

# Keys Traveler

The Magazine



**Connect & Protect**  
**Please Release Me**  
**Sustainable Stone Crab**  
**New Keys Resorts**

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Cover photo of Michelle McCann, left,  
and Edna Kilpatrick, on paddleboards  
in the Lower Keys by Rob O'Neal

# Keys Traveler

The Magazine

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Higgs Beach in Key West by Rob O'Neal

Frazier Nivens



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Bungalows Key Largo





Diver Lad Akins connects with marine life in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary off Key Largo.

# Connect & Protect

By Julie Botteri

Visitors from around the world are drawn to the Florida Keys' priceless natural beauty — the blue-green hues of the water, the surrounding mangrove islands and flats that are prime territory for fishing, wildlife viewing, diving and snorkeling.

Recreational and educational experiences create meaningful and memorable connections to this natural realm: observing protected animal species and thousands of wading and migratory birds in their natural habitat at wildlife preserves, discovering state and national parks, encountering dolphins and sea turtles, swimming, boating, fishing, diving, snorkeling, kayaking and paddle-surfing in the backcountry.

Travelers leave with a greater appreciation of their individual impact on the earth, the ocean, the people and all living things that compose the 125-mile island chain's unique ecosystems and environment.

Mindful and dedicated travelers return to the Florida Keys with a passion to protect, preserve and even improve the quality of both human and animal life for future generations.

The Florida Keys have advocated the responsible use and preservation of their abundant terrestrial and marine environments through the creation of wildlife preserves, America's first undersea park and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Federally established in 1990, the sanctuary protects 2,900 square nautical miles surrounding the United States' only living coral barrier reef, encompassing vast stretches of Florida Bay, the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. The sanctuary enables

## ...The Florida Keys

management of the region's special ecological, historical, recreational and esthetic resources.

Within its boundaries lie historic shipwrecks and other archeological treasures, extensive seagrass beds, mangrove-fringed islands and more than 6,000 species of marine life, providing an unsurpassed experience for visitors from all over the world to view the extraordinary reef ecosystem and explore their connections to the ocean.

The Keys also are home to the world's first state-licensed veterinary sea turtle hospital. For over 30 years, the Marathon-based facility has been rescuing, rehabilitating and returning sea turtles to the wild.

Education is a priority at the Turtle Hospital. Visitors are introduced to the hospital's curative programs for loggerhead, green, hawksbill and Kemp's ridley turtles, as well as the permanent resident sea turtles whose conditions prohibit their return to the open ocean.

The facility has three "turtle ambulances" for patient transport and features a surgical suite, examination room, commons area and classroom. When possible, visitors are encouraged to attend sea turtle releases open to the public, emphasizing education, awareness and the importance of humans helping to preserve the endangered reptiles.

The Keys' commitment to conserving and protecting the region's natural resources also extends to its focus on environmentally responsible fishing, an ethic that

has become a way of life for saltwater anglers.

Catch-and-release fishing, followed by size and bag limits and bans on gill nets and fish traps in Florida state waters have enabled fish stocks to stabilize and grow. 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. Backcountry game fish such as bonefish, tarpon, permit, snook and redfish are released on a regular basis.

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.



## 10 'Keymandments' for the Florida Keys

Lighthearted but educational guidelines for residents and visitors, stewards of the Florida Keys' natural resources, to live and play by.

**P**lant a coral. Or adopt one of the cute little things, but don't touch them on the reef.

**S**upport the wildlife. Volunteer food, funds or time to a local wild bird center.

**T**ake out the trash. Especially if it's floating in the water.

**C**apture a lionfish. Any time and size — we can show you how.

**H**ike it, bike it or hoof it. It's low on eco-impact and high on fresh tropical air.

**L**ease digital footprints. Share photos with friends and fans.

**C**atch dinner and release all fish you know you can't eat.

**U**se a mooring buoy at dive sites. Save your back and leave the anchor aboard.

**C**onserve. Don't consume. Reduce, reuse and recycle — even on vacation.

**G**et off the beaten path. Hike, bike, walk or kayak along trails throughout the Keys.



Bob Care

Visitors to the Turtle Hospital watch as Percy, a green sea turtle, receives specialized treatment.





Visitors at the Florida Keys Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center observe convalescing pelicans.

## Bird Centers Rescue and Shelter Winged Wildlife

In the Florida Keys, visitors can find countless places to connect with the island chain's natural beauty, unique ecosystems and living things. Among them are centers dedicated to the rescue, care, rehabilitation and release of native and migratory birds back to the wild.

