

# FLORIDA KEYS

Heaven is a place on earth when you're frolicking in the Sunshine State.

**F**lorida has so much to offer, from the perpetual sunshine that's earned it its Sunshine State moniker, to the unparalleled Miami nightlife. But most of all, visitors to the beautiful Caribbean-style keys that stretch out across the turquoise waters of Florida will leave with memories of idyllic days and sultry nights.

## LAIDBACK & LOVIN' IT

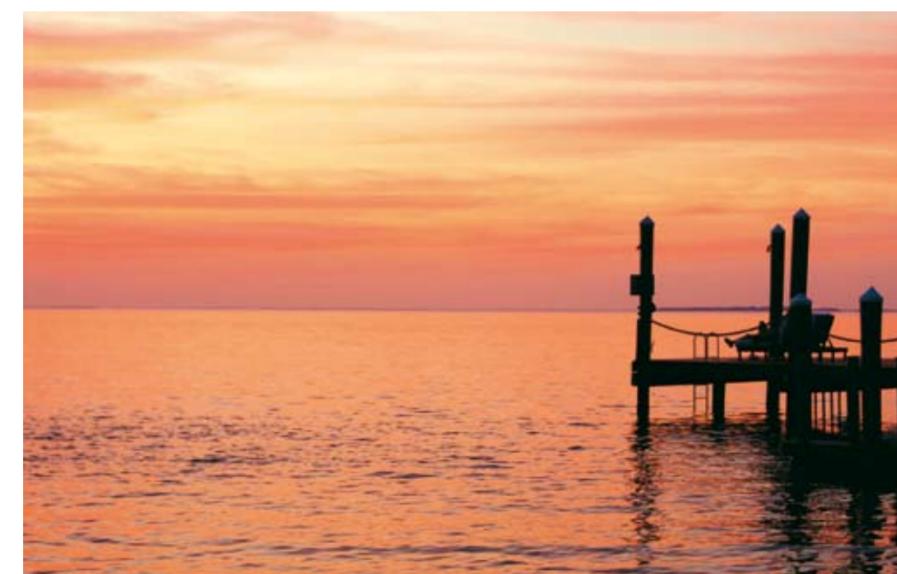
The keys are unlike the rest of the United States, or even Florida. Indeed, the islands linked up by bridges have more in common with the Caribbean than the US. It's a million miles away from busy Miami, with a laidback vibe that you can gently strum, as the proliferating palm trees sway in the cool breezes.

The climate in the keys is mild all year round and the calendar of events is busy every single month, especially in Key West, but it's worth bearing in mind that September is known as 'Hurricane Season', so you're probably best off if you plan to visit the other 11 months of the year. February is especially agreeable for the great temperature – around 24 degrees Celsius – and the empty beaches.

## ROMANTIC HIDEAWAY

In Key Largo, famous due to the movie Lauren Bacall and Bogart made, Azul del Mar ([www.azulkeylargo.com](http://www.azulkeylargo.com)) is a cosy five-room hotel with spacious tropical suites that blend contemporary with classic touches and an extremely friendly welcome. Although he won't say who, the manager admits it's a bolthole for rock stars and sports celebrities who love the atmosphere and designer edge.

For a romantic and low-key hideout with fabulous views, check into Casa Morada ([www.casamorada.com](http://www.casamorada.com)) on the Islamorada key. The boutique hotel is reminiscent of a stylish '50s motel with a dash of cool Caribbean style. White linen, wrought iron and sleek lines contrast with bright fuchsia orchids. Don't miss

