produces professional productions is Red Barn Theater. If you are in Marathon, the Marathon Community Theater produces small productions featuring local talent.

Festivals& Street Fairs

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Depending on when you go to Key West, there are annual festivals and fairs that shouldn't be missed. The German Oktoberfest has reached Sumerland Key that holds a parade, live music and of course plenty to drink and eat. If you come in December enjoy the beautiful and often humorous Key West Lighted Boat Parade. Key West in transformed into a pirates heaven for a day during Pirates In Paradise. In July the Hemingway Days Festival can't be beat.

One of the best annual events is the Conch Republic Independence Celebration. The festival is a ten day celebration of when the Florida Keys briefly seceded from the United States. The United States Border Patrol was treating the Keys unfairly and in protest the Keys seceded and humorously declared"war." After a minute and without any prompting the Keys surrendered and jokingly asked for foreign aid. The festival celebrates how the Border Patrol stopped the unfair treatment and the celebration features drag races, music concerts, a parade, and a"battle" against the US Border Patrol.
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Things to Do Insights

Along the 113 miles that make up Key West, you will see small signs every mile marking the distance. Called Mile Markers, many hotels and restaurants along the way bear no other address than MM 99 or MM 88.5. Businesses may also identify themselves with the letters OS for ocean side, or BS, for bay side. Florida's Keys are also often grouped into three divisions—the Upper Keys, Middle Keys and Lower Keys, and there are plenty to see in each one.

Key Largo Largo means long in Spanish and Key Largo lives up to that name as the longest of the keys, stretching from MM 106 to MM 91. Here you'll find the Indian Key State Historic Site, which holds many local treasures. The island is also home to the Dolphin Cove Research& Education Center's Dolphin Encounter, which offers you an opportunity to swim with dolphins and watch them play. Grab a bite at Alabama Jack's. The best attraction of Key Largo is John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, the nation's first underwater park. Also stop into the Theater of the Sea.
Smathers Beach The Seven-Mile Bridge connects the Middle and Lower Keys. Nearby Smathers Beach is Key West's longest, while the Curry Hammock State Park is a small wonder that attracts many visitors. For some interesting exhibits, check out the Museum of Natural History of the Florida Keys. Stop into the Barracuda Grill for dinner.

Key West Lighthouse Museum The views from the Key West Lighthouse Museum are stunning. Take a boat to Dry Tortugas National Park and do some diving, swimming or fishing. Dine at Louie's Backyard. The nearby Nancy Forrester's Secret Garden is worth a stroll, then discover the shops, restaurants and other attractions at Historic Seaport at Key West Bight.

Wrecker's Museum Take a tour of the Wrecker's Museum, a unique home built in 1829 that has some interesting features. Have lunch at Antonia's Restaurant, then stroll through Bahia Honda State Park or check out the creations at the Paradise Gallery. Tour the historical Curry Mansion, with its elegant period furniture and antiques.

Key West Aquarium City Zoo- The Gallery preserves some of the most important remnants of Haitian culture. The Audubon House& Tropical Gardens is named for the artist John James Audubon. The home and surrounding gardens are open to visitors. The Key West Aquarium is also a must-see. Dine at the Caribe Soul restaurant, then go to the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Museum to take in some nautical exhibits.

This is nature's wonderland. You'll find a national wildlife refuge devoted to tiny Key deer, an endangered species, and a national marine sanctuary, Looe Key, rated one of the best diving reefs in the world. You can see this Keys' version of Big Bird —great white herons, North America's largest wading bird—in a 375-square-mile refuge. Kayaks and shallow-draft boats are a favored way to tour, since the Keys are surrounded by water.