Florida Keys Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center in Tavernier is an avian hospital and home to a sanctuary located at mile marker 93.6 that provides a humane, natural and protected refuge with acres of wetlands to serve as a habitat for injured birds that cannot safely return to the wild. Visitors can stroll the sanctuary's boardwalk and view these beautiful creatures.

All wild birds living in the aviary have permanent injuries or disabilities that prohibit their release. Visitors can read each inhabitant's story and, through them, expand their knowledge about wild birds and their protection.

On-site at Crane Point Museum

and Nature Center at mile marker 50.5 bayside is the small, all-volunteer Marathon Wild Bird Center. This sanctuary and rehabilitation hospital treats sick, injured and orphaned cormorants, egrets, pelicans and other birds. Operating as a year-round rehab clinic, the center also participates in educational and research projects.

Nature and bird lovers can explore an aviary, meet rescued birds and discover a haven for wildlife at the nonprofit Key West Wildlife Center. Visitors can walk through tree-shaded grounds to view tropical plants and butterflies, feed turtles at a pond where wildlife gathers and learn about rescued birds.

Wildlife centers welcome volunteers with special skills or interests who want to help protect and improve the quality of bird and animal life in the Florida Keys. Keys visitors interested in volunteering can explore opportunities at [fla-keys.com/voluntourism](http://fla-keys.com/voluntourism). —Julie Botteri

## LGBTQ Adventures Spotlight Marine Ecosystem in Keys

The Florida Keys are home to the only living coral barrier reef in the continental United States, with spectacular reefs just a short boat ride from shore — often in water only 10 to 15 feet deep.

Key West's Blu Q Sailing Adventures offers intriguing watersports activities for LGBTQ visitors and friends. The company was founded 22 years ago by Captain Steve Talbott, who left his Texas home aboard his sailboat Brigadoon to follow his passion.

"That passion, sailing, literally brought me to the shores of the Florida Keys," Talbott said. "The day I landed, I realized this was my new home and the beginning of a dream to finally do what I love."

Talbott and his crew offer multiple excursions on the 37-passenger Blu Q catamaran, ranging from the all-male clothing-optional Sail, Snorkel & Paddle trip to the Sunset Sail and Harbor Tour for LGBTQ passengers and allies.

Experiences may include visits to remote islands, sandbars and isolated areas. The reefs and sponge gardens of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary offer world-class snorkeling and the chance to view vast populations of colorful tropical fish and marine life. Dolphins, sting-rays and sea turtles occasionally appear to give passengers a true aquatic welcome.

—Greg Tromba

[blukeywest.com](http://blukeywest.com)



Guests sail on the Blu Q off Key West.

Blu Q Sailing Adventures

## Keys Coral Restoration Helps World's Reefs

According to experts, coral reefs make up less than 1 percent of the world's oceans. This includes the continental United States' only living contiguous coral barrier reef, which parallels the Florida Keys.

Yet despite their small size and limited sea floor coverage, more than 4,000 species of fish and as much as 40 percent of the marine life worldwide depend on coral reefs at some point in their life cycle — whether for spawning, nursery grounds, refuge or forage.

Coral reefs play a key role in the health of the oceans and the planet as a whole, affecting every human in some way — and two Florida Keys organizations play a similarly vital role in reef restoration and preservation.

Corals normally grow very slowly and spawn, or reproduce, roughly once a year. However, scientists and researchers with Mote Marine Laboratory's Elizabeth Moore International Center for Coral Reef Research & Restoration, located in the Lower Florida Keys, and Key Largo's world-renowned Coral Restoration Foundation have made breakthrough discoveries that demonstrate many coral species — when fragmented into pieces of 1 to 2 inches — will grow rapidly and nearly double in size over a period of months.

Small coral fragments grown in underwater nurseries and then outplanted back to reef areas can stabilize, affix permanently to the reef's substrate and grow more rapidly to a mature size, colonizing areas of reef where existing coral

populations may have perished due to a changing marine environment. Branching corals grow up and outward into dense thickets, attracting fish and marine life and creating a new ecosystem.

Divers, snorkelers and ocean lovers can have a positive impact on the world's oceans by participating in recreational coral restoration dive opportunities. Tailored programs in the Keys can provide them unforgettable experiences to productively give back to the living, dynamic reef systems they enjoy.

