

AWESOME ADVENTURE VACATIONS IN THE FLORIDA KEYS!

Keys Traveler

The Magazine



Battling Monsters Off the Keys

Music With the Fishes
Be a Dolphin Researcher
A Trail of Shipwrecks
Go for Golf in the Keys

fla-keys.com

What began as a one-time race to commemorate the completion of a Florida Keys Overseas Highway bridge-rebuilding program in 1982 has matured into one of the most popular running events in America.

Thousands of people apply each year to participate in the Seven Mile Bridge Run across one of the longest segmental bridges in the world — the centerpiece of the 113-mile Overseas Highway in Marathon that connects the Keys to the American mainland.

Held in April each year, the annual footrace is limited to 1,500 runners. It's essentially a race over water, offering participants seemingly endless vistas of the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Gulf of Mexico on the other.

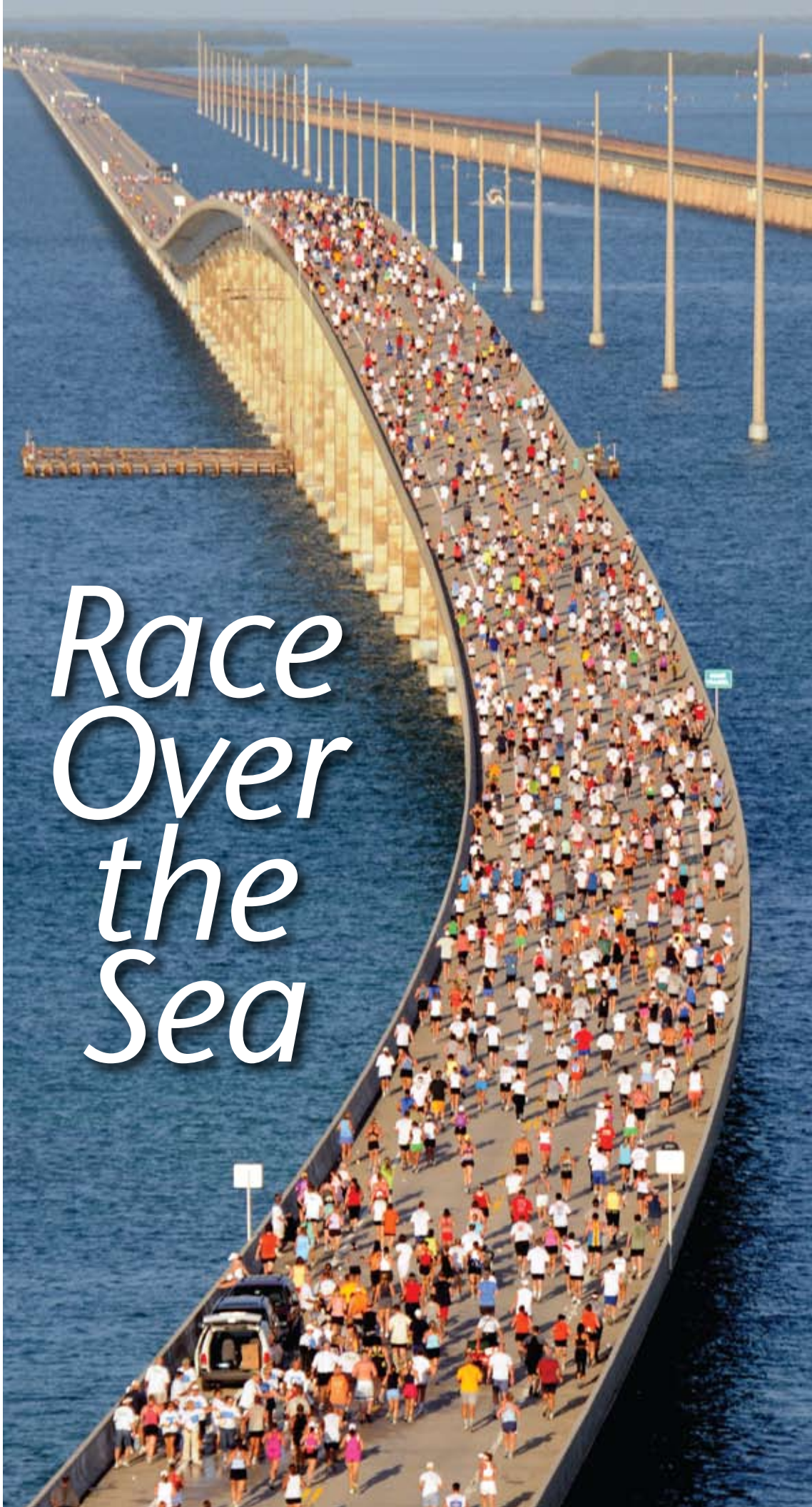
The route also parallels the original Seven Mile Bridge, adapted for automobiles in the late 1930s from a railroad span that served the historic Overseas Railroad. The modern-day Seven Mile Bridge is closed to vehicular traffic during the race.

