



AllWays Traveller

Key West, Florida

[www.allwaystraveller.com](http://www.allwaystraveller.com)

# Well worth you heading down the Florida Keys

**The Florida Keys are a string of small islands that start just south of Miami and stretch for 125-miles along the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico to Key West.**

Each key is connected to the next by the Overseas Highway and its 43 bridges including the Seven Mile Bridge which is, in reality, only 6.79 miles long.

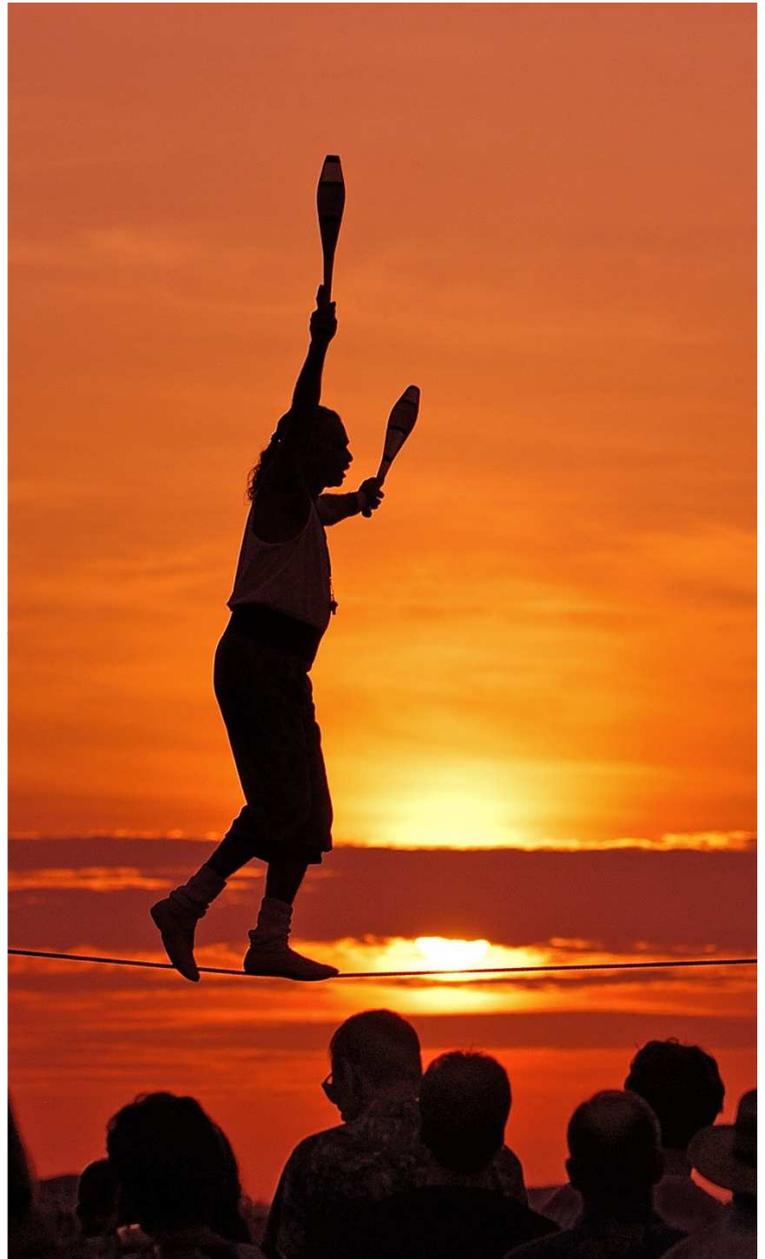
The coastal waters, shallow water flats, mangrove islets and coral reefs that surround the Keys are designated the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

On land, each island along the Florida Keys enjoys a distinct character, while combining to offer a laid back, 'island living, experience within two hours of Miami.

Finally, a climate that remains, season to season, between the high 70s and low 80s makes the Florida Keys an real option during the summer months - when the heat can put a real strain when visiting other parts of Florida.

**Ashley Gibbins**

Managing editor  
**AllWays traveller**





The Conch Train



The Conch Train has been giving guided tours of Key West since 1958 and is an entertaining, fact-filled 90 minute trip.

[www.conchtourtrain.com](http://www.conchtourtrain.com)

Ghosts and gravestones



On this tour you will hear ghostly tales as you travel the narrow, dark streets of Old Town - with their 19th century wooden houses that 'hold on to the secrets of their former inhabitants'.

[www.ghostsandgravestones.com/key-west](http://www.ghostsandgravestones.com/key-west)

Also

[www.trolleytours.com/key-west](http://www.trolleytours.com/key-west)

## Not too far to go to get away from it all

By Ashley Gibbins

**With just four days for our first visit to the Florida Keys, we chose Duck Key and Key West, knowing this would provide a contrasting take on this part of the Sunshine state.**



*Hawks Cay* on Duck Key, and about mid-way down, is a 65 acre island hideaway resort.