One-day workshops include a morning presentation and hands-

Carrying staghorn coral clippings, volunteers with the Coral Restoration Foundation swim to a planting site on a coral reef in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary off Key Largo.



Bob Care

on training, followed by afternoon dives to a coral nursery and planting site. Only certified divers can help tend underwater nurseries and outplant corals to reefs.

However, recreational divers and snorkelers can monitor the wellness of existing coral colonies. The Coral Restoration Foundation offers smartphone users a new app called OKCoral to collect data during trips to Keys reefs, recording important information about the health of outplanted reef habitats.

—Julie Botteri

[coralrestoration.org](http://coralrestoration.org)  
[mote.org](http://mote.org)



Florida Keys guide Justin Rea releases a permit caught on a fly rod in the Lower Keys.

By Doug Kelly

Photograph by Steve Bly

fillets soon became passé.

But transcending reduced catches evolved an even mightier mentality: catch-and-release fishing.

Particularly for species not considered dinner fare, such as bonefish and tarpon, heck ... let them all go. In that way, more fish will breed and grow to larger sizes.

It's caught on (pun intended). Most anglers have now embraced the mantra that "a fish is too valuable to be caught only once." And with the advent of digital cameras and the Internet, one can still score bragging rights on social media without killing a fish.

And taxidermists don't need dead fish to create memorable fish mounts. An approximate length and girth is all that is required for a beautiful and exacting fiberglass reproduction mount.

While conservation of fish didn't originate in the Florida Keys, the region is now the world's poster child for it. Even novice anglers release every bonefish, permit and tarpon — and while it's delectable to enjoy a fish fillet now and then, all species are tightly regulated in Florida.

Proper ways to release fish can be found through a Google search, and barbless hooks or circle hooks are often employed to deter a fish from swallowing the hook.

The welcome mat is out to experience the unparalleled bounty of fishing from Key Largo to Key West. But go about it with a catch-and-release mentality, because that's why the good ol' days of Keys fishing are here once again.

Doug Kelly, an author of three books including "Florida's Fishing Legends and Pioneers," writes travel and outdoors articles for a variety of publications.

# *Please Release Me'*

Engelbert Humperdinck certainly doesn't have fish in mind when he sings the hit song "Release Me," but it is an appropriate soundtrack for modern-day angling.

In 1939 Florida Keys fishing guide Bill Smith discovered a new game in town: catching bonefish with fly-fishing gear. Up until then, no one thought that targeting the species on fly was possible.

The word slowly leaked out to the rest of the world until it reached the ears of Bernard "Lefty" Kreh in 1951.

Kreh (pronounced CRAY), a budding newspaper writer from Maryland with a knack for fly fishing, arranged a

trip to the Keys to fish with Captain Smith.

After several days of fly fishing, Kreh had racked up catch after catch of bonefish. He also battled tarpon, snook, trout and redfish. On traditional tackle offshore, Kreh reeled in reef fish and billfish. It was the good ol' days of Keys fishing.

In the ensuing decades, word spread like wildfire via television shows, magazines and newspapers extolling the bounty of Florida Keys offshore and light-tackle fishing. Anglers flooded the Keys, and inevitably the increased pressure put a dent in the Keys' resources as well as other saltwater fishery habitats around the world.

Kreh recognized the drop in numbers of fish, as did veteran Florida Keys guides such as Jimmie Albright and Cecil Keith.

They arrived at the only sensible answer: anglers needed to keep fewer fish. It made no sense to overfill ice chests just for the purpose of "feeding the neighbors."

Fishing journalists started pushing a more conservation-focused angle. Government fisheries agencies implemented size and bag limits. Captains began to understand the need for conservation and counseled their clients accordingly.

Piles of carcasses on the dock or freezer-burned



Andy Newman

Many Florida Keys fishing excursions also include the opportunity to view spectacular sunsets.



Rachel Bowman is the

# Lionfish Queen



Passion drives Marathon resident Rachel Bowman, a dedicated pole spear huntress who is the Florida Keys' only female commercial lionfish fisherman. She spears several thousand lionfish each year, removing as many as she can of the voracious invaders from Keys waters.

She is the envy of fellow recreational divers and her commitment is unshakeable.

A licensed boat captain, Bowman moved to the Keys 17 years ago from Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina. She and fellow divers hunt off her vessel Britney Spears, aptly embla-

zoned with a pole spear—clasp- ing mermaid, in waters ranging from 80 feet to 150 feet deep along reefs and shipwrecks.