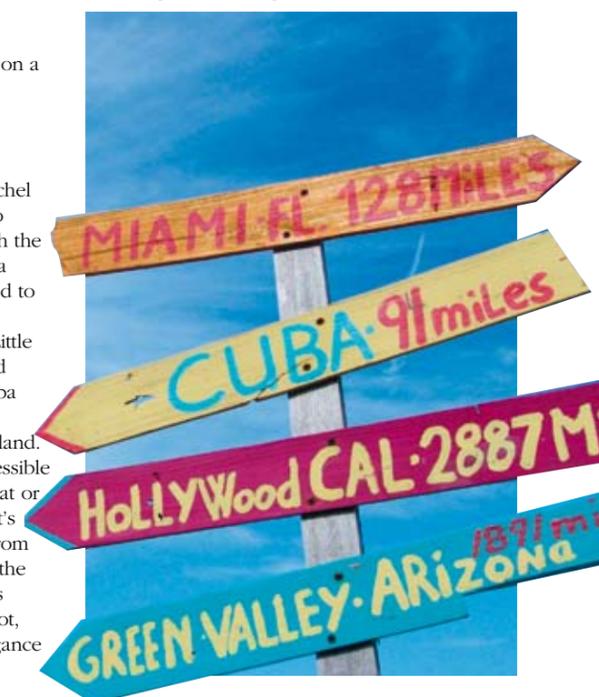


Above: Little Palm promises glorious sunsets. Below: Quirky wooden signs in Marathon.

drinks at the bar by the pool, which floats on a manmade island off the property!

## CELEBRITY GUESTS

Everyone from Madonna to Oprah and Rachel Hunter have taken time out in the keys. To mingle with the crème de la crème, head to the ultra-exclusive Little Palm Island Resort & Spa ([www.littlepalmisland.com](http://www.littlepalmisland.com)). Accessible only by boat or seaplane, it's secluded from the rest of the world. This tranquil spot, where elegance





and casual cool rule, has hosted Sandra Bullock, John Kerry and Cameron Diaz. There's everything you'd expect from a luxurious resort: Palm fringed beaches, turquoise waters, attentive staff and gourmet cuisine. Lie by the pool, on the beach or in a hammock, or borrow a motorboat and head out to sea, or visit the surrounding islands, which are uninhabited. Finish the day by taking your welcome champagne hamper to the dock for the show: Yes, impossibly electric pink sunsets are screened daily. Also keep an eye out for the sweet miniature key deer that roam free.



## SPA SESSIONS

Check into the Cheeca Lodge for a spa session. It's popular with celebrities, and even the Bush family spend their holidays here. The Lodge on Islamorada, the purple island, has a state of the art spa, as well as a nine-hole golf course and tennis courts. Try a tangy Key Lime Scrub and finish off with a coconut lime body cream or the Mango sugar smoothie. Delicious! Surf to [www.cheeca.com](http://www.cheeca.com) for more information.

At Little Palm on Torch Key, you will find another top-end spa: The Spa Terre. Treatments include exotic Balinese style or Thai massages, and the Sacred Stone massage, where the warmth of heated volcanic rocks penetrate the deeper layers of your muscles. For a bit of pampering, treat yourself to a facial with all-natural ingredients and essential oils. Or simply indulge in a luxurious spa manicure and pedicure.

## BEST BUYS

There isn't much in the way of retail in the keys – unlike in other parts of the USA, there are no giant malls to be found. In Marathon, a strip mall will get you basics at Radio Shack or a supermarket, but the best things to bring home are souvenirs from Key West. Specialities include therapeutic aloe vera products from Key West Aloe ([www.simplyaloe.com](http://www.simplyaloe.com)), such as the Fresh Green Massage Lotion, or cigars from the Key West Cigar Factory ([www.keywestcigarfactory.com](http://www.keywestcigarfactory.com)). Other nice things to cart back are artsy souvenirs and Key lime goodies from Conch Traders ([www.conchtraders.com](http://www.conchtraders.com)).



Above: Little Palm promises nothing but sun, sand and sea.

## POSH NOSH

Stop off at Lazy Days in Islamorada, the 'catch to cook' restaurant, where you'll bring your catch to be cooked up in any style you like. If you aren't bringing your own, stop off at the Keys Fisheries in Marathon to get some. Set in a picturesque Marina, it's a low key and laid back eatery that cooks up excellent coconut shrimp and calamari.

