

# Keys Traveler

The Magazine

## Pigeon Key

Tiny Island has a Big History

Fly Like James Bond  
Gibraltar of the Gulf  
Florida Keys Art Walk  
Help Plant a Coral Reef

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

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. On the left, a multi-lane road with cars runs parallel to a dense line of palm trees. To the right of the palm trees is a sandy beach with several sailboats parked on the shore. Further right, the beach meets the water, where several people are sunbathing under colorful umbrellas. The water is clear and blue. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

# Embark on a Keys Photo Adventure

Everyone loves to share photos to keep vacation memories alive.

Keys visitors can now do that with the new Photo Adventure website [fla-keys.com/photoadventure](http://fla-keys.com/photoadventure).

Vacationers can upload their photos into various subject galleries. Contributors could see one of their shots prominently featured as the “Image of the Month.”

The site also has a “Meet Professional Photographers” section where Keys photo pros share how-to tips. The

“Photo Quest” section uses images to illustrate iconic sights and experiences from Key Largo to Key West.

A companion application for mobile devices is to launch in 2012.

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

*Key West's Smathers Beach by Andy Newman*

# Keys Traveler

The Magazine

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ROB O'NEAL

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BOB KRIST

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The Florida Keys  
& Key West



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### What's This?

You'll find this QR code accompanying many stories in this issue of "Keys Traveler." The QR codes can be scanned by most smart phones. Activate the app, aim your smart phone at the bar code and you'll be automatically taken to a corresponding website or video for more information. For iPhones and iPads, QR readers can be downloaded for free at the Apple App Store.



# TINY ISLAND BIG HISTORY

*Diminutive Pigeon Key (bottom right) lies about two miles west of Marathon.*

It covers only five acres of land, and seemingly houses little more than a sleepy cluster of buildings and vegetation. But when it comes to Pigeon Key, appearances are deceiving.

Surrounded by turquoise water beneath the Old Seven Mile Bridge at Marathon, the tiny island looms large in the history of the Florida Keys. When visionary Henry Flagler conceived and built the Florida Keys Over-Sea Railroad in the early 1900s — forever changing the face of the Keys by connecting the formerly isolated islands to each other and mainland Florida — the biggest challenge was building a bridge in the Middle Keys across nearly seven miles of open water.

During its construction, tiny Pigeon Key made an indelible mark

*By Carol Shaughnessy*

on history. The island was a base camp for workers building the Seven Mile Bridge, the centerpiece of the railroad known as the Eighth Wonder of the World.

From 1908 to 1912, more than 400 workers lived in the railroad village on Pigeon Key, and despite its small size it had a commissary and one-room school. Even after the landmark bridge was completed, maintenance crews continued to live on the island.

Tragically, a 1935 hurricane ended the railroad's reign. But that wasn't the end of Pigeon Key's importance. A state highway was built to replace the track, and the tiny island became headquarters to the Florida Road and Toll Bridge District.

Today the original Seven Mile Bridge no longer carries traffic, and drivers travel a newer span that was completed in 1982. The old bridge still stretches alongside it, empty and massive, with Pigeon Key beneath.

Pigeon Key is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a true American treasure. Even so, it's far too often overlooked by vacationers driving through the Keys.

Do not even think about making that mistake.

Instead, spend a few hours exploring this spot whose history transports you back in time, and whose geography means there's nothing on earth quite like it.

To reach the remote little island, you can

Scan for Video



hop a ferry from the Pigeon Key Visitor's Center (near mile marker 47, oceanside) at Knight's Key in Marathon or stroll or bicycle along part of the Old Seven Mile Bridge — a journey that literally feels like traveling over water, with a soundtrack composed of the cries of circling sea birds and the hypnotic wash of waves.

Once you get to Pigeon Key, there's plenty to see. Many of the old railroad buildings are still standing, overseen by the not-for-profit Pigeon Key Foundation.

One of the original 1909 buildings houses a museum dedicated to the railway's builders, with exhibits including maps, historic photos, models and a picture postcard collection of the railroad. In this spot, where work crews shared the pressure of unrelenting effort, you can really grasp the breathtaking



Visitors to Pigeon Key relax at a picnic table outside one of several historic buildings.

scope of Flagler's project.