Boat Tours Dry Tortugas National Park Ferry(+1 305 294 7009/http://www.yankeefreedom.com/) Key Largo Princess(+1 305 451 4655/http://www.keylargoprincess.com/) Discovery Undersea Tours(+1 305 293 0099/+1 800 262 0099/http://www.discoveryunderseatours.com/) Snorkel and Sailing Adventure(+1 305 292 4768/http://www.keywestsebago.com/) Tortugas Party Boat(+1 305 293 1189/http://www.tortugacharters.com/)

Trolley Tours Old Town Trolley Tours(+1 800 213 2474/http://www.trolleytours.com/)

Train Tours Conch Tour Train(+1 305 294 5161/http://www.conchtourtrain.com/)

Air Tours Island City Flying Service Incorporated(+1 305 296 5422)

Diving Tours Reef Express Catamaran(+1 305 294 7755/http://www.sunnydayskeywest.com/reefx.htm) Snorkel and Sailing Adventure(+1 305 292 4768/http://www.keywestsebago.com/)

Ghost Tours Ghost Tours of Key West(+1 305 294 9255/http://www.hauntedtours.com) Ghosts& Legends of Key West(+1 305 294 1713/ +1 866 612 3890/http://www.keywestghosts.com/)
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Travel Tips

Highway

The major U.S. airlines continue to offer convenient flights to the Florida Keys. However, our islands are the only tropical getaway reachable by car from the U.S. mainland.

The 120-mile island chain can be reached by U.S. 1 south of Miami. Each Key is linked to the next by the scenic Overseas Highway, which was first built atop the remains of tycoon Henry Flagler's Overseas Railroad.In 2012, the Florida Keys will celebrate 100 years since Flagler's arrival into Key West.

The US Highway 1, or Florida Keys Overseas Highway, from north of Key Largo to Key West, has been designated an All-American Road. The Keys highway is the only All-American Road in Florida. It's the highest recognition possible under the National Scenic Byways program established by the U.S. Congress in 1991. Only 30 other roadways in the nation have earned the prestigious title.

Driving Directions to the Florida Keys...

From Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood

From Miami International Airport, take LeJeune Road south to 836 West. Take the Florida Turnpike south toward Key West. The Turnpike ends at US 1 in Florida City.

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Follow U.S. 1 south about 22 miles to Key Largo and you are now in the Florida Keys.

International Airport, exit the airport and follow the signs for 595 West. Take 595 to the Florida Turnpike and follow the signs for the Florida Keys.

From the north, take the Florida Turnpike south to just below Ft. Lauderdale, where Exit 4 joins the southern portion of the Turnpike. The Turnpike ends at US 1 in Florida City. Follow U.S. 1 south into the Florida Keys.

From Florida's west coast, take 1-75 Alligator Alley east to the Miami exit, and south to the Turnpike Extension.

A Note on Mile Markers. Once you're in the Keys, U.S. 1 becomes the Overseas Highway, which is like Main Street. The best way to get around is to know the mile marker of your destination. Look for the little green mile-marker signs on the right side of the highway(in either direction). They begin just south of Florida City with number 127 and run all the way down to zero in Key West. Think of them like addresses. If you know the mile marker, getting there is easy.

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Fun Facts

Top 10 Florida Keys Facts

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INTERESTING FACT:

The Overseas Highway represents a remarkable engineering feat: 113 miles of roadway and 42 bridges leapfrogging across the water from key to key in a series of giant arches of concrete and steel. The Atlantic Ocean lies on one side of the highway, with Florida Bay and the Gulf of Mexico on the other — providing drivers breathtaking vistas of open sea and sky. In 2009, the Overseas Highway was named an All-American Road by the National Scenic Byways program administered by the Federal Highway Administration.

FREE APP:

Visitors are just a finger tap away from comprehensive travel information and guidance from Key Largo to Key West with the new Florida Keys Essential Guide App, free to download at the iTunes store.

WEIRD FACT:

Marathon is home to the Turtle Hospital, situated at mile marker 48.5 bayside; it is the world's only licensed veterinary hospital dedicated to the treatment of sea turtles. It was opened in 1986 with the goal of healing injured sea turtles and returning them to the wild.

HISTORICAL FACT:

Dry Tortugas National Park, located 68 miles west of Key West, is home to Fort Jefferson, the largest masonry structure in the Western Hemisphere. The classic red-brick structure is part of Key West's military history more than 130 years ago, in addition to Fort Zachary Taylor on the south shore. Fort Taylor, named for the country's 12th president, was built between 1845 and 1866. East Martello, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is one of the best-preserved Civil War-era batteries in the United States.