For a gastronomic experience, head to Little Palm Island. Dinner is set up out on the beach, complete with a spectacular sunset as the backdrop and Tiki torches aflame. The resort prides itself on its glorious cuisine, such as deliciously fresh tuna tartare, rosemary lamb chops or shrimp risotto. Breakfast is even better, with eggs Benedict, lobster, smoked salmon and incredible pastries.

In Key West there is plenty of choice, from Mangoes in the Old Town, or for a hint of Caribbean, Snapper in passion fruit sauce, or even grub from the infamous Sloppy Joe's, open since prohibition was repealed on 5 December 1933 ([www.sloppyjoes.com](http://www.sloppyjoes.com)). For dessert, a slice of Key Lime pie from Kermit's Key West Lime Shoppe is compulsory. ([www.keylimeshop.com](http://www.keylimeshop.com))

## Stars In The Keys



**Sheryl Crow, Paul Newman, Rosie O'Donnell, Toby Keith** and **George Strait** have all spent time out in the Keys.



Former US President **Bill Clinton** and **Hillary Clinton** have also visited. President Bush stays at the Cheeca Lodge on Islamorada.

Children's books author **Judy Blume**

(who lives in Key West part-time) and **Frank McCourt**, who wrote *Angela's Ashes*, has also visited.



Key Largo was the location for the famous film of the same name starring **Humphrey Bogart** and **Lauren Bacall**. A more recent production, *Blood & Wine*, starring **Jack Nicholson** and **Jennifer Lopez**, was filmed at the same site.



Above: Key West is a must-stop shopping destination.

## Need To Know

Find out more at [www.fa-keys.com](http://www.fa-keys.com). Visit [www.VISITFLORIDA.com](http://www.VISITFLORIDA.com) or call 0870-770-1177 for a free Florida Vacation Guide & Map.

## COOL SIGHTS

Take a scenic road trip across the keys' amazing bridges; the Overseas Highway is a masterpiece of construction with 43 bridges, including one that is seven miles long!

First stop off in Key Largo, where the marine sanctuary and 'coral reef state park' are home to 500 fish species. It's the perfect place to spend the day snorkelling or scuba diving at the wreck in Spiegel Grove, or even taking a glass bottom boat tour. The next island, Islamorada, is the 'Sport fishing capital of the world' for those who like to fish tarpon, snook or redfish, or just sample the seafood.

In Marathon, animal lovers should stop off at the Dolphin Research Centre. Home to over 16 dolphins, you can even have a quick swim with them ([www.dolphins.org](http://www.dolphins.org)); or head to the Turtle Hospital. ([www.turtlehospital.org/about.htm](http://www.turtlehospital.org/about.htm)) Otherwise, take time out in the romantically named Conch Keys, Duck Key, Grassy Key or Pigeon Key.

Big Pine and the lower keys are the most chilled out. A natural reserve stretches over 2,300 acres and is home to the adorable miniature key deer. This is the place for nature lovers, and best explored by kayak.

And, last but not least, there lies Key West, the US's most southern point. Closer to Cuba than to Miami, there's plenty to do in what has been nicknamed the 'Conch Republic'. Wander around the pastel coloured 'gingerbread' houses, the quaint streets alive with exotic blooms, or enjoy sunset drinks at Mallory square. A cruise ship port, Key West has a real party town vibe with plenty of restaurants, bars and shops to keep you busy. Don't miss a visit to Key West's most famous resident's home: Ernest Hemingway's ([www.hemingwayhome.com](http://www.hemingwayhome.com)). The Spanish colonial villa at 907 Whitehead St is a National Historic Landmark and museum, where his presence is still palpable. **OK!**

Below: Cosy up in a luxurious suite at Little Palm.



## Get there!

Fly Malaysian Airlines to New York, then to Key West International Airport on American Airlines. Or try Virgin Atlantic that flies from Singapore to London and onto Miami. Find out more at [www.virgin-atlantic.com](http://www.virgin-atlantic.com) or call 08705 747 747.

Hire a car to explore the keys with Avis. For more information go to [www.avis.com](http://www.avis.com).

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