Unique as it is, the Seven Mile Bridge Run is just one of the many popular annual racing events held in the Florida Keys.

Others include the Half Shell Raw Bar Half Marathon in Key West and Islamorada's 5k Run, Walk and Crawl at 8 a.m. on New Year's Day.

— Carol Shaughnessy

Race Over the Sea



Keys Traveler

The Magazine

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SEVEN SPORTS



STEPHEN FRINK

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KEY WEST GOLF CLUB



BILL KEOGH

Cover photo by Ron Modra

Battling Monsters Off the Keys

BY ANDY NEWMAN

“Come on, you Jimmy Durante-looking, long-nosed son of a gun.” It wasn’t the first time that Richard Stanczyk pleaded those words and it would not be the last.

The venerable owner of Bud N’ Mary’s Fishing Marina in Islamorada was endeavoring to prove once again it was possible to catch a swordfish, or broadbill, in broad daylight off the Florida Keys.

But the fish, aptly named for a sword-like bill proportionately longer than that of a sailfish or marlin, were not cooperating and I knew why. In angling, usually it’s the kiss of death to have a journalist on a boat, especially when a fish must be caught for a news story.

There were three writers on Stanczyk’s Catch 22.

Swordfish are highly prized among big game anglers. They often perform aerial acrobatics like a marlin,



but possesses the power, dogged determination and deepwater swimming ability of a bluefin tuna.

For years, anglers have caught swordfish off the Keys at night, but in 2002 Stanczyk’s longtime fishing companion Vic Gaspeny read an intriguing account of daytime swordfishing off of Venezuela. He figured if it could be done there, success could be

achieved off the Keys — providing an opportunity to get the full visual experience of catching a swordfish.

In January 2003, Stanczyk, his brother Scott, the boat’s captain, and Gaspeny went out during the day about 35 miles off Islamorada. It took 20 minutes to drop a bait 1,800 feet down. Within an hour they boated their first daytime swordfish.

“Everyone thought I was nuts,” Gaspeny said. “If we hadn’t caught one on the first drop, we probably would have never tried it again.”

Even after that initial success, they kept fishing at night. Occasionally they’d go out early and fish before



dark. In the spring of 2006, they decided to make daytime swordfishing their full-time obsession.

They tried to keep their discovery under wraps, but that proved difficult when returning to the dock with catches at about the same evening hour they should have started fishing.

Word started getting out on the "Coconut Telegraph," the name affectionately ascribed to the Keys rumor mill. Small offshore fishing boats followed them on their outings. Journalists begged for the story, but Stanczyk would only take writers that were close friends and swore not to do a story.

With each successful trip, guarding the secret became more challenging. Especially following Feb. 21, 2007, when Stanczyk 's older son, Ricky, caught seven swordfish in one day. And six days later, Stanczyk led an angler to a 448-pounder.

Eventually, other charter captains saw and heard enough to convince them that the daytime swordfishery was real.

Recently, Stanczyk decided it was time to preserve his team's rightful place in Keys angling history and went public with the accomplishment.

Thus was the motivation for the daylight swordfishing trip I was on. The first drop that day in early September came at 10:30 a.m. Gaspeny got a bite at 11:15 a.m. from what he determined was a big fish because it pulled much line off the reel before spitting the bait. Four more

'People can come to the Keys, book a charterboat and have a chance of catching a really giant fish'

drops also produced bites, but unfortunately no swordfish in the boat.