FUN FACT:

Key Largo is best known for John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, located at mile marker(MM) 102.5. It is the first underwater preserve in the United States, and celebrated its 50th anniversary on Dec.10, 2010.

DRIVING TIP:

Travelers along the Overseas Highway will see mile markers, often called mileposts, on the right shoulder or median strip. These are small green signs bearing white numbers, which begin with number-mile – 126, just south of Florida City. Mile markers decrease steadily from there to Key West, ending with the zero marker at the corner of Fleming and Whitehead streets. Awareness of these markers is useful, since Keys residents refer to them regularly when giving addresses. Visitors asking for directions shouldn't be surprised to hear that the spot they're seeking is located at- or just before or just beyond- a given mile marker number.

RANDOM FACT:

In January, 1912, railroad tycoon Henry Flagler completed his impossible"railroad that went to sea," connecting the Keys and Key West with the mainland for the first time and providing a way for wealthy visitors to travel to the Keys for warm-weather vacations. In 2012, the 100th anniversary of his arrival into Key West via rail is to be marked with a Keys-wide celebration.

FOOD FACT:

Stone crab season is open Oct. 15 – May 15 every year. Considered a renewable resource, the crabs are harvested only for their claws- the crabs can re-grow claws. While both claws can be taken lawfully if each is of legal size, defined as a 2.75-inch propodus(the larger, immovable part of the claw's pincer), harvesting only one claw is preferable for the crab's protection and feeding ability. Stone crab claws are delectable served either hot or cold, with mustard sauce.

THAT'S RICH:

Key West is home to the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum, founded by the legendary shipwreck salvor who died in 1998. The museum holds the richest single collection of 17th-century maritime and shipwreck antiquities in the Western Hemisphere — most of them excavated from the waters around the island city.

FISHY FACT:

According to the International Game Fish Association, the Keys are home to more sportfishing records than any other destination in the world. Pelagic,(migratory

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ocean fish), flats and reef species are plentiful throughout the Keys, and the numerous world records attest to healthy and productive fisheries.

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Quick Facts:

Time Zone: GMT-5

Electricity: 110 volts, 60Hz, standard two pin plugs

Country Dialing Code: 1

Area Code: 305

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Key West Snapshot

Local Info

Key West is on the silvery ribbon of islands that trail off the southern shore of Florida. Thanks to the ever present warm temperatures and glistening seas, the islands have long been an escapist's nirvana. Eclectic and eccentric, wild and warm, blessed with some of Florida's most colorful characters and equally blessed with some of its most spectacular sea scenery, the Keys are a wonderland paradise.

Key West

Key West is a rather small island that is about 4 miles long and 2 miles wide. Whether you want to relax on the beach or spend the day shopping, Key West has plenty to offer.

Duval Street is the center of Key West life, with many hotels, guest houses, inns and bed& breakfasts, plus dozens of shops and restaurants, nestled into its tropical ambiance. Wreckers Museum is an old house and museum where you can observe and learn more about the treasures salvaged from shipwrecks. If you get thirsty stop in for a cocktail and a snack at Duval Beach Club.

The Historic Seaport is the perfect place to walk down Harborwalk and enjoy the ocean along with shops and restaurants. Watch the free daily turtle feedings at Turtle Kraals Museum. Then stop for a bite to eat at Conch Republic Seafood Company or Half Shell Raw Bar.

If you get tired of the beach head to Key West Butterfly& Nature Conservatory where you can observe about 60 species of butterflies. You should also go to Key West Aquarium where you can learn more about sea life. The aquarium is the perfect place to take the kids since there are interactive exhibits where you can touch marine creatures.

Key Largo

Key Largo is a larger island and is occasionally called the"Diving Capital of the World" since the coral reefs attract so many divers. John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park is a protected park where you can view coral reefs and colorful sea life. The state park also offers an aquarium, museum, camping, snorkeling, diving, and boating.