In fact, you can spend the entire day on the island, enjoying activities such as exploring the fully restored turn-of-the-century buildings, soaking up subtropical sun and vistas of open blue water, snorkeling along the tidal shoreline, and absorbing the

atmosphere of an earlier era.

If you're visiting the Florida Keys, don't miss the chance to discover the little island that played such a big role in Keys history.

It's more than unique — it's simply unforgettable.

[pigeonkey.net](http://pigeonkey.net)

## Over-Sea Railroad Centennial Honors Anniversary

Celebrations commemorating the 100th anniversary of the historic Florida Keys Over-Sea Railroad's completion continue through 2012 in the Florida Keys, with primary activities occurring the weekend of Jan. 22, 2012.

Exactly 100 years earlier, the first Over-Sea Railroad train rolled from the Florida mainland through the Keys to Key West, connecting the previously isolated islands with the mainland and each other.

Celebration highlights throughout the Keys include a community parade, period costume ball, museum exhibition and displays, performance by a re-enactor portraying Over-Sea Railroad founder Henry Flagler and a Keyswide kayak adventure following the historic



Flagler's Over-Sea Railroad train crosses the Long Key Viaduct.

railroad's route.

The Key West Art & Historical Society is celebrating the anniversary with a permanent exhibit, "Flagler's Speedway to Sunshine," at the Custom House Museum.

Visitors can learn about this incredible project,



considered by many to be the Eighth Wonder of the World.

The exhibit introduces the railroad workers, cooks, doctors, wives, and children who came to the once distant outpost to create a marvel of modern engineering, with a number of artifacts as well as interactive presentations. — C.S.

[flaglerkeys100.com](http://flaglerkeys100.com)

# Explore America's Most Remote National Park

A trip to Dry Tortugas National Park takes visitors into a realm untouched by modern civilization, yet unmatched in historic and natural wonders. America's most remote national park, Dry Tortugas is a cluster of seven tiny islands approximately 70 miles west of Key West in the Gulf of Mexico.

The undeveloped islands were named Las Tortugas, Spanish for *The Turtles*, by explorer Ponce de Leon in 1513. Awash in pirate legend and wild bird life, they soon became known as the "Dry Tortugas" because they had no fresh water.

The park's centerpiece is 19th-century Fort Jefferson, sometimes called the Gibraltar of the Gulf of Mexico. Construction on the gigantic fort, whose walls are 8 feet thick and 50 feet tall, began in 1846 and continued for 30 years, but was never completed.

During the Civil War, Fort Jefferson was a Union military prison that housed Dr. Samuel Mudd and three others convicted of complicity in President Abraham Lincoln's assassination.

By the 1880s, the Army had abandoned Fort Jefferson and in 1908 the area became a wildlife refuge. Proclaimed Fort Jefferson National Monument in 1935, it was designated Dry Tortugas National Park in 1992 to protect its natural and historic wonders.

Today most visitors journey to the park by ferry or seaplane to explore Fort Jefferson, which stands on an island barely larger



**Fort Jefferson, in Dry Tortugas National Park, has been nicknamed the Gibraltar of the Gulf of Mexico. Its massive brick walls are 8 feet thick and 50 feet tall.**

than its exterior walls.

Visitors can take a complimentary guided fort tour, stepping inside cells to feel the prison chill, peering through gun casements and observing the panorama of sea and sky from the structure's open third level.

Afterwards, they can picnic, swim and snorkel in the crystalline

waters, laze on the secluded beach, stroll along the fort's moat or take advantage of unmatched bird-watching opportunities.

Twenty years ago, Britain's Queen Elizabeth toured Fort Jefferson during a royal visit to America.



Visitors to the Florida Keys can pretend to be and actually fly like “James Bond” during a levitation-like jetpack flight.

The Keys, with characteristic beautiful weather and consistent waters, are the first region in the United States to offer the experience to travelers and provide the most possible days out of the year to fly, according to Erik Adams, manager of Key West’s Jetpack Adventures.

Jetpack Adventures, based at the southernmost city’s Galleon Resort & Marina, and Sundance JetLev, part of Sundance Watersports at Hawks Cay Resort & Marina on Duck Key, currently offer the water sport.

