

# Keys Traveler

THE MAGAZINE

**Connect with the Keys**  
**Preserving coral reefs**  
**Letter from a fish**  
**Keys natural world painter**

[fla-keys.com](http://fla-keys.com)

Photograph by Andy Newman

# *Turtle Spa Day*



***This tiny post-hatchling loggerhead sea turtle, rescued after being found in a Florida Keys marina, gets a spa day at the Turtle Hospital in Marathon. The renowned facility opened in 1986 as the world's first state-licensed veterinary hospital specializing in the care and treatment of sea turtles.***

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On the cover: A family relaxes in the shallow waters of the Lower Florida Keys backcountry near Marvin Key. *Photograph by Rob O'Neal*



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BOB CARE



By Carol Shaughnessy

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK DOLL

The Florida Keys island chain is renowned for its unparalleled natural resources, ranging from national wildlife refuges to the continental United States' only coral barrier reef. And while Keys residents are leading the effort to protect and nurture those resources, visitors can share their dedication while having an unforgettable vacation.

From Key Largo to Key West, visitors can discover the Keys' natural world at scores of environmental attractions, wildlife rescue and rehabilitation facilities, protected dive sites, state parks and nature preserves.

Contemporary travelers are encouraged to embrace the trend toward "conscious escapes" — being mindful of their consumption,

environmental footprint and behaviors; incorporating positive eco-activities and experiences into their vacation; and blending relaxation and renewal with respect for the Keys' natural wonders and unique way of life.

The Florida Keys community's focus on resource protection and preservation dates back more than a century. The Key West National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1908, launching a dedicated commitment to long-term environmental stewardship.

Since then, milestones have included the 1957 establishment of the National Key Deer Refuge to protect habitats for wildlife — particularly the tiny Key deer that live only in the Lower Keys — and the 1963 opening of John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, America's first underwater park.

In 1990 the U.S. government created the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, which protects 3,800 square miles of coastal and ocean waters surrounding the entire island chain — including the treasured coral reef.

More recently, experts have pioneered coral restoration efforts in the Keys, steadily restoring endangered corals by replanting on the reef new growths raised in coral nurseries.

While visiting the Keys you can explore four national wildlife refuges and 10 state parks, as well as Dry Tortugas National Park and portions of Everglades National Park.

You can tour environmental and wildlife rescue centers including Marathon's world-famous Turtle Hospital; enjoy diving and fishing adventures with eco-conscious Blue Star operators; savor sustainable food choices like stone crab claws,

STEPHEN FRINK



The Christ of the Deep statue is an icon of John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park in Key Largo.

# Connect with the Keys' rich environment and way of life

**The Lower Keys backcountry offers magnificent ecotourism experiences.**

lionfish and locally sourced seafood; stay at Florida-designated “Green Lodging” properties that prioritize resource conservation; kayak in tranquil backcountry waters or view dolphins in the wild; and take part in “voluntourism” opportunities such as assisting at a coral nursery.

While enriching your vacation with authentic sustainable adventures, you’ll also experience and connect with the Keys’ colorful, sought-after way of life. That’s because no Keys exploration is complete without meeting locals — fishing guides, artists, restaurateurs, wildlife rescuers, attractions operators, musicians and many others.

Insights from these creative, quirky, independent people offer a unique window into the island chain’s distinctive, close-to-nature lifestyle — a feature as alluring as the region’s natural world.

The Keys are a place to enjoy memorable experiences that can’t be

**Paul Menta, left, leads Key West residents and visitors in a rousing 40th birthday cheer for the Southernmost Point marker.**



ROB O'NEAL



ANDY NEWMAN

**Chef Paul Kapsalis shows off a creation at his South of the Seven restaurant tucked inside the Sugarloaf Lodge.**

found anywhere else, discover one-of-a-kind environmental and lifestyle elements, forge a personal connection to both, and embrace actions that protect and preserve them.

For visitors seeking an environmentally responsible vacation spot with genuine character, culture and community, it doesn’t get any better than the Florida Keys.