Pennekamp Park is a treasure trove of local flora including wild orchids, gumbo limbo, wild cotton, strangler fig, tamarind trees, wild coffee, and mahogany trees. If you want to see endangered animals go to Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site where the mangrove trees grow a "hammock" which is basically a small island that attracts animals.

Islamorada

Billed as the'Sportfishing Capital of the World', Islamorada's waters are home to the conch, alligator and Pickles Reefs, with a vast array of marine life. It's a destination for scuba divers and snorkelers. A scuttled ship, sunk on purpose is a great diving spot.

Those interested in Keys' geology can look at Windley Key Fossil Reef State Geologic Site, a reef that's no longer underwater. You can take a boat ride and get a historic exploration at Lignumvitae Key State Botanical Site, a virgin hardwood forest, and Indian Key State Historic Site, once the Miami area's county seat! Both are accessible on ferry trips.

You can feed tarpon off the docks at Robbie's Marina or swim with dolphins, manta rays and sea lions at Theater of the Seas.

Marathon and the Middle Keys

Some of the residents can trace their history to early 1800s settlements. Bahamians raised tropical fruit for a living; New England fishermen searched the sea for its bounty; and in 1908, Henry Flagler's Overseas Railway reached Key Vaca, where the village of Marathon grew as headquarters for the railroad's final push to Key West.

Here your adventure can include a swim with dolphins, an iguana introduction, a visit to a hardwood hammock or rain forest, or a loll on sandy beaches. Roaring jet skis and other water sports are available. Fishing is great on the reefs, the flats or in the deep.

For a close look at a sea turtle, visit the hospital that treats injured turtles. To learn something about early Indian settlements, visit the Museums of Crane Point, which encompass the Museum of Natural History of the Florida Keys and the Florida Keys Children's Museum.

Bahia Honda and the Lower Keys

Big Pine Key is the center of life in the Lower Keys. Looe Key Reef off Big Pine Key is one of the Keys' top diving spots and one of the best reefs for diving in the world. In July each year, the Sanctuary sponsors a popular music festival promoting the preservation of the Keys' coral reefs.

So popular is Bahia Honda State Park that campers reserve space months in advance to ensure a place in this waterfront paradise with its pristine beaches and warm waters. ©

History

Calusa Indians and other tribes found their way to these islands, recognizing them as hunting grounds, both on land and in the warm seas where shellfish, turtles and marine life of all kinds thrive. Generations later, the Spaniards, who discovered and settled most of the Florida, arrived. Most notable was adventurer Ponce de Leon, who first set eyes on the Keys on May 15, 1513. He and his sailors dubbed the islands Los Martires, the martyrs, in salute to the rocks that, from a distance, looked like suffering men.

In 1820, the island was bought from the Spanish for$2,000, quite a substantial sum in those days, and the purchaser was John Simonton, an Alabama businessman, whose name and descendants live on here and remain a powerful influence in the area.

With a long history of looting and pillaging outlaws, pirates were eventually driven out and the island's mixed population of English Bahamians, Southerners and transplanted

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northerners rose to 2,700, many of them happily engaged salvaging the cargoes of wreaked ships.

In the 1850s, however, a lighthouse was built, putting a bit of a damper on the wrecking business, and the town's industry began to change. A devastating fire destroyed the town in 1859. However, about the same time, cigar makers, fleeing war in Cuba, arrived in Key West, where they established a thriving industry. Key West's port was a hot spot, too, and by the 1880s, the city was said to be the wealthiest in the nation.

In the 1800s and 1900s, farmers found success raising pineapples on large plantations that spread across the Upper Keys. Sugarloaf, a kind of pineapple, is now the name of one Key and another is named Plantation Key. A canning plant in Key West provided pineapples to most of eastern North America in the early 1900s.

Some oranges and grapefruit were, and still are, grown, along with the exotic tamarind and breadfruit. But it was the tiny, yellow key lime that was to capture the attention of growers and become an icon of the keys.

Fishing has been a mainstay of Keys success from the earliest Indian inhabitants to today's charter and shrimp boats, the later still netting the little crustaceans so successfully that shrimp are known here as"pink gold."