An hour of daylight remained and it appeared that the word "catch" in Catch 22 would not live up to its reputation. Frustration began to set in and discussion turned to what was to blame.

"C'mon you Jimmy Durante-looking, long-nosed son of a gun," Stanczyk implored again.

With the sun getting low on the horizon, the crew of Jimmy Coughlin, K.J. Zeher and Nick Stanczyk, Stanczyk's youngest son, began retrieving the sixth drop, when 80-pound-test line started pulling off the Shimano reel. Gaspeny got into the fighting chair

and less than a half-hour before sunset reeled in a 75-pound swordfish.

It wasn't a massive fish, but it certainly beat being skunked and, of course, fresh swordfish was destined for someone's dinner table.

"You think back to the days of Zane Grey and Hemingway and the idea of going out and capturing one of these big monsters," said Richard Stanczyk, whose crew has a success-catch average of better than 90 percent when they target swordfish. "You don't have to go to an exotic spot anymore for a world-class gamefish.

"People can come to the Keys, book a charterboat and have a chance of catching a really giant fish," he said.

fla-keys.com/fishing
budnmarys.com

At top left, a swordfish leaps at the end of an angler's line. At bottom left, Vic Gaspeny winds down on a fish and below, Gaspeny and Richard Stanczyk show off a nice swordfish destined for the dinner table.



PHOTOS BY ANDY NEWMAN



BOB CARE

On the Reef

Underwater voyeurs vie for spots to dive reefs in the Florida Keys each year for the annual coral “love affair” sparked by the August full moon.

According to marine scientists, nearly all large reef-building coral species release millions of eggs and sperm once a year in synchronized mass-spawning rituals. These spectacular displays, which many divers say resemble an upside-down underwater snowstorm, allow the stationary animals to mix genetically and disperse offspring over great distances.

Viewing the rare exchange of reproductive cells is an awe-inspiring experience for divers. Mesmerized, they watch as luminous white excretion seemingly fills the Atlantic Ocean around the United States’ only living coral barrier reef, which parallels the Florida Keys.

The exact cues triggering the annual phenomenon remain unclear, but scientists’ observations indicate a strong connection between the coral spawn and seasonal lunar cycles.

The generally accepted schedule is for branching corals (e.g., finger, staghorn and elkhorn corals) in the Keys to spawn three to five days after the August full moon, about two hours after sunset. Star and boulder corals spawn six to eight days after the August full moon, about three hours after sunset.

Many Keys recreational dive operators offer excursions during spawning periods. Though seeing corals spawn is not guaranteed on trips, divers generally have good success at viewing the unparalleled spectacle.

— Andy Newman

fla-keys.com/diving

Slip, Slide, Splash and Ski In the Florida Keys

With all the enthusiasm in wakeboarding, wake-skating and winching, the professionals at Islamorada’s Seven Sports can guide adrenaline enthusiasts on virtually any adventure — as long as it involves catching air and going fast.

For an exhilarating rush over sea grass flats, try a backcountry safari where kites slip through estuaries past marine life

The newest big splash Seven Sports is sharing with kiting customers is reef trips. Any time a southeast wind blows hard onshore, they head out and surf waves along the reefs.

Families with kids as young as 7 can enjoy these adventures. Seven Sports offers beginner through advanced training on all modalities of skating and boarding using kites, boats, jet skis or a winch.

At Hawk’s Cay Resort near Marathon, Sundance Water Sports offers waterskiing and wakeboarding lessons for Keys visitors.

Owners George and Cindy Shattuck encourage the entire family to participate. George Shattuck believes it’s important for families to experience learning together, so he includes boat navigation instruction for parents as well.

According to George Shattuck, students often are up on the skis before they even realize they’ve mastered the skill. At Sundance Water Sports, low-stress and high-reward teaching makes the process of learning to ski fun and surprisingly quick.

— Nancy Lucas

hawkscay.com
sevensports.com



BOB KRIST

Thrill-Seekers Take Flight Over Key West

Passengers can get a bird's-eye view of Key West while feeling like a barnstorming airshow hero during 30-minute adventure flights with Cabanas Aerobatics Unlimited.