[fla-keys.com/sustain](https://fla-keys.com/sustain)

# Fort Jefferson

## Voices from the past

Sometimes called the "Gibraltar of the Gulf of Mexico," Fort Jefferson is situated in the Dry Tortugas National Park, about 68 miles west of Key West.

When Union Army Private Thomas Moran was imprisoned during the Civil War at Fort Jefferson in the remote Dry Tortugas islands, he chose an unusual method of begging for freedom: he wrote a poem.

Addressed to the commander of the Union's Department of the Gulf, it protested his incarceration in America's largest and most remote coastal fortress, located 68 miles west of Key West in the Gulf of Mexico

*"I fear not the duty/Nor battle's loud strife/But I care on Tortugas/To pine off my life,"* the poem read in part. *"My voice from Tortugas I ask you to hear."*

Private Moran's is only one voice that has cried out from the Tortugas over the years. Fort Jefferson, whose construction began in 1846 but was never finished, housed numerous soldiers and prisoners whose journals and letters describe life on the barren coral-and-sand islands.

Among them was Sergeant Harrison Herrick of the 110th New York Volunteers, who penned unvarnished diary entries: *"Friday May 6th. In the morning while the prisners on the Thames were coming ashore one of the guards, one of the*

*1st Del Artillery shot himself through the head he was crazy wether fair & plesant."*

The most enduring voice from the Tortugas is that of Dr. Samuel Mudd, imprisoned after being convicted of conspiracy in Abraham Lincoln's assassination. His "crime" was setting assassin John Wilkes Booth's broken leg.

*"We are still in irons,"* Mudd wrote in December 1865, *"compelled to wash down six bastions of the Fort daily. However, we are allowed to purchase articles of food, etc."*

Later, Mudd was released following a yellow fever epidemic during which he treated and saved the lives of stricken soldiers — and his grateful captors petitioned President Andrew Johnson on his behalf.

Though Mudd was granted a pardon in 1869, his family members are still trying to prove his innocence and get his conviction overturned. In 2015, 80 of his descendants visited Fort Jefferson on the 150th anniversary of the doctor's July 1865 arrival at the isolated outpost.

Recently, on a submerged Tortugas island, archaeologists discovered the remains of a 19th-century quarantine hospital

where yellow fever patients were treated, and a cemetery with a headstone dated 1861.

A trip to the Tortugas, usually by authorized seaplane or ferry, takes visitors into a realm largely untouched by modern civilization and unmatched in historic and natural wonders.

The seven tiny islands were named Las Tortugas (The Turtles) by explorer Ponce de Leon in 1513. A lack of fresh water inspired the addition of “dry” to their name.

On Garden Key stands the 19th-century fort. Its construction began after American leaders realized fortifying the Tortugas was vital to controlling navigation in the gulf. During the Civil War, Fort Jefferson was a Union military prison for captured deserters and others. The U.S. Army abandoned it shortly afterward.

In 1908 the area was designated a wildlife refuge. Named Fort Jefferson National Monument in 1935, it was proclaimed Dry Tortugas National Park in 1992 to protect its natural richness.

Entering Fort Jefferson, on an island hardly larger than its exterior walls, is like stepping back more than 150 years. Six-sided and constructed of some 16 million bricks, its three levels loom up



**Snorkelers search for marine life in the clear waters off Fort Jefferson's beach.**

against the sky.

Visitors can take a complimentary guided tour of the fort — stepping inside the cells, peering through gun casements and observing vast sea and sky vistas from the structure's open third level.

Afterward, they can swim and snorkel in the crystalline waters, stroll Garden Key, birdwatch, laze on the secluded

beach or possibly reflect on the lives of Private Moran, Sergeant Herrick and Dr. Mudd — and all the others whose voices still echo from the Tortugas fortress, lost in the past.