As the centuries rolled by, railroad entrepreneur Henry Morrison Flagler heard about this place, figured it would have allure for winter-weary Northern travelers, and that it would make a good jumping-off place linking his Florida East Coast railroad to ships sailing to Cuba. In 1912, his Railroad that Went to Sea steamed into Key West on tracks that hopped from island to island, passing over the shallow seas. If you would like to learn more visit Flagler Station Over-sea Railway Historeum.

But then decline set in. Cigar makers departed for Tampa; the sponge industry declined. Enterprising entrepreneurs took a look at the possibilities of tourism and got things under way, but a disastrous hurricane in 1935 blew away the railroad and killed hundreds. While the railroad dubbed'Flagler's Folly' did not survive, the roadbed on which it was set did, and went on to become the Overseas Highway—the Highway that Goes to Sea. This two-lane roadway streaks across more than 100 miles from Miami to Key West, and has become to Keys tourism what peanut butter is to jelly.

Although dampened by World War II, tourism took off in the Keys after the war and has never looked back, thriving beyond the wildest dreams of those early Conchs. Conchs(pronounced'konks'), by the way, is a reference to the big, pink-lined shells that you put to your ear to hear the ocean's roar. Islanders born here are the only ones who can really call themselves conchs, but those who have lived here more than seven years qualify to be called'freshwater conchs', and those who visit often enough can earn the name visitor, replacing tourist. Now there's a reason to stay a while!
©

Hotel Insights

From Key Largo to Key West, and all the little islands in between, you'll find a variety of places to stay in tropical comfort, from simple to luxurious.

Options range from large resorts with several hundred rooms and a host of amenities to middle-size properties with fewer than 100 rooms to small family owned and operated motels and small resorts, with accommodations ranging from single rooms to cottages to suites and townhouses.

Key West

Accommodations in Key West include inns where residents claim there are ghosts, picket-fenced mansions, large hotels with every amenity, cheap hostels with a few handsomely-or whimsically-appointed rooms, campgrounds, and guest houses. The lodgings are as numerous and varied as the fish in the seas that surround this enchanting island.

If you would like to stay in a large and elegant there are several options: Pier House Resort and Caribbean Spa, Wyndham's Casa Marina and La Concha, all have historic ambiance. The Hyatt Key West is a great contemporary resort with excellent amenities. Smaller but select accommodations include Curry Mansion and Victorian Island City House. The Marquesa Hotel is elegant and has a 1884 grace. Also, Key Lime Inn is know for its Bahamian ambiance.

Key Largo

If you like big hotels with a restaurant, bar, pool, beach, and a host of water sports, the lively Key Largo Bay Resort and Holiday Inn Resort& Marina are the most popular. At the Holiday Inn, that famous film craft, the African Queen, of Humphrey Bogart/ Katherine Hepburn fame, offers sailings.

If you would like a less conventional hotel, Jules' Undersea Lodge is a unique accommodation where you dine and sleep underwater while rainbow-hued fish drift past your window!

Islamorada

If you want world-class accommodations, Cheeca Lodge is known for attention to detail and a great golf course. If you would like a smaller resort there are several options, including Pelican Cove Resort, Hampton Inn& Suites and Howard Johnson Lodge at Holiday Isle. If you would rather have a party-loving hotel the El Capitan at Holiday Isle is for you.

Marathon and the Middle Keys

The best resort is Hawk's Cay, where you can swim with resident dolphins. Amenities also include four pools, sauna, beach, sailing, tennis, putting green, ecology tours and children's programs. Or for a more laid-back resort go to Conch Key Cottages.

Bahia Honda and the Lower Keys

At the posh Palm Island Resort, you can shower under the sky in enclosed but open-air élan. An award winner for its ability to combine rusticity and elegance, casual

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and formal, you won't miss telephones and televisions.
©

Restaurants Insights

Seafood is king, queen and courtier here in the Keys, and no wonder. Fat lobsters, succulent clams, hefty tuna, shrimp, bass, grouper, pompano, swordfish, and of course conch are all fresh and delicious. Conch has been a long-standing resident of the toasty waters around these islands.