One look at Freddie Cabanas' antique-style Pitts Biplane and it's obvious his thrill ride is not for the faint-hearted. No daredevil amusement park ride can duplicate the exhilarating rush passengers get as Cabanas pilots the plane through loops, dips, spins and even 360-degree rolls at speeds up to 215 mph.

A world-class aerobatic pilot, Cabanas also holds the rank of general in the Florida Keys' own Conch Republic Air Force. With more than 20,000 hours of flying time under his belt, he provides passengers the ride of a lifetime over the blue waters

BY JOSIE GULLIKSEN

surrounding Key West.

All flights begin at Key West International Airport with a 10-minute briefing about safety and aerobatics.

Once in the air, Cabanas performs torque rolls, knife-edge spins, snap rolls, double hammerheads and other maneuvers. Sometimes he'll even let

passengers take the controls.

"I find that people dream about flying," Cabanas said. "I have the passengers take the controls and once I teach them how to go left, go right and the next thing they know they've rolled the plane and they can't believe they've done it."

cabanasaerobatics.com

Ladies Learn to Fish in 'No-Yelling' Zone

Women who dream of landing "the big one" but find knot tying, casting or any other angling skill a mystery can unravel the mystery at an annual "Ladies, Let's Go Fishing!" seminar.

The women-centered adventures, designed to increase participants' angling skills and confidence, are offered each fall in Islamorada.

Each seminar is billed as the "No Yelling School of Fishing" and offers beginners and intermediate instruction in inshore, reef, fly and offshore angling techniques.

An offshore charterboat fishing trip off the Keys completes the course.

ladiesletsgofishing.com

Up the (Gulf) Str

World-famous surfer Laird Hamilton, regarded as a genius in crossover board sports, is credited with a resurgence of interest around the world in standup paddling, also called SUP or paddle surfing, popularizing the sport among boarders virtually everywhere.

Paddle surfing originated with the ancient Hawaiians, who paddled their outrigger canoes through the surf while standing up. During the 1960s, “beach boys” were known to perch on top of big boards to snap photos for tourists.

The sport has exploded in popularity and is attracting enthusiasts and newbies alike to the Florida Keys to try it.

When the winds are too much (or simply nonexistent) for kiteboarding, standup paddling is a perfect stand-in sport for fun and a core physical workout.

Standing on the board, typically 12 to 14 feet in length, doesn't just allow paddlers a better view of their

surroundings. They also can paddle longer and more easily while standing than in the sitting position required for kayaking.

Standup paddling appeals to many different people because it's a relatively simple, straightforward yet diverse activity. It's possible to use the board for surfing, traversing on a “downwinder” (riding the board backed by tradewinds to cover long distances), as a fishing or diving platform, or just quietly enjoying secluded eco-tours through the mangroves, along the beaches or in the backcountry flats in an environmentally friendly way.

Two regions in the Keys are riding the wave of SUP interest. Lessons, day tours and equipment rentals are available through Islamorada's Otherside Boardsports and Seven Sports, the board sports division of Islamorada Watersports Company, as well as the kiteboarding mavericks at Key West's The Kitehouse.

— Julie Botteri

ream With a Paddle



Paul Menta of The Kitehouse paddles his board off Key West.

othersideboardsports.com
sevensports.com
thekitehouse.com

Get Teed Off in the Keys



Rees Jones designed the course at the Key West Golf Club.

The Ocean Reef Club in North Key Largo features two golf courses for Florida Keys vacationers.

While many people visit the Florida Keys for water-based activities, others seek out new and picturesque places to indulge in their favorite sports, and passionate golfers can find unique courses to play throughout the island chain.

The elegant Ocean Reef Club in North Key Largo, although private, welcomes avid golfers to its pristine dual 18-hole courses when sponsored by a club member. The Club's courses offer distinctive scenery including a mangrove and tropical hardwood hammock, exotic landscaping, coconut palms and mahogany trees.

Other private courses throughout the Keys include Card Sound Golf Club in Key Largo and Sombrero Country Club in Marathon. Each 18-hole course is open to visiting enthusiasts when accompanied by a member or exercising reciprocal privileges.

In Islamorada, Cheeca Lodge & Spa offers guests and the public a nine-hole pitch-and-

putt golf course. The family-friendly, laid-back course is situated on the property's lushly landscaped grounds, and golf professionals are available for private or group instruction customized to each player's needs.