— Carol Shaughnessy

[nps.gov/drto/index.htm](https://nps.gov/drto/index.htm)

ANDY NEWMAN



*In 2015, 80 of Dr. Samuel Mudd's descendants crossed the moat at Fort Jefferson on the 150th anniversary of the doctor's July 1865 arrival at the isolated outpost.*

# Keys sanctuary and part

By Scott Atwell

It's ancient (10,000 years old), it's large (stretching from North Key Largo to the Dry Tortugas), it's unique (the only living barrier coral reef in the continental United States) and don't even ask how much it's worth (hint: the answer will start with a B).

All of which is to say the decision to increase coral reef coverage in the Florida Keys was not so much a decision as it was a requirement — even in the face of unprecedented pressures from man and mother nature alike.

Mission: Iconic Reefs (M:IR) is one of the largest collaborative coral reef restoration efforts the world has ever seen, made possible through years of restoration practice, research and innovation that have laid the comprehensive foundation to even dream — much less start — such a bold endeavor.

Launched in December 2019 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the program aspires to add over half a million mature corals to seven iconic reefs throughout the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, with a goal to significantly increase coral cover.

The work is expected to take up to 20 years, driven by current restoration partners including Coral Restoration Foundation, Mote Marine Laboratory and Reef Renewal USA — organizations that are each true leaders in the coral restoration field. These practitioners grow corals in land-based and in-water nurseries and then outplant them to the iconic sites, where they can grow and fill in gaps along the reefs that have emerged over the last 40 years.

Meanwhile, partners at the Smithsonian Institution are developing a population management strategy for elkhorn coral using data from previous genotyping that focuses on corals that seem



## MISSION: *Iconic Reefs*

to do well when other corals don't — considered more resilient in the face of rising temperatures like the kind experienced in the summer of 2023.

Restoring reefs involves more than reviving the corals themselves.

The M:IR plan includes the intentional distribution of herbivorous grazers — animals like Caribbean king crab and the long-spined

sea urchin — that consume enough algae to keep the reef clean to promote coral health and growth. Over 200,000 grazers are part of planned reintroduction for each phase of the mission.

Site preparation and maintenance are as critical as the restoration process itself, much the same way gardening work requires weeding and pruning. Site preparation enables a reef to receive outplants through the initial removal of

 **MISSION:  
ICONIC REEFS**



# Partners team up to preserve coral reefs



nuisance species, leading to increased coral survival over time.

To accomplish those activities at all seven sites, the program leverages the local dive community, facilitated through such programs as Iconic Reef Guardians, a partnership enabling professional Blue Star dive operators to engage customers in M:IR-focused maintenance and stewardship dives. Volunteer divers are now visiting in-water nurseries and soon

will be introduced to restoration sites on the reef.

Visionaries, it is said, are people who plant trees knowing full well they will never live to rest in their shade.

A version of that proverb relative to the oceans is Mission: Iconic Reefs.

**Scott Atwell, a Key West native, is communications manager for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.**

**Key Largo underwater videographer Frazier Nivens frames his camera on an elkhorn coral cluster off the Upper Florida Keys.**

**Photo by Stephen Frink**

[missioniconicreefs.org](http://missioniconicreefs.org)  
[floridakeys.noaa.gov](http://floridakeys.noaa.gov)

# Blue stars foster a blue economy



**A crew member for Fury Watersports, a Blue Star-certified operator, briefs Key West visitors on proper snorkeling techniques, including information about safeguarding the ecological resources of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.**

JOHN PENNEY

The 3,800-square-mile Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary may look like an endless resource, but below the water's surface lies a delicate environment.

For those who make a living from this ecosystem, ensuring its safety makes old-fashioned business sense. It's what bankers call the "blue economy": sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth and jobs, while preserving the health of the sea.

In the Florida Keys there's a club whose members subscribe to that philosophy. They fulfill the roles of educator, ambassador, guardian or cultural influencer — and they are shining stars showing the way to inspirational diving and fishing experiences in the Keys.

Appropriately, the stars are blue — a proprietary designation by the national marine sanctuary system that recognizes diving and fishing operators who consciously reduce their impact on the environment, while teaching clients how to do the same.

"The challenges facing our oceans are so large that sometimes individuals feel incapable of making a difference on their own," said Sarah Fangman, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary superintendent. "But choosing a Blue Star operator for your visit to the Keys is a tangible step toward helping preserve an irreplaceable ecosystem for future generations."