Key West

Key West is known for its amazing seafood and there are great restaurant all around the city. A& B Lobster House naturally serves some of the best lobster around. If you want oyster head to Alonzo's Oyster Bar. The trendy Nicola Seafood has a wide selection of seafood and a romantic atmosphere.

Chefs from Europe added some intriguing touches to it all and, voila, such award-winning restaurants as Pisces, Alice's and Louie's Backyard.

Cuban cigar makers who settled here generations ago and whose descendants remain brought their distinctive cuisine with them:picadillo, ground beef and raisins; thick, strongcubano coffee; and sweet, fried banana-like plantains. Bahamians, who have created a colorful Bahamian village right in the middle of Key West, brought their akee fish and rice, their rum and their pigeon peas. Try the flavors at Blue Heaven and Caribe Soul.

If you an aficionado of Ernest Hemingway, a stop at Captain Tony's Saloon and Sloppy Joe's is required. Ernest Hemingway was said to frequent these bars.

Key Largo

Besides well-known restaurants scattered throughout the Keys, perhaps the most fun is stopping into some rustic little find and discovering a memorable meal you'll be discussing for many a day to come. Flamingo Seafood Bar and Grill is not well known, but services a delicious catch of the day. Gus' Grill is another laid back restaurant that serves seafood. For a party-friendly atmosphere the Alabama Jack's is the place to go.

Islamorada

You can taste the freshness of the seafood at Marker 88. If you want Cuban and Spanish food Manny& Isa's can't be beat. For a romantic dinner the Atlantic's Edge provides views of the ocean and a candlelight meal.

Bahia Honda and the Lower Keys

The Dining Room is an elegant restaurant where you can dine on seafood. In the Lower Keys, you can find some well-known watering holes such as the rustic ambiance of No Name Pub.
©

Nightlife Insights

From the top of the Keys at Key Largo through Marathon, Islamorada, Big Pine Key and into Key West, the diversions are as diverse as those who seek them. Pet a shark, sit in the sun, roar across the waters, visit mangrove swamps, swim in the ocean, swim with a dolphin, drink like a fish, eat like a trencherman, visit old churches, scuba dive, shop'til you drop, revel in resort amenities, or romance by candlelight.

Outdoor Activities

Whether you choose to tour on a glass-bottomed boat or snorkel or scuba tank, an underwater world of amazing beauty awaits in John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, one of the best diving sites in the world and home to 78 square miles of coral reefs. Hiking trails and a visitor's center with a floor-to-ceiling aquarium are among the other diversions of this not-to-be-missed park.

At the Theater of the Seas, you can swim with dolphins, sea lions or stingrays or become a trainer for a day, putting creatures of the sea through their paces. In the Middle Keys, the Dolphin Research Center offers another opportunity for swimming with dolphins.

At the Windley Key Fossil Reef State Geologic Site on Windley Key, you can see what a coral reef looks like when it's left high and dry, and visit middens left behind by the earliest Native American residents of the keys, who clearly knew a good thing when they saw it. Looe Key Reef is home to a beautiful coral reef, and Bahia Honda State Park offers sand dunes, waters as clear as a teardrop, and views that go on forever.

For an offshore adventure, explore Indian Key State Historic Site, ferrying over on the twice-daily ferry or paddling your own canoe—well, kayak—to the island, where you will learn of murder and mayhem on this 10.5-acre islet. Or try a visit to the 280-acre Lignumvitae Key State Botanical Site, a hardwood forest that was the home and gardens of a millionaire who put it all together in 1919 in such style that the site is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Museums

The Keys has a long and fascinating history and you can learn more about it at the many museums scattered amongst the islands. The Custom House Museum provides a detailed history of Key West's history. Fort East Martello Museum and Gallery is dedicated to Key West historical artifacts. The museum also has exhibits dealing with the daily life for earlier Key West inhabitants.

If you would like to know about specific portions of the island history, then Key West Shipwreck Historeum is the place to go. At the museum, you learn about how some islanders would dive for shipwrecked goods. Learn about the ill-fated Henry Flagler's railroad at Flagler Station Over-Sea Railway Historeum. If you want to know more about how the Bahamians influenced the Key West culture, the Lofton B. Sands African-Bahamian Museum provides fascinating artifacts, such as letters and clothing.