In the heart of the Keys, the public Key Colony Beach Golf & Tennis Club offers a scenic nine-hole par-three golf course.

Continental North America's southernmost golfing challenge can be discovered at the Key West Golf Club, with an 18-hole course designed by golf legend Rees Jones and recently renovated greens. Highlights include the "mangrove hole," played completely over a field of thickly intertwined tropical mangroves.

A restaurant and clubhouse, pro shop and instructional programs featuring computerized swing analysis round out this club's offerings.

— Josie Gulliksen

cheeca.com • keycolonybeach.net
keywestgolf.com • oceanreef.com



OCEAN REEF CLUB

Linda Erb, vice president of animal care and training at Dolphin Research Center, signals Talon to select the board with the fewest number of dots. The Atlantic bottlenose dolphin provides the correct answer about 82 percent of the time.



Be a Dolphin Researcher

Imagine delving into the world of marine mammal science, working hand-in-hand with researchers to unlock the mysteries of dolphin and sea lion behavior.

Where?

At Dolphin Research Center near Marathon, where a unique Researcher for a Day program means marine mammal enthusiasts can participate in projects that explore the intelligence of DRC's marine mammal inhabitants.

Founded in 1984 as a not-for-profit teaching and research facility, DRC is home to a family of Atlantic bottlenose dolphins and California sea lions. The center and its staff specialize in behavioral research, and

BOB KRIST

BY CAROL SHAUGHNESSY

maintain liaisons with university research programs and independent scientists around the world.

The center also initiated a groundbreaking study that demonstrates conclusively that dolphins understand numerical concepts. Through that study researchers discovered that the marine mammals could recognize that two black boards held different numbers of objects (numerosity) and that they could identify the board with the fewer number of dots (relative numerosity).

Participants in DRC's Researcher for a Day program work alongside the facility's research team members on current,

hands-on studies involving dolphins and sea lions. They learn how to arrange research sessions, compile data and help prepare test questions within study parameters.

In addition, they enjoy "playtime" with dolphins and a Dolphin Dip, where they join dolphins in the water to interact.

"By the end of your visit, we guarantee you'll know what it's like to be a marine mammal research scientist," said Emily Guarino, the dolphin center's administrative director of research.

Program participants leave with new insights into the abilities and personalities of the friendly, fascinating dolphins and sea lions that shared their experience.

dolphins.org



STEPHEN FRINK

Dive Into Digital Photo Adventure

BY JULIE BOTTERI

waterhousetours.com

For master underwater photographer Stephen Frink, who has taught his skill for 25 years, the waters of his Key Largo home are an ideal classroom because the fish are so abundant and accessible.

Frink's remarkable classes, such as the Digital Immersion Seminar scheduled Aug. 8-15, 2009, involve private dives at extraordinary underwater sites, all determined by the subjects to be taught and shot.

"Key Largo has such a strong heritage of marine conservation," Frink said. "There are massive fish populations to photograph as well as a great portfolio of historic shipwrecks, like the Spiegel Grove and Duane."

Curious, unafraid groupers and snappers populate the reef's Sanctuary Protected Areas where spearfishing is banned — in contrast to the more elusive fish on other areas of the reef.

Whether the objective is wide-angle, fish or macro subjects, classes have evolved from using slide film to digital, though they're still defined by photography's art and the desirable adventure of diving.

Frink believes digital photography results in improved student learning and efficient workflow. Images can be transferred from camera to computer quickly, and then prepped for daily critique sessions.

Seminars can last into the night, and often students log 14-hour days between diving and the classroom.

"But no one's complaining, least of all me," the teacher quipped.

Music With the Fishes In the Lower Keys

Divers and snorkelers can experience music in the key of “sea” when the Lower Keys Underwater Music Festival makes waves each second Saturday in July. The unique concert, celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2009, showcases the colorful diversity of marine life that inhabits the continental United States’ only living coral barrier reef.

Divers and snorkelers gather each year for the undersea songfest at Looe Key reef, part of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, about six miles south of Big Pine Key.