So how do these operators ... operate differently? It begins with extensive training for staff members followed up with annual refresher courses. Their most impactful contribution happens at pre-trip briefings where clients are taught how best to interact with the habitats they will visit.

For divers that means leaving sea life undisturbed and staying off corals.

"The majority of damage happens at the beginning of someone's dive," said Marlies Tumolo, Blue Star dive coordinator. "So take time at the beginning of the dive to streamline your

gear, checking buoyancy to make sure you're properly weighted and less likely to impact the bottom."

Similarly, the briefing by fishing charter captains focuses on "reducing fight times, making sure hands are wet when handling fish, leaving them in the water, taking quick pictures, releasing them and not taking more than you can eat," said Eric Raslich, Blue Star fishing guides coordinator.

Blue Star operators are proactive in their protection of the environment, so it's no surprise to see them collecting marine debris above and below the water or relocating boat anchors that have settled too close to corals.

The extra effort pays off on the bottom line — 70% of the traveling public believes sustainability enhances their vacation experience, according to luxury travel advisor Virtuoso.

"If you're interested in recreational fishing, diving or snorkeling, it's because you love it," said Tumolo, "and you protect what you love."

Look before you book! When you book with a Blue Star operator, you are supporting sustainable tourism and helping to protect the natural and cultural beauty of the sanctuary.

A list of Blue Star diving and fishing operators can be accessed by downloading the free Marine Sanctuary Explorer mobile app, available at Apple and Google stores, or by visiting [sanctuaries.noaa.gov/bluestar](https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/bluestar).

MATT MCINTOSH/NOAA

— Scott Atwell

[floridakeys.noaa.gov](https://floridakeys.noaa.gov)



**A Blue Star-certified fishing guide gets set to release a tarpon within sanctuary boundaries.**

## View Key deer and other natural wonders in the Lower Keys

The Florida Keys take on a magical aura for many visitors with their “nowhere else” natural wonders. High on most Keys “wish lists” is spotting the rare miniature Key deer that live within the National Key Deer Refuge on Big Pine Key and the Lower Keys.

Many people are in awe that the tiny deer — about the size of a large dog when fully grown — live wild in the Keys. Though they were once near extinction, the population of engaging animals is now estimated to be more than 800.

The first stop for anyone seeking to spot the diminutive deer is the Nature Center at mile marker 30.5 on Big Pine Key. The center showcases the Key Deer Refuge along with the island chain’s Key West, Great White Heron and Crocodile Lake National Wildlife refuges.

At the facility, engaging and informative exhibits present information about the four refuges and the endangered and protected animals they shelter.

Exhibits feature reminders to help keep Key deer wild by not feeding them — a practice that’s both illegal and bad



Story and Photos by JoNell Modys

**The Nature Center, at mile marker 30.5 on Big Pine Key, showcases the Key Deer Refuge as well as the Key West, Great White Heron and Crocodile Lake National Wildlife refuges.**

for the creatures’ health. The Big Pine and Lower Keys habitat has plenty of native shrubbery and grasses to properly nourish the deer, and feeding leads them to lose their natural shyness.

Displays also spotlight the importance of maintaining slow speeds while driving through Key deer territory. Sadly, automobiles are the leading cause of death for the deer, especially fawns that are apt to leap or dart into roadways.

At the center, visitors can pick up driving and walking trail maps to the Key

deer habitat just around the corner and — most important — learn how to safely spot the diminutive animals without causing harm.

A primary reason Key deer survive on Big Pine Key is the area’s natural supply of fresh water. The oolitic limestone traps rainwater in “lenses” that float on top of saltwater that seeps up through the porous stone.

One of the most popular stops in the National Key Deer Refuge is the Blue Hole. The large sinkhole was created from an old rock quarry and is now a source of fresh water not only for Key deer, but also for other wildlife. A short walk leads to an overlook fronting on the Blue Hole, where it’s possible to spot alligators and birds as well as Key deer.