Participants strap on a JetLev R200 flight pack that looks like the one actor Sean Connery wore in the James Bond film “Thunderball.”

A 30-foot hose tethers the apparatus to a tiny boat whose pump uses seawater as propellant as the boat is dragged behind.

The JetLev R200’s intuitive flight controls allow individuals to pilot their own water-powered jetpack, learning to take off, fly, make soft turns, hover and land. Two jets help lift and provide forward momentum.

During training, thrill-seekers receive a safety briefing, are fitted with a helmet and personal flotation device and are harnessed to the JetLev R200.

Once on the water, participants first experience three-dimensional flying with a certified instructor operating the vehicle via remote control, while the student’s task is to stay balanced and centered in the pack as it rises in the air, reaching heights of up to 30 feet.

As the student becomes more proficient, he or she gains more flight control and can operate the jetpack independently.

In Key West, for more information, visit [jetpackadventures.com](http://jetpackadventures.com). For Sundance details, visit [flyajetlev.com](http://flyajetlev.com).



# Fly Like ‘James Bond’ At Keys Attractions



ROB O'NEAL

# Key Lime Pie

Story by Christina Baez  
Photograph by Alan Maltz

Virtually every travel destination boasts a signature dish that shouldn't be missed by the epicurean traveler. For example, there's New Orleans' seafood gumbo, Chicago's deep-dish pizza and Philadelphia's cheese steak sandwich. In the Florida Keys & Key West, that dish is Key lime pie.

Key lime pie is made from the Key lime, a citrus indigenous to the Keys that's yellow and smaller and rounder than grocery store limes. Key lime pie is Florida's official state pie, and fans savor millions of slices every year.

The pie's origin is heavily debated. Owners of Key West's Curry Mansion Inn claim a woman named Aunt Sally, the cook for estate owner William Curry, made the first Key lime pie. Some historians, however, surmise that Aunt Sally likely perfected a delicacy created by area fishermen.

The typical ingredients of an authentic Key lime pie are sweetened condensed milk, egg yolks, Key lime juice and a pie crust generally made from butter and graham crackers. The egg yolks give the pie a yellowish coloring.

Green pies are never authentic.

A good Key lime pie should be naturally tart and stiff, standing up well on a plate yet still looking and feeling creamy.

Key lime pie can be enjoyed with many toppings, but a controversy has raged for decades over whether whipped cream or meringue is better.

Those who adhere to the motto "waste not, want not," use the leftover egg whites to create a tall meringue topping. Whipped cream supporters may derive their preference from the pie's early days, when milk products had to be consumed quickly due to lack of refrigeration.

Today, Key lime pie can be found in numerous forms throughout the Keys — dipped in chocolate and frozen on a stick at Kermit's Key West Key Lime Shoppe, deep-fried at Porky's Bayside Restaurant in Marathon or even mixed with multiple flavors.



*The*

## Key Lime Pie Recipe

### Ingredients:

9-inch graham cracker pie crust (crushed digestive biscuit base is a substitute)  
2 14-ounce cans sweetened condensed milk  
6 egg yolks (the egg whites can be saved to make a meringue topping, if desired)  
1/2 cup Key Lime Juice

### Preparation:

Blend milk and egg yolks at slow speed until smooth. Add Key lime juice and finish blending. Pour into pie crust. Bake in preheated 300-degree F (149 C) oven for 15 minutes. Cool pie 20 minutes before refrigerating. Serve chilled Key lime pie with whipped cream topping or meringue.

*Recipe courtesy Kermit's Key West Key Lime Shoppe*



Scan for Video



# Sweeter Side of Keys Cuisine

# Outdoor Art Celebrates Keys Culture

Visual artistry can be seen virtually everywhere in the Florida Keys. Even if visitors never venture inside a gallery they still can view an abundance of art.

Inspired by the Keys' vibrant culture and diverse environment, local artists have created murals on exterior walls throughout the islands.

Wrapping around a building in Key Largo's highway median at mile marker 99.2, a 7,500-square-foot mural by marine-life artist Wyland depicts the Keys' undersea world.

At mile marker 86.3, an Islamorada eyesore has become a whimsical wonder.