Today Bowman and other conservationists employ population-control tactics instead of seeking complete removal of the mass-breeding lionfish, since its rate of reproduction far exceeds eradication efforts.

Lionfish reportedly can live up to 15 years. They can grow to nearly 20 inches in length and over 3 pounds in weight, eating smaller fish within 2 inches of their own size.

"With every lionfish I spear, I'm saving the juvenile fish around it and I'm preventing that lion from breeding," Bowman said.

Culinary demand for the fish, whose fillets are white and flaky like hogfish, is increasing.

Seafood markets, most notably the nationwide chain of Whole Foods Markets, buy whole fish from Bowman and other commer-

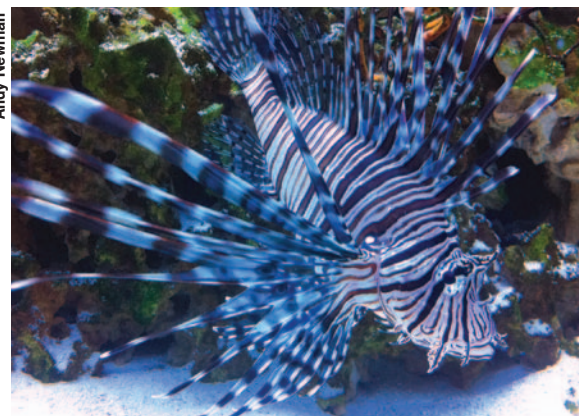
cial fishermen who can capture up to 400 pounds a day of lionfish — an acceptable bycatch species in their lobster traps.

Hurtful spines containing venom, not poison, are removed during cooking preparation. The meat is harmless and considered a healthy choice since it's rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Lionfish can be broiled, baked, sautéed, fried or prepared as ceviche or sushi.

"When you order lionfish off the menu in a restaurant, you're also not ordering snapper or hogfish or grouper, so you're taking a little bit of pressure off those species, whose populations are already being affected by lionfish," said Bowman.

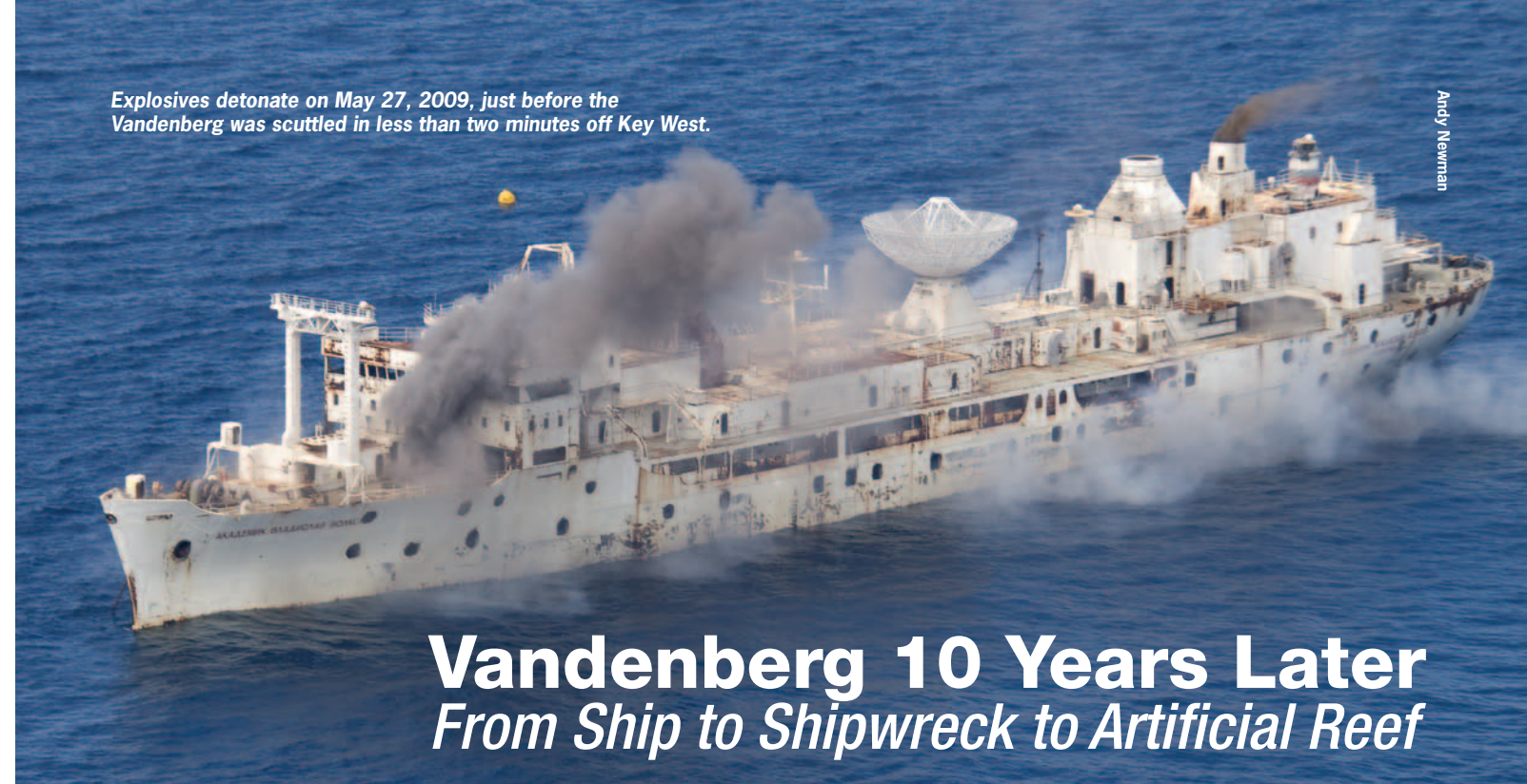
She also submits lionfish data to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, whose lionfish state records program — recognizing spearing and hook-and-line divisions — and a May statewide Lionfish Removal Day promote public education about the fishery and recreational harvest of lionfish.