Other trails also crisscross this part of the refuge — some easy and others for more experienced hikers. The most likely time to encounter Key deer is early in the morning and from late afternoon through sunset.

Not far from the Nature Center is Pine Channel Nature Park that opened in the summer of 2022 and was funded in part by the Keys tourism council.

Attractions include an 11-foot-high raised scenic viewing area, boardwalks, Tiki huts, picnic tables, a kayak launch and a swimming hole. The park is widely known as a wonderful spot to enjoy an island sunset.

[fws.gov/refuge/national-key-deer](https://fws.gov/refuge/national-key-deer)



Visitors are reminded to never feed Key deer in the Florida Keys.

# Letter from a fish



TRANSCRIBED BY  
**Doug Kelly**

Dear Human,

Greetings! I'm Gloria Grouper and I live on a coral reef in the Florida Keys.

I'm not saying which one for obvious reasons, but you can make life easier for me and all my aquatic friends by being mindful of your actions.

For example, those big metal anchors you throw from boats often crash into our coral homes. The damage can impact our safety and makes it easier for Barry Barracuda to catch us. If you would anchor away from reefs or use mooring buoys, we'd be ever so grateful.

Sometimes you toss trash into our water wonderland. Please don't splash your trash! Bring along a bag and take waste home with you. And please don't spill oil, gas and other liquids into the water because we can't breathe that stuff.

I don't mind playing tug-of-war with you, but if you win – especially out of harvest season – please release me. That way I, and other fish, can play tug-of-war again. Use circle hooks so it's easier to let me go. And don't forget to slow down in idle zones to avoid bumping into Marty Manatee.

My pal Barney Bonefish likes to dine in real shallow water, so please do your boat zoomies out in deep water so your propellers won't tear up our precious seagrass. I mean, it's a few minutes of fun for you, but it's life and death for us!

We don't mind sharing our waters with humans who swim or dive in our home. But if you visit us, please use nontoxic sunscreen and don't touch or remove what you find ... after all, this is the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

And be sure to go to a Florida Keys restaurant and eat a lionfish for us. We detest lionfish because they're invasive and eat our young children, but you humans certainly do like their taste at the dining table.

If you would do these and other eco-friendly things, you'll put a big grin on this grouper's face.

Tight lines,

**GG**

Gloria Grouper

[fla-keys.com/fishing](http://fla-keys.com/fishing)

# Women lead the way on Keys waters

FLORIDA KEYS HISTORY & DISCOVERY CENTER



Bonnie, Beulah and Frankee Laidlaw show off a bonefish caught in the 1940s. Today, bonefish are strictly a catch-and-release species for anglers in the Florida Keys.

**F**ish are the ultimate equalizer. The scaly critters care not a whit about the gender of who's tugging on the other end of the line. Skill is skill, and the same holds true for whoever runs the boat.

World War II proved that point. While most male captains in the Florida Keys left to serve overseas, the Laidlaw sisters — Bonnie, Beulah and Frankee — demonstrated they were equal to any man when it came to for-hire fishing trips. They not only led clients to copious catches and releases of bonefish and tarpon, but they also caught and kept three husbands — each a pioneering Keys guide.

Capt. Joyce "Scottie" Kingsley skippered her 38-foot charter boat out of an Islamorada marina for three decades until the early 2000s. Her Scottish accent and expertise in putting anglers on Gulf Stream gamefish resulted in a bounty of bookings and earned lasting respect.

Fast-forward to the present to Maryann Marinho of Boa Vida Fishing Charters. Formerly a stand-up paddleboard pro and head chef, she moved to Key West in 2009 after a stint of salmon fishing

in Alaska. A friend in the charter business occasionally asked her to lend a hand and noted her adept fishing skills and personable style.

"Luckily, he convinced me to become a full-time charter captain," said Marinho, who now operates two boats to handle her booming business.

Lori McCoy owned a car dealership in Georgia and vacationed for a month every year in Marathon in the Middle Keys. In 2019 she concluded that getting paid to pursue big fish for a living would beat selling cars any day.