Local artists Kathy Clements and Barbara Weingardt with other resident volunteers created a Key lime pie mural that looks good enough to eat outside a former bakery.

The patriotism and heroism of firemen at the Big Pine Key Fire Station at mile marker 30.5 are reflected in the building's outdoor



A crowd gathers to watch Wyland finish and sign his mural in Key Largo.

mural by artist Michael Kirby. The piece also features indigenous Big Pine flora and fauna.

Adorning the exterior of the Key West International Airport terminal is a large-scale mural by artist Rick Worth. It depicts a rooftop view

of Key West's historic Old Town architecture and foliage backed by a turquoise ocean, ensuring that visitors' last sight of the island is its picturesque subtropical beauty.

– Christina Baez

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

## Angling Tournaments Offer Prizes, Good Times

With more saltwater angling world records than any other destination on the globe, each year the Florida Keys host numerous angling tournaments that provide participants opportunities for big prizes and good times

Many of these tournaments are catch-and-release oriented, a practice Keys charterboat captains and backcountry guides have had in effect with many species for more than a quarter-century.

The World Sailfish Championship, the richest catch-and-release contest in the Keys, is held each April in Key West and offers up a \$100,000 top prize. Later, in July, the Drambuie Key West Marlin Tournament is staged in conjunction with the annual Hemingway Days festival.

Each fall, the Redbone Celebrity Trilogy Series stages tournaments that focus on catch-and-release for bonefish, redfish, tarpon and permit. The events serve as fundraisers for cystic fibrosis treatment and research.



Ken Nedimyer, right, works in his foundation's coral nursery.

## Voluntourism for Divers

# Vacationing for the Greater Good

**D**ivers exploring the only natural coral reef in the continental United States can help keep it healthy through “voluntourism” vacations, doing things to protect the reef while vacationing in the Keys.

Capturing lionfish helps prevent the invasive Indo-Pacific species from preying on invertebrates and juvenile fish such as grunts and hamlets, and stealing resources from domestic species like grouper and snapper. The popular aquarium fish, likely introduced to Atlantic waters in the 1980s, has no natural reef predators except humans.

The Keys’ Reef Environmental Education Foundation, whose mission is to conserve marine ecosystems, has partnered with the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary to create fishing derbies where divers can capture and remove lionfish from Keys waters.

Derby divers can earn cash and even sample the edible fish.

Ongoing coral restoration efforts with marine scientists from Key Largo’s Coral Restoration Foundation enable recreational sport divers to learn about environmental impacts

on Florida’s reefs and help restore endangered staghorn and elkhorn corals — two reef-building species with the best chance to propagate and create new habitats.

Volunteers go on working dives to coral nurseries to clean and prepare corals for planting.

“This is something the average person can do,” said foundation director Ken Nedimyer.

Divers also can make a positive impact through everyday conservation actions to leave an area cleaner than they found it.

Cutting and removing monofilament fishing line eliminates a potential entanglement for other divers. Clearing cans, bottles and plastics from the reef makes a huge difference over time, as does picking up lost fishing tackle such as hooks and swivels.

The Florida Keys reef tract is a living, dynamic ecosystem. Through positive choices and actions, visiting divers can make meaningful contributions that help keep it alive and healthy.

– Julie Botteri



Lionfish are very pretty, but they're not good for Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean coral reefs.

[reef.org/lionfish/derbies](http://reef.org/lionfish/derbies)  
[coralrestoration.org](http://coralrestoration.org)

# Key West Historic Marker Tour Spotlights Colorful Island History

**M**odern-day visitors can immerse themselves in the extraordinary history of America's southernmost city via the Key West Historic Marker Tour. Created by a local historian, the tour features sites and properties bearing Key West Historic Marker plaques that highlight their place in the island's colorful past.

More than 50 sites have been commemorated with markers, and more are planned. Visitors can explore them at their own pace, with narration and guidance from a free cell-phone tour or online tour.

The chosen sites showcase aspects of Key West's early days including the cigar industry, literary community, Cuban heritage, Over-Sea Railroad, wrecking and shipwreck salvage industries, and military history. They range from former cigar factories and the home of philosopher John Dewey to Key West's Oldest House and the Southernmost House in the continental United States.

Visitors can access the