A two hour drive from Miami International airport it is well within striking distance after a long transatlantic flight.

Arriving at the resort mid-evening, gives just enough time to check-in, freshen up and have a couple of drinks and a snack before bed.

Sitting at the pool bar with a cool beer and the temperature 75°, at 9:30 in the evening, is the moment I hang on to when boarding the early morning flight from London.

Tired but at ease, and excited about the trip that lies ahead.



## Way out West

**In my younger days, phrases like 'way out' or 'far out' meant slightly crazy, a little wild maybe or something off kilter.**

Key West is just like that. A time locked sort of place - locked sometime in the mid-seventies - and as far out as you can get still be in the USA.

It's also a little frayed around the edges, in an attractive way.

When the waters are high, some of the roads tend to flood as a result and no one really seems to care.

It's been happening, just about always and life still goes on so what the heck.

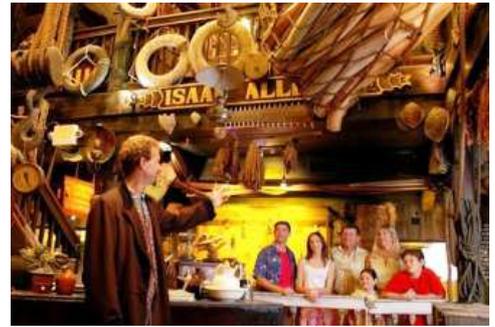
As for location, signs everywhere remind you it's only 90 miles to Cuba (30 minutes flying time by seaplane).

Key West is one of Florida's prime tourist destinations.

Its residents, a quirky lot, welcome visitors with 'open arms', proud to be, well, a little way out.

They happily refer to themselves as conches (pronounced conks) and freshwater conch status is bestowed on those who live here for seven years or more.

## The Key West Shipwreck Treasure Museum



The plundering of wrecks during the 1850s made Key West the richest city in the United States.

This museum uses live actors and artefacts from the shipwrecking industry and tells the story of the Isaac Allerton, which was wrecked off of Key West in 1856.

On display are many of the treasures from the wreck of this ship.

[www.keywestshipwreck.com](http://www.keywestshipwreck.com)

## The Audubon House & Tropical Gardens

The Audubon House & Tropical Gardens is one acre of orchids, bromeliads and other tropical foliage, together with a herb garden and 1840-style nursery.

The house itself has many antique furnishings purchased from estate sales and auctions in Europe.

[www.audubonhouse.com](http://www.audubonhouse.com)

## Key West Aquarium



When it first opened in 1935 the Aquarium was the first in the US to use an "open air concept", which allowed natural sunlight to illuminate the marine displays.

Today the Aquarium is home to sharks, turtles, stingrays, tropical and other fish found in the waters of Key West.

[www.keywestaquarium.com](http://www.keywestaquarium.com)

## The spirit of Hemmingway is still strong



**The most famous, or should that be infamous, freshwater conch was Ernest Hemingway.**

Hemingway lived in Key West during the 1930's and took seamlessly to the laid-back lifestyle, great fishing, warm tropical climate and Sloppy Joes, the bar he was to be found propping up every afternoon.

The Hemminway house offers a glimpse of the author's time in Key West and is home to 40-50 polydactyl (six-toed) cats, which are direct decedents of a white six-toed cat named Snowball that was given to Hemmingway by a ships captain.

[www.hemingwayhome.com](http://www.hemingwayhome.com)



The annual Hemingway Days celebration, every July, has a programme of events including a look-alike contest for stocky white-bearded men resembling the author along wit a three-day marlin tournament to remember Hemingway's devotion to the deep-sea sport.

## Bar life and soul

The bars, for which Key West is renowned, are clustered around Duval and offer a lively lure to Key West.



Sloppy Joe's is still here, although on a different site, and others take 'red neck' sounding names like Dogs Breath, Tattoos and Scars.

For those who enjoy live music the performances start from mid-morning onwards.

But it is as each evening passes into the early hours that the music gets louder and the atmosphere more raucous. Do Duval once and you will know if this is going to be a regular night time haunt.

Talking of haunts, Key West, seems to have more than its fair share of ghostly conches.

And while I am not sure how many are actually spotted on the nightly ghost tours, they are great fun.

## The Harry S Truman Little White House



The Harry S Truman Little White House was used as the White House of the United States during the Truman administration.

It offers the chance to experience the house as it was redecorated for Truman in 1949.

Most of the furnishings are original and used by President Truman.

It was also home for inventor Thomas Edison, who lived here for six months during WWI, while perfecting new weapons for the Navy.