"I absolutely love it," said McCoy, who



BOA VIDA FISHING CHARTERS

Captain Maryann Marinho shows off a big wahoo.

operates Island Girl Charters. "There's no better place in the world to enjoy quality fishing experiences."

The legacy of successful lady skipper is a testament to the Keys' ethos of liberty, equality and fisheries.

— Doug Kelly

[BoaVidaCharters.com](http://BoaVidaCharters.com)  
[IslandGirlMarathon.com](http://IslandGirlMarathon.com)



ISLAND GIRL CHARTERS

Captain Lori McCoy holds a grouper caught off Marathon.



ANDY NEWMAN (2)

storm cloud on a summer day, the stillness of a night on the water under a full moon.

**Q:** *What keeps you challenged and focused?*

**TH:** My daughters keep me energized about painting. They inspire me to focus on growing and reaching my potential to provide a beautiful life for them. From a conservation standpoint, I want to preserve the natural landscape for them, their children, and their children's children.

**Q:** *What message do you want your actions and example to communicate?*

**TH:** All living things — humans, animals, plants — are interconnected and each action we take affects those around us, even in the smallest ways.

Like the ecosystems of the Florida Bay rely on each other, so do we.

**Q:** *What do you hope your positive environmental actions will accomplish?*

**TH:** To help people become more connected to nature. In the same way that experiencing the environment shaped me and my desire to protect nature and share love, I hope that people who hang my work in their homes can feel the peaceful connectedness of being near the water.

— Laura Myers

[thehalegallery.com](http://thehalegallery.com)  
[taylorhalepaintings.com](http://taylorhalepaintings.com)



**Hale at his working gallery in Islamorada amid an evolving display of oil paint clumps.**

# TAYLOR HALE

## Painter of the Keys' natural world

**A**rtist Taylor Hale, a Florida Keys native, has returned home to the Upper Florida Keys — drawn by the pull of the ocean, colors of the skyscapes and mangroves of the bay.

Hale, who has lived in northern Florida and the U.S. Northeast, is known for his ethereal scenes of the Keys' natural world: cloudscapes, waterscapes and landscapes.

Though a resident of Key Largo, he and wife Kelly operate two galleries in Islamorada. The Hale Gallery presents curated shows of his and other contemporary artists' works, while the Taylor Hale Studio & Gallery is where he paints and displays his art.

Hale, whose great-great grandfather was an artist as are other family members, describes his images as "naturalistic and coloristic, with harmonized palettes of color."

The father of two young daughters, he's passionate about the Keys' natural world. He prioritizes donating his artistry and time to local groups that protect that world — specifically, the Coral Restoration Foundation and Florida Bay Forever.

Recently, Hale discussed his art and its role in raising environmental awareness.

**Q:** *What aspects of the Keys' environment or way of life matter most to you?*

**TH:** The most important part of the Keys lifestyle is the water. It allows for adventure and discovery and peace and joy. It influences all the people who come here to vacation and to live.

**Q:** *What inspired you to care about respecting and protecting the Keys' natural world?*

**TH:** I was lucky to grow up in the Keys' natural world — climbing wild tamarind trees, snorkeling at the reef, exploring the Everglades, scrambling through the mangroves. As a kid, in summers I probably spent more time on the water than on land, and that time inspired me. We always followed the motto of "Leave no trace." That gave me a deep, ingrained love and respect for the beautiful waters of the Keys and a desire to protect the fragile environment.

**Q:** *How does that influence your work?*

**TH:** The waters of the Keys provide me with endless inspiration for my paintings. I aim to capture moments in time in nature — the atmosphere and magic of a sunset glow, the feeling of being "small" when facing a huge white

## Key West's renaissance shaped by LGBTQ community

Key West's offbeat charm and open, genuinely welcoming spirit are among the reasons the island city is so popular among LGBTQ visitors — but few people are aware that respect for diversity dates from its earliest settlement.

Located 125 miles southwest of mainland Florida at the southernmost tip of the Florida Keys, the subtropical city has embraced widely differing groups of people since the early 1800s.