— Julie Botteri



Lionfish are certainly attractive, but they have a negative impact on Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean marine life.

Explosives detonate on May 27, 2009, just before the Vandenberg was scuttled in less than two minutes off Key West.



## Vandenberg 10 Years Later From Ship to Shipwreck to Artificial Reef

On May 27, 2009, after over a decade of planning and funding totaling \$8.6 million, a former U.S. Air Force missile-tracking ship called the Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg — which once tracked space launches off Cape Canaveral, Florida, and monitored Soviet missile launches during the Cold War — was added to a list of military vessels purposely sunk off the Florida Keys to become artificial reefs, thus preserving a bit of U.S. history.

The 523-foot-long ship is the second-largest vessel in the world intentionally sunk for that purpose. Located approximately 7 miles south of Key West International Airport in nearly 150 feet of water, it also is the southernmost addition to the Florida Keys Wreck Trek, a series of nine vessels from Key Largo to Key West that recreational divers enjoy exploring.

Marine engineers had predicted the ship would sink in less than three minutes.

Vandenberg slipped beneath the surface and made it to the bottom of the ocean in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in a stunning one minute, 45 seconds.

Thousands of visiting wreck-certified divers eager to explore the "Vandy" have deemed the site a bucket-list dive.

Vandenberg has bloomed into a timeless circle of life. Seasoned divers consider it an "environmental sweet spot," reporting invertebrate life covering the ship, big schools of fish and hundreds of species of fish.

Vandy's steps, railings and superstructure are glazed over with gorgonian corals, sponges and sea urchins. Sailfish, huge hogfish, parrotfish, squid and large marine life

are spotted on the wreck — species that divers may not normally see on a coral reef.

Vandenberg has been called one of the world's best wreck dives. After their initial dive on the venerable vessel, first-timers are hooked, and experienced aquanauts agree that every qualified diver should experience it.

Properly prepared artificial reefs help take human pressure off natural coral reefs, providing alternative structures for scuba divers to explore and additional habitats for marine life. They increase marine life populations, provide a platform for education and research, boost the local economy and preserve the history and heritage of the vessel.

— Julie Botteri



A diver explores the Vandenberg off Key West in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.



## Blue Star Diving, Fishing Programs Help Sustain Keys Coral Ecosystem

Look before you book and help sustain the only barrier coral reef in the continental United States.

That's the message the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary has for travelers booking Keys fishing, diving and snorkeling trips. The sanctuary covers 2,900 square nautical miles of waters surrounding the Keys, including the coral reef that parallels the island chain.

The sanctuary's Blue Star program promotes sustainable recreational fishing, diving and snorkeling through practices that help conserve the Keys' unique marine ecosystem. Blue Star fishing guides and dive and snorkel operators know sanctuary regulations and how to practice sustainability to protect the Keys' underwater treasures.