[www.trumanlittlewhitehouse.com](http://www.trumanlittlewhitehouse.com)

## The Key West Butterfly & Nature Conservatory



The Key West Butterfly & Nature Conservatory is a glass-enclosed, climate-controlled home to hundreds of butterflies and exotic colourful birds from around the world.

[www.keywestbutterfly.com](http://www.keywestbutterfly.com)

## The Fury glass bottom boat



The Fury Glass Bottom boat is the second oldest attraction in Key West.

Now a modern catamaran it offers trips to view the vivid colours of North Americas only living coral reef.

[www.furykeywest.com](http://www.furykeywest.com)

## Sunsets and how!



This being the bottom end of Florida, a state known for its sunsets, there are two other things to earmark for when the sun goes down.



### Mallory Square

The first is the nightly sunset celebration at Mallory Square with high wire walkers, fire eaters and other street entertainers performing.

There's also the chance to browse and buy from the artists selling their paintings, prints and jewellery items.



### The sunset cruise

The second evening activity that should be pencilled in is the sunset cruise.

There are a number of sailing options and we chose Commotion on the Ocean.

The band, playing blues and rock music, is worth cost on its own, but the margaritas, wine and beer also keep coming and coming and there is a sturdy buffet.

This was the first time I had seen from the water and I have to admit it was special.

While Key West undoubtedly comes to life from late afternoon onwards, there is still much to do during the day. (See the side panel just a selection.)

And don't forget, this is the sunshine state. Time has to be given to lying in the sun by the pool or on the beach.

### A bit farther to go, but is it worth the trip down the Florida Keys?



Without doubt the answer is yes.

To begin with, the Keys are Florida, and have all that the sunshine state has to offer.

But they also enjoy that cultural difference that distance helps to nurture.

I wonder how many times I will need to go to get honorary 'conch-hood'?

## Key West Eco Tours



Key West Eco Tours takes small groups into the Key West National Wildlife Refuge on board a 31' Catamaran designed for shallow water.

There is also the chance to do a guided kayak tour around the mangrove islands looking for small sharks, sting rays, fish, and a variety of birds.

[www.keywestecotours.com](http://www.keywestecotours.com)

### The Dry Tortugas



About 70 miles west of Key West, Florida lie seven undeveloped coral and sand islands that make up the Dry Tortugas National Park.

On Garden Key, the centerpiece of these islands, stands Fort Jefferson – America's largest 19th-century coastal fort.

The Yankee Freedom II ferry to the Dry Tortugas, departs daily at 8am.

[www.yankeefreedom.com](http://www.yankeefreedom.com)

See also :

[www.keywestattractions.org](http://www.keywestattractions.org)

### More information



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

[www.keywestcity.com](http://www.keywestcity.com)



## Hawks Cay, Duck Key

**"Look!" I raised myself from my sun lounge to see a four foot long, key-lime green and black iguana slowly saunter past my feet writes Ann Mealor.**

Unperturbed by my being there, he nonchalantly made his way towards a favoured rock to commence his afternoon sun bathing. It was a real treat to see this 'mini dinosaur' close up in his natural habitat.



**And that's what made Hawks Cay special.**

Not only did I end up spotting a couple of iguanas, but also colourful yellow and black striped fish in the lagoon and bottlenose dolphins, which are part of the resorts conservation and education programme.

Swishing palms, lush foliage and a tranquil, blue sea provide the tropical setting for the Hawks Cay resort at Duck Key, which occupies one of Duck Keys five islands, and has stunning views.

Our room was large and furnished in old colonial style with a very comfortable king bed and spacious bathroom with Tommy Bahama toiletries.

The balcony, with its view across the pool, lagoon and sea proved the ideal spot to enjoy a drink and watch the sun go down.

Although the resort is good for families (there is an excellent kids club and programme) it also provides a romantic getaway for couples as it is beautifully landscaped with lots of hideaway places to sit and relax.

There are four restaurants at Hawks Cay including the fine dining *Alma* and the more relaxed *Ocean*.

We sampled the buffet breakfast in *Ocean*, which included delicious smoked salmon and proper Florida orange juice.

A particular pleasure was sitting at the *Tikki* bar and around the pool fire sipping cocktails well into the evening.

Hawks Cay has a range of watersports and activities including kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding and snuba, a scuba experience without the need for classes. You can also get close up to their four resident dolphins and find out more about these wonderful creatures.

With an award winning spa and a fully equipped gym, there is plenty here for all to enjoy.



[www.hawkscay.com](http://www.hawkscay.com)



## Hyatt Regency Key West

**Big Momma was impressive. Twenty years old and weighing in at 22lb was the Queen of Turtles writes Ann Mealor.**

This beautiful creature has been at the Hyatt Key West for most of her life and is now one of 50 aquatic turtles living in 'turtle paradise' at the resort.