American seafarers and merchants, Bahamian shipwreck salvagers and fishermen, Cuban cigar barons, pirates, poets and U.S. presidents all found their way to Key West — and developed a community with an atmosphere of live-and-let-live individualism.

Playwright Tennessee Williams, famed for “A Streetcar Named Desire” and “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” among other works, helped attract national attention to Key West's accepting appeal in the 1940s. After he moved to the island for good in 1949, his presence attracted artists, writers and musicians who elevated Key West's emerging reputation.

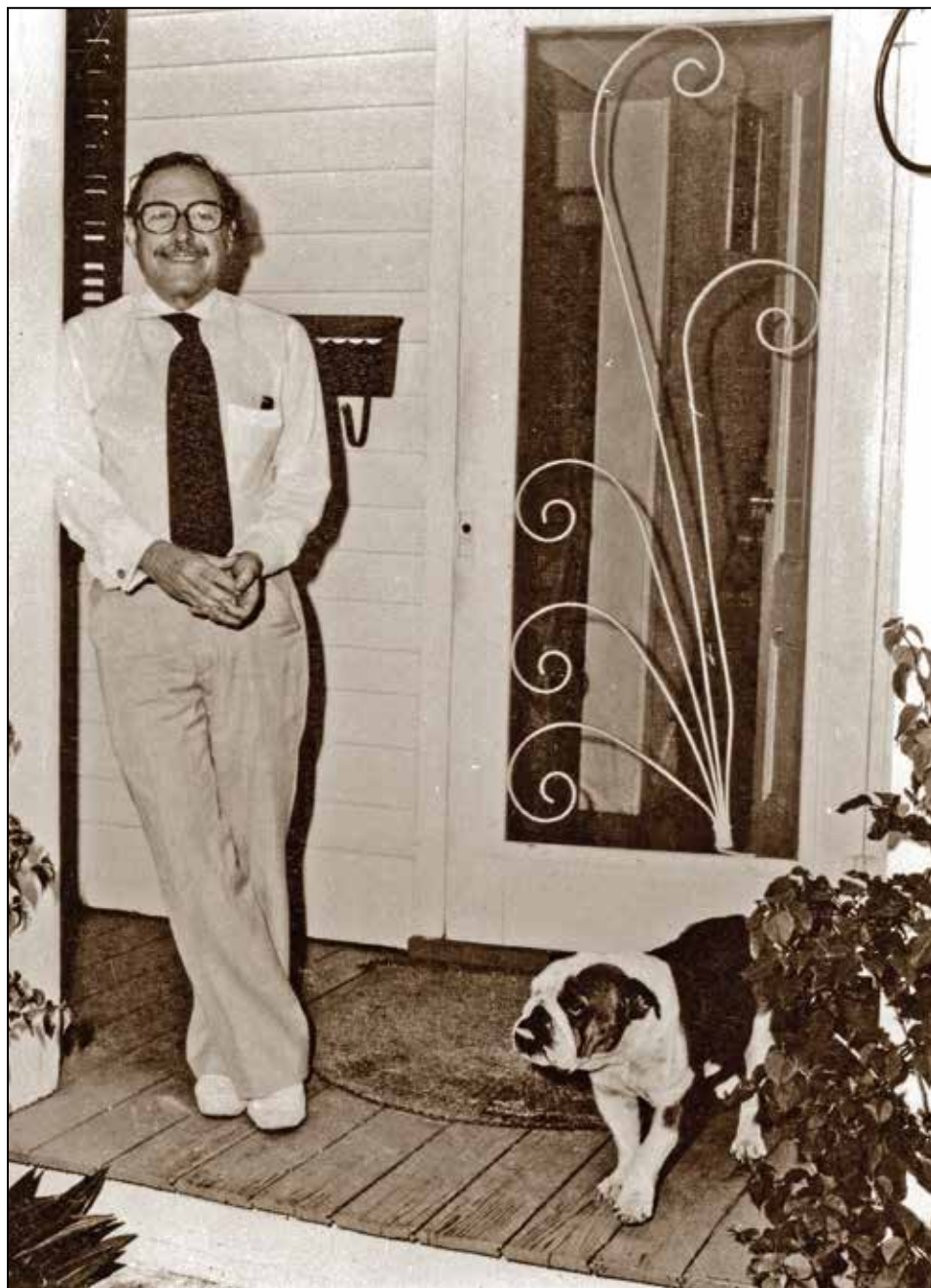
Other gay and lesbian notables including Gore Vidal, Truman Capote, Leonard Bernstein and Elizabeth Bishop also enjoyed spending time on the island, helping to shape its growing literary and artistic culture.