"By practicing responsible diving, snorkeling and fishing, visitors can help to lessen the stress on the Florida Keys' unique and economically important coral reef ecosystem," said Sarah Fangman, the sanctuary's superintendent. "Efforts to protect the fragile ocean resources will be appreciated for generations to come."

Blue Star guides take online tests and are annually certified to become sanctuary partners and share educational information with clients.

Visitors can be assured that these operators are dedicated to reef sustainability, habitat conservation and proper fishing, diving and snorkeling etiquette.

Outdoor enthusiasts who book charters with Blue Star guides are helping to sustain and protect the world-renowned Keys coral reef.

— Laura Myers

[sanctuaries.noaa.gov/bluestar](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/bluestar)

## Wildlife Refuges' Nature Center Serves Lower Keys Visitors



Rob O'Neal

A Key deer fawn examines surroundings at the National Key Deer Refuge on Big Pine Key.

Since the National Key Deer Refuge was established in 1957 in the Lower Florida Keys, it has played a vital role in protecting and preserving the tiny Key deer and other Keys wildlife species.

The refuge is opening a new 1,840-square-foot nature center on Big Pine Key — a center that also showcases the island chain's Key West, Great White Heron and Crocodile Lake national wildlife refuges.

The miniature Key deer, about the size of a large dog, were once almost extinct. Today the population of shy, engaging animals is nearing 800.

At the new Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges Nature Center, surrounded by refuge lands near mile marker 30.5, visitors can learn about the deer and other plants and animals found only in the Keys. Attractions include exhibits, space for interactive events and the Nature/Bookstore operated by the Florida Keys Wildlife Society.

Protection of the island chain's priceless resources dates back to the 1908 creation of the Key West National Wildlife Refuge. Nature enthusiasts can share in the region's long-term focus on environmental stewardship by exploring the refuges and the new center that helps tell their stories.

— Carol Shaughnessy

[fws.gov/refuge/National\\_Key\\_Deer\\_Refuge](http://fws.gov/refuge/National_Key_Deer_Refuge)

## All-New and Redesigned Resorts Greet Keys Travelers

Accommodations options for travelers to the Florida Keys & Key West continue to expand as the 125-mile-long island chain unveils a variety of all-new and redesigned resorts.

In Key Largo, Curio Collection by Hilton debuts the 13-acre, 200-room Baker's Cay Resort, with 17,000 square feet of event space, two pools, a waterfall grotto and nature trail. Inclusive pet programming includes a doggie menu, apparel and Tiki huts.

Also in Key Largo, the 12-acre, luxury-inclusive, adults-only, 135-unit Bungalows Key Largo features a "Florida chic" design. Bungalows average 800 square feet, with private outdoor plunge pools or tubs. There's a Zen Garden Spa, two pools, three restaurants, Tiki boats and 1,000 feet of shoreline.

Islamorada's 25-acre 114-villa Islander Resort is to offer sleekly renovated cottage-style accommodations with screened-in lanais, a 6,000-square-foot Great Lawn, the 2,760-square-foot Blue Marlin Ballroom and Tarpon Terrace with expanded outdoor space, and a splash pad. The nearby Islander Bayside features 25 two-story two-bedroom townhomes.

Also in Islamorada, the oceanfront boutique 37-room Hadley House Resort has a sister property,



Bungalows Key Largo

Bungalows Key Largo is the Florida Keys' first all-inclusive resort.

the 5-acre oceanfront 22-room Fisher Inn Resort & Marina.

The 60-acre, 177-room Hawks Cay Resort, located on Duck Key in the Middle Keys, showcases a \$50 million renovation. New amenities include the Sixty-One Prime restaurant and adults-only Oasis Cay area. Attractions include sunset cruises, fishing excursions, dolphin encounters, Calm Waters Spa, a sunset pool, Coral Cay kids' activities center and Angler and Ale restaurant. The resort, a Preferred Hotel Group Lifestyle Collection member, also has two- and three-bedroom villas.

In Marathon, the 24-acre, 199-unit oceanfront Isla Bella Beach

Resort is to open in early 2019 with a 3,800-square-foot Hibiscus Event Center, a 4,000-square-foot spa, a marina, five oceanfront pools, four food and beverage venues and The Dunes oceanfront event space. Among attractions are bocce, croquet, oversized chess, complimentary bicycles, watersports and guided fishing expeditions.

Key West's 148-unit Parrot Key Resort, with four pools and new food and beverage concepts featuring poolside al fresco dining, has been refreshed. Also new in the island city is The Laureate Key West, an all-suite Opal Collection member.