Theaters

If you would like to enjoy the theater while in the Keys you have plenty of options.

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The historical Waterfront Playhouse has a modest theater and shows quirky and well-known productions, includingCat on a Hot Tin Roof andThe Best Man. Another small theater that produces professional productions is Red Barn Theater. If you are in Marathon, the Marathon Community Theater produces small productions featuring local talent.

Festivals& Street Fairs

Depending on when you go to Key West, there are annual festivals and fairs that shouldn't be missed. The German Oktoberfest has reached Sumerland Key that holds a parade, live music and of course plenty to drink and eat. If you come in December enjoy the beautiful and often humorous Key West Lighted Boat Parade. Key West in transformed into a pirates heaven for a day during Pirates In Paradise. In July the Hemingway Days Festival can't be beat.

One of the best annual events is the Conch Republic Independence Celebration. The festival is a ten day celebration of when the Florida Keys briefly seceded from the United States. The United States Border Patrol was treating the Keys unfairly and in protest the Keys seceded and humorously declared “war.” After a minute and without any prompting the Keys surrendered and jokingly asked for foreign aid. The festival celebrates how the Border Patrol stopped the unfair treatment and the celebration features drag races, music concerts, a parade, and a “battle” against the US Border Patrol.
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Things to Do Insights

Along the 113 miles that make up Key West, you will see small signs every mile marking the distance. Called Mile Markers, many hotels and restaurants along the way bear no other address than MM 99 or MM 88.5. Businesses may also identify themselves with the letters OS for ocean side, or BS, for bay side. Florida's Keys are also often grouped into three divisions—the Upper Keys, Middle Keys and Lower Keys, and there are plenty to see in each one.

Key Largo Largo means long in Spanish and Key Largo lives up to that name as the longest of the keys, stretching from MM 106 to MM 91. Here you'll find the Indian Key State Historic Site, which holds many local treasures. The island is also home to the Dolphin Cove Research& Education Center's Dolphin Encounter, which offers you an opportunity to swim with dolphins and watch them play. Grab a bite at Alabama Jack's. The best attraction of Key Largo is John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, the nation's first underwater park. Also stop into the Theater of the Sea.
Smathers Beach The Seven-Mile Bridge connects the Middle and Lower Keys. Nearby Smathers Beach is Key West's longest, while the Curry Hammock State Park is a small wonder that attracts many visitors. For some interesting exhibits, check out the Museum of Natural History of the Florida Keys. Stop into the Barracuda Grill for dinner.

Key West Lighthouse Museum The views from the Key West Lighthouse Museum are stunning. Take a boat to Dry Tortugas National Park and do some diving, swimming or fishing. Dine at Louie's Backyard. The nearby Nancy Forrester's Secret Garden is worth a stroll, then discover the shops, restaurants and other attractions at Historic Seaport at Key West Bight.

Wrecker's Museum Take a tour of the Wrecker's Museum, a unique home built in 1829 that has some interesting features. Have lunch at Antonia's Restaurant, then stroll through Bahia Honda State Park or check out the creations at the Paradise Gallery. Tour the historical Curry Mansion, with its elegant period furniture and antiques.

Key West Aquarium City Zoo- The Gallery preserves some of the most important remnants of Haitian culture. The Audubon House& Tropical Gardens is named for the artist John James Audubon. The home and surrounding gardens are open to visitors. The Key West Aquarium is also a must-see. Dine at the Caribe Soul restaurant, then go to the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Museum to take in some nautical exhibits.

This is nature's wonderland. You'll find a national wildlife refuge devoted to tiny Key deer, an endangered species, and a national marine sanctuary, Looe Key, rated one of the best diving reefs in the world. You can see this Keys' version of Big Bird —great white herons, North America's largest wading bird—in a 375-square-mile refuge. Kayaks and shallow-draft boats are a favored way to tour, since the Keys are surrounded by water.