The creative LGBTQ presence is credited with sparking interest in Key West from the 1950s through the 1970s, when architects began transforming then-shabby Old Town and renovating significant buildings.

It has since been estimated that more than 70% of the area's restoration and renovation effort was undertaken by members of the LGBTQ community. Now Old Town is acclaimed as one of the most remarkable historic districts in the United States, with about 3,000 standing wooden structures.

As well as Key West's architectural renaissance, LGBTQ visionaries played a significant role in the island's commercial revitalization. When the U.S. Navy dramatically reduced its presence in the mid-1970s, the city turned to tourism to bolster a sagging economy.

Attracted by the island's commercial



Playwright Tennessee Williams poses outside his Key West home in this 1940s photo.

potential, entrepreneurs began opening guesthouses, shops, restaurants and clubs. In 1978, the Key West Business Guild was formed to support the island's gay population and encourage tourism.

Today, Key West's thriving LGBTQ community continues to influence and lead in realms ranging from politics to hospitality and the arts.

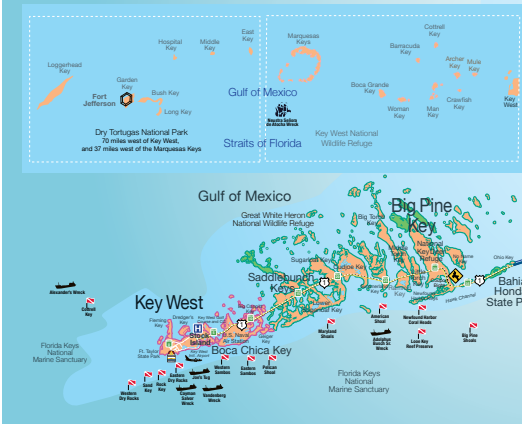
From a small beginning, fueled by the efforts of a farsighted group, the inclusive island has become an internationally acclaimed vacation spot for LGBTQ

travelers. Some 250,000 visit each year, delighting in the “come-as-you-are” atmosphere and relaxed camaraderie.

— Laura Myers

[fla-keys.com/gay](http://fla-keys.com/gay)  
[gaykeywestfl.com](http://gaykeywestfl.com)

# Traveling Tips to the Florida Keys



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keysvoices.com

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	58	93	1
Fort Myers	200	320	4
Tampa	300	480	6
Orlando	280	450	5.75
Jacksonville	490	780	10

## Distance from Miami

REGION	MILES	KM	MILE MARKER
Key Largo	58	93	108-90
Islamorada	76	122	90-63
Marathon	111	178	63-40
Lower Keys	135	217	40-4
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)

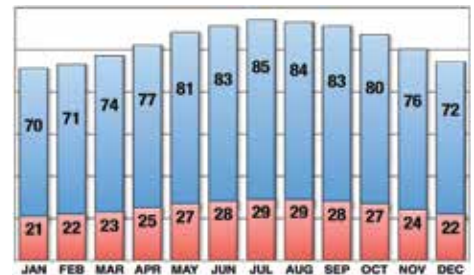
## Weather/Climature

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 summer's peak, 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 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 past 30-year monthly air temperatures from 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 visitor assistance line at 800-771-KEYS. It's staffed 24 hours a day. To contact visitor offices throughout the Florida Keys, call 800-FLA-KEYS, weekdays during normal business hours. The Florida Keys' fact-filled website is at [fla-keys.com](http://fla-keys.com).



Keys Info