The turtles have become a big hit with by guests and their numbers have grown over the years, primarily due to people donating lost or injured ones.

Hyatt Executive Assistant, BeBe Clarke, better known as the 'Turtle Lady' looks after their every need.

Self-trained, she is now an authority on the hard shelled species and keeps a close eye on all in her care, from Buttercup, a Peninsula Cooter turtle and the smallest of the bunch, to Big Momma, a Chicken Turtle.

Guests can watch the turtles being fed shrimp by BeBe, who is happy to answer questions such as why the girls are separated from the boys (fairly obvious!) and why Topsy doesn't swim straight (she had a lung infection and has swam crooked ever since, hence her name).

BeBe's attention to detail in the care of her wards mirrors the excellent personal service shown to guests by all staff at the Hyatt Key West.

On arriving, we were offered a complimentary glass of sparkling wine and while sat around the pool, cold towels scented with bergamot were offered.

In the room was a card listing a range of items from toothpaste to tea bags that could be requested on a complimentary basis (I asked for slippers, which I always like to have); toiletries were a generous size and good quality from the spa, which I appreciated.

Each time we went out, a bottle of water was offered by the ever helpful Peter and cold water infused with orange and lime was always available in reception.

The manager's weekly guest reception on a Wednesday gave us the chance to sample some of the chef's handiwork: hot spinach and tomato dip with garlic bread and multi-coloured tortilla chips and beef wrap pin wheels – they were all delicious.

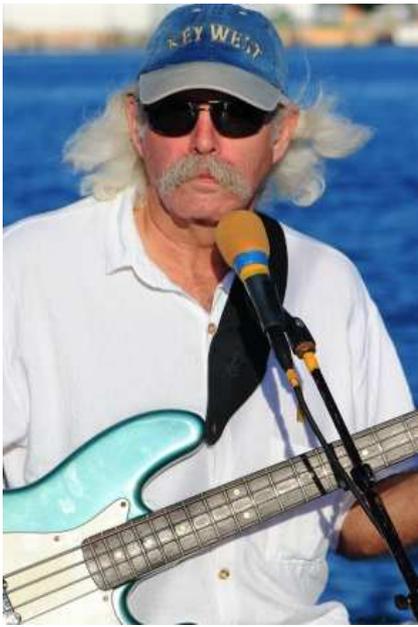
The service at this hotel was exemplary from Dylan who welcomed us and took our bags to our room to Susie who discretely waited on us around the pool and bought us our delicious 'happy hour' margaritas.

Ideally situated close to the dock area and vibrant Duvall Street, the Hyatt Key West provides an oasis of luxury and refinement - and tranquillity when it is needed.



[www.keywest.hyatt.com](http://www.keywest.hyatt.com)

A snapshot of Key West



## Doing the airport in style – using the executive lounge



**How often have you heard it said that it is the airport that is the worst part of flying.**

The time it takes to get through security, the panic at the thought of checking in late and missing the flight and then the wait in crowded departure areas.

So is the best approach to spend as little time there as possible?

No. To avoid the stress and pressure of flying, get to the airport three hours earlier than necessary, check in and clear security in a leisurely 'no sweat' fashion and then head to one of the airport lounges to relax or work in style.



This costs a little more but, with all that lounges offer to make guests comfortable, it is money very well spent .



Comfortable chairs and a good view of the aircraft; Wi-Fi access and power points; a complimentary choice of hot and soft drinks and a selection of fine food and a wide range of newspapers and magazines (for reading there and on the plane).



This makes the airport experience a pleasure rather than a pain.



# Nº1 TRAVELLER

Passengers flying out of London (as I tend to do) should opt for the premium lounges by *No.1 Traveller*.

*No.1 Traveller* offers 'pay-as-you-go' airport lounges at Heathrow Terminal 3, Gatwick North and South Terminals, Stansted and also at Birmingham.

In addition to its premium lounges, *No.1 Traveller* also offers chauffeur-driven airport transfers to provide a 'driveway to runway' service, as well as travel spas and bedrooms.

You can then look forward to enjoying the flight in a fit state.



[www.No1Traveller.com](http://www.No1Traveller.com)

## AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance



**AllWays**

[www.allwaystraveller.com](http://www.allwaystraveller.com)

*AllWays traveller* provides independent travellers with a view of the world from the journalists in the International Travel Writers Alliance.



**The International Travel Writers Alliance**

[www.itwalliance.com](http://www.itwalliance.com)

The International Travel Writers Alliance is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

**Ashley Gibbins**

Ashley Gibbins is Chief Executive of the International Travel Writers Alliance and Managing Editor of *AllWays traveller*

## Ashley Gibbins



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