Boat Tours Dry Tortugas National Park Ferry(+1 305 294 7009/http://www.yankeefreedom.com/) Key Largo Princess(+1 305 451 4655/http://www.keylargoprincess.com/) Discovery Undersea Tours(+1 305 293 0099/+1 800 262 0099/http://www.discoveryunderseatours.com/) Snorkel and Sailing Adventure(+1 305 292 4768/http://www.keywestsebago.com/) Tortugas Party Boat(+1 305 293 1189/http://www.tortugacharters.com/)

Trolley Tours Old Town Trolley Tours(+1 800 213 2474/http://www.trolleytours.com/)

Train Tours Conch Tour Train(+1 305 294 5161/http://www.conchtourtrain.com/)

Air Tours Island City Flying Service Incorporated(+1 305 296 5422)

Diving Tours Reef Express Catamaran(+1 305 294 7755/http://www.sunnydayskeywest.com/reefx.htm) Snorkel and Sailing Adventure(+1 305 292 4768/http://www.keywestsebago.com/)

Ghost Tours Ghost Tours of Key West(+1 305 294 9255/http://www.hauntedtours.com) Ghosts& Legends of Key West(+1 305 294 1713/ +1 866 612 3890/http://www.keywestghosts.com/)
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Travel Tips

Getting There

Air

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Key West International Airport(EYW)+1 305 296 5439http://www.keywestinternationalairport.com

EYW is located just minutes from downtown and services the following airlines:

Air Key West(+1 305 923 4033/http://www.airkeywest.com) American Airlines(+1 800 433 7300/http://www.aa.com) Cape Air(+1 800 352 0714/http://www.flycapeair.com/ca/index.html) Delta(+1 800 221 1212/http://www.delta.com) Florida Costal(+1 888 435 9322/http://www.floridacoastalairlines.com) Gulfstream International(+1 800 992 8532/http://www.gulfstreamair.com) US Airways(+1 800 428 4322/http://www.usairways.com)

From the Airport

Taxi and Shuttle: Taxi and shuttle services are provided by: A Airport Cab Company(+1 305 292 1111) Bone Island Shuttle(+1 305 293 8710) Crabby Cabby(+1 305 923 3747) Five Sixes Taxi(+1 305 296 6666) Friendly Cab Company(+1 305 292 0000) Keys Shuttle(+1 888 765 9997) Southernmost Shuttle of Key West(+1 305 293 1811) Yellow Cabs of Key West(+1 305 294 2227)

Car Rental: Alamo(+1 800 327 9633/http://www.alamo.com) Avis(+1 800 831 2847/http://www.avis.com) Budget(+1 800 527 0700/http://www.budget.com) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/http://www.hertz.com)

By Train

Amtrak(+1 800 872 7245/http://www.amtrak.com) offers service to Miami. From Miami, take the Keys Shuttle.

By Bus

Key Largo is serviced by Greyhound(+1 800 231 2222/http://www.greyhound.com) which provides transportation to destinations throughout America.

Highway

Palm Beach is accessible by U.S. 1.

Getting Around

Shuttle

Key West Park N' Ride offers a shuttle service to downtown. For ferry service to and from the island, take the Key West Shuttle(+1 888 539 2628/http://www.keywestshuttle.com) or the X-Press to Key West(+1 800 273 4496/http://www.keywestferry.com).

If traveling overseas, take the safety precaution of registering your trip athttps://travelregistration.state.gov and for helpful, practical advice about traveling technicalities and safety standards check outhttp://travel.state.gov/
©

Fun Facts

Key West State: Florida **Country:** United States

Key West by the Numbers:

Population: 25,478 Average Winter Temperature: 69 degrees F Average Summer Temperature: 84 degrees F Elevation: 25 feet Average Rainfall: 40 inches

Quick Facts:

Time Zone: GMT-5 Electricity: 110 volts, 60Hz, standard two pin plugs Country Dialing Code: 1 Area Code: 305

Did You Know?

In 1938 the Overseas Highway connected the Florida Keys to mainland Florida. Key West is considered to be the most urban of the islands in the Florida Keys and is known for its thriving nightlife.
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