Presented by Florida Keys radio station WWUS, the quirky concert features music broadcast underwater via special speakers suspended beneath boats. Marine melodies typically include the Beatles’ “Yellow Submarine” and “Octopus’s Garden” and even humpback whale songs.

The event also is known for ocean-floor appearances by mer-musicians “playing” artistic instruments.

As well as being a one-of-a-kind event for divers and snorkelers, the Underwater Music Festival also has a serious focus: promoting preservation of the Florida Keys’ unique coral reef ecosystem.

The musical broadcast features diver awareness announcements, prepared by sanctuary officials, explaining how people can enjoy the ocean while minimizing their impact on the reef and marine environment.

— Carol Shaughnessy



BILL KEOGH

Wreck Trek Spotlights Sunken Ships



Fraser Nivens

The Florida Keys Shipwreck Heritage Trail stretches from Key Largo to Key West, a line of nine notable wreck sites suitable for both snorkeling and diving.

Established by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the trail is an adventure attraction for experienced divers and was created to foster an appreciation and understanding of the Keys’ maritime heritage.

In recent years, centuries-old wrecks have been joined by ships intentionally sunk to create artificial reefs and now are home to 55 varieties of coral and 500 species of fish.

Resting in depths from 20 to 130 feet, the wrecks on the trail reflect a diversity of origins and locations. There are vessels of Spanish explorers dating to the early 1700s and modern cargo and military ships.

— Julie Botteri

fla-keys.com/diving



Spencer Slate has been cultivating marine relationships for 30 years.

BY NANCY LUCAS

'We want divers to be educated so they don't get hurt and they don't hurt these amazing creatures.'

Underwater

For some 30 years, legendary divemaster Captain Spencer Slate has befriended, nurtured and fed slithery sea creatures at coral reefs off Key Largo in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

There's Oscar, Psycho, Rusty and Flash from the barracuda family. Then, there are Melba, Sundance and Slime from the moray family. And the captain would never want to forget about Shredder, who has left his mark on Slate.

It's because of his regular "visits" with these and other marine creatures that Captain Slate has become a legend in the Florida Keys and a well-known celebrity in both diving and non-diving circles.

Slate developed his passion for his extraordinary "friends," under the tutelage of Steve Klem, who was a pioneer dive operator in Key Largo in the mid-1950s.

"He was a wonderful guy who loved the creatures and just wanted to introduce them to the people," said Slate. "I used to go watch him do the feeding and we became best friends."

Slate took over feeding Klem's creatures in 1978 — and today offers Creature Feature dive excursions from his Atlantis Dive Center in Key Largo. Every Friday and Sunday at 8 a.m., Slate gives dive visitors an up-close and personal introduction to many of his underwater pals.

Divers can even "hug" a moray eel

and tickle its tummy. Snorkelers also can enjoy the show and interact with fish brought closer to the surface by staff from the sandy bottom 25 to 30 feet below.

One Creature Feature "regular" is a gentle giant nicknamed Bruiser — a goliath grouper with spotted skin and a rounded body that weighs about 350 pounds.

From November to May, Bruiser meanders around the reef hiding under rocks. But for Slate and his excursion participants, Bruiser emerges with a fishy smile to be hand-fed by new friends.

Divers also can watch Slate feed Sundance, the moray eel named for the way she moves.

"She's real gentle — very sweet," Slate said.

One of the excursion's highlights demonstrates the trust and affinity between Slate and his undersea friends. Slate holds bait clenched in his teeth, and a silver bullet-like barracuda named Lightning strikes just centimeters from his dive mask to take it.

Slate's unusual undersea comrades have been featured on the Discovery Channel, SEATV, Animal Planet and dozens of television shows as well as in many dive magazines.

"The thrill is introducing new divers to these animals," said Slate. "We want divers to be educated so they don't get hurt and they don't hurt these amazing creatures."

captainslate.com

With Psycho and Friends



Spencer Slate gives Sundance a hug.

STEPHEN FRINK

GREEN
MEANS GO.



In a world of heavily trafficked “ecotourism” destinations, more people are turning to The Florida Key & Key West. Here you can have miles of unspoiled mangrove shorelines, off-the-beaten-path hiking trails and fascinating wildlife – all to yourself. What’s stopping you?



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