— Laura Myers



Bob Carey

Hawks Cay Resort, near Marathon, completed a \$50 million renovation.



# Stone Crab Claws Succulent and Sustainable

They look like the clawed talons of some oversized prehistoric bird, but these claws — orange-red, pale yellow and black — come from the ocean, not the sky. They're stone crab claws, offering sweet and succulent meat that ranks among the Florida Keys' most popular delicacies.

The island chain is Florida's leading regional supplier of the world-renowned treat, harvested during an annual season that runs Oct. 15 through May 15.

More than 50 percent of processed claws shipped worldwide comes from the Keys.

After harvest, the claws are steamed, cracked and served dipped in melted butter or a

tangy mustard sauce at local restaurants. They're also sold in Keys markets and shipped nationally and internationally.

But stone crab claws are more than just delicious.

They're also a uniquely sustainable, renewable seafood resource — because crabs can regrow harvested claws.

While both claws can be taken lawfully if each is of legal size, harvesting only one claw is preferable for the crab's protection and feeding ability.

Fishermen generally pull the larger claw and return the crab to its ocean environment.

Whether served at a dockside eatery or fine gourmet bistro, sustainable stone crab claws are a



Stone crab claws are delectable and are a unique sustainable seafood resource.

singular sensation — and a can't-miss dining experience for all.

— Carol Shaughnessy

## Make Family Memories in the Keys' Natural World

Looking for a place with appealing travel experiences that strengthen connections between parents, kids, grandparents and extended families? A place to establish a tradition of shared vacations that build lasting family memories?

That place is the Florida Keys & Key West, a subtropical island chain rich in nature-themed attractions and experiential activities for everyone from young children to seniors.

They might choose to visit one of the first family-friendly attractions in the Keys. The Key West Aquarium, opened in 1935, was also believed to be the first open-air aquarium in the United States. Unique and inviting, it's home to tropical fish, sea turtles, rays, grouper, tarpon and more.

The Keys cater to multigenerational travel groups with accommodations including waterfront villas, RV parks, spacious resort suites and small inns — and an enticing array of memorable adventures.

Families and friends can snorkel together at Key Largo's John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, the world's first underwater park; explore the region's living coral reef by glassbottom boat or feed wild tarpon from a dock at Robbie's Marina in Islamorada.

There are many other options including learning about sea turtles at Marathon's Turtle Hospital;

feeding indigenous Keys fish at Florida Keys Aquarium Encounters; or interacting with dolphins at Dolphin Research Center, Theater of the Sea and other facilities. Kayak the secret realm of the Lower Keys' backcountry, walk among hundreds of living butterflies at the Key West Butterfly and Nature Conservatory, and celebrate sunset at a nightly Key West street carnival.

Or bond over a family fishing trip, catching dinner while guided by a skilled Keys charter captain — and then, at an area restaurant that cooks the catch, share smiles and plans for the next Keys getaway.

— Carol Shaughnessy



Families can feed Keys fish at Florida Keys Aquarium Encounters.

## Local Artists Embrace Keys Environment



Stephen Frink shot this French angelfish at Molasses Reef in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary off Key Largo.

Virtually all aspects of the Florida Keys' natural world are reflected in the work of the region's artists and creative spirits. For example, Key West's Jim Salem paints graceful birds in their native habitats, while Islamorada's Michelle Nicole Lowe is known for her images of fish, invertebrates and turtles.

Stephen Frink's underwater photography depicts the wonders of the continental United States' only contiguous living coral barrier reef, which parallels the island chain and provides endless inspiration to the Key Largo photographer.

Some artists rely on the Keys environment and its denizens not just for inspiration, but also as their medium of expression. The Lower Keys' Kim Workman, a master of the traditional Oriental art form of *gyotaku* or fish printing, memorializes the Keys' finned and gilled population by inking actual fish and pressing paper or canvas on them to create exact replicas.

Key West sculptor Helen Harrison, by contrast, is intrigued by wood, palm fronds and found objects. She shapes abstract and realistic pieces that reveal the beauty of her materials.

No matter their medium, many Keys artists have another calling besides creating works that chronicle or incorporate their surroundings. They also are environmentalists — making subtle yet powerful statements about the need to preserve and protect the region's unique ecosystems, habitats and their inhabitants.

For example Frink, a strong supporter of Keys marine conservation, feels that viewing the underwater world can be an important motivator in inspiring people to work for reef protection.

Artists' fascination with the Keys is not new. It dates back to 1832, when artist and ornithologist John James Audubon visited Key West and the Dry Tortugas. During that visit, he drew nearly 20 new species for his "Birds of America" folio.

Whether making creative statements about local flora and fauna or celebrating the ocean realm, local artists have embraced the Keys' ecosystems. They, and those who collect their work, make environmental awareness an art form all its own.

— Carol Shaughnessy

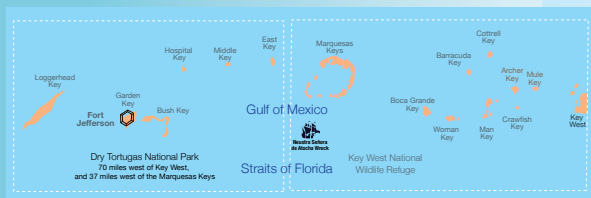


Helen Harrison, next to 'ENGENDER,' created from rare cohune palm and other materials including 24-karat gold.

keysarts.com



# Traveling Tips to the Florida Keys



The 125-mile-long Florida Keys island chain is linked to mainland Florida by U.S. Highway 1, the Overseas Highway. Visitors can fly into Miami International Airport (MIA) or Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL) and from there can reach the Keys by airport shuttle bus or rental car. Travelers can reach Key Largo, the gateway to the Keys, in about an hour from Miami or an hour and 45 minutes from Fort Lauderdale.

## Air Service to the Florida Keys

For an up-to-date roster of commercial airlines and on-demand charter operators serving Key West International and Florida Keys Marathon International Airports, go to [fla-keys.com/how-to-get-here](http://fla-keys.com/how-to-get-here).

## Driving Directions

From Miami International Airport (MIA), take LeJeune Road south to 836 West. Take the Florida Turnpike (State Road 91) south toward Key West.

The Turnpike ends at U.S. 1 in Florida City. Follow U.S. 1 south about 22 miles to Key Largo and you and your travel companions will be in the Florida Keys.

From Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL), exit the airport and follow the signs for I-595 West. Take 595 to the Florida Turnpike and follow the signs for the Florida Keys.

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

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

## Driving Data to Keys/Key Largo

FROM	MILES	KM	HOURS
Miami	50	80	1
Fort Myers	200	320	4
Tampa	300	480	6
Orlando	280	450	5.25

## Distance from Miami

REGION	MILES	KM	MILE MARKER
Key Largo	50	80	107-90
Islamorada	76	122	89-66
Marathon	111	178	65-45
Lower Keys	128	205	44-5
Key West	159	254	4-0

## Via Bus

Bus/shuttle connections from MIA and FLL to the Florida Keys allow traveling to the Keys without renting a car.

## Via Boat

Ferry connections from Fort Myers or Marco Island to Key West are offered via the Key West Express. Voyages take approximately 3.5 hours.

Extensive details on getting to the Florida Keys & Key West are available at:

[fla-keys.com/how-to-get-here](http://fla-keys.com/how-to-get-here)



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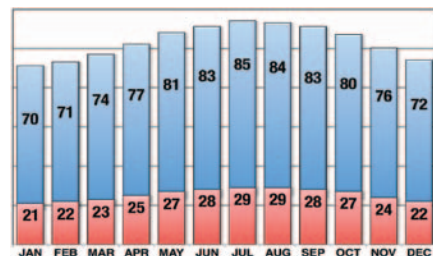
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## Weather/Climate

Wherever you are right now, chances are the weather is better in the Florida Keys. That's true even on a summer day. The hottest it's ever been in Key West is 97° F (36° C), and that was in 1880. At the peak of summer, the average high air temperature is about 89° F (32° C). The Keys are devoid of superhighways or urban sprawl to absorb and radiate the sun's heat. And the subtropical islands are cooled by sea breezes.

In the winter, the Keys are typically the warmest region in the continental U.S. There has never been a frost in Key West, according to the U.S. Weather Service.

Below are the average monthly air temperatures for the past 30 years, according to the Key West weather office. Temperatures in blue shades are Fahrenheit and those in red are Celsius.



## Help and More Information

If you're traveling in the Keys and need any help, call the toll-free visitors assistance line at 800-771-KEYS. It's staffed 24 hours a day. To contact visitor offices in the Keys, call 800-FLA-KEYS. The Keys website at [fla-keys.com](http://fla-keys.com) has a live chat feature with visitor information specialists available during regular U.S. weekday business hours to aid travelers in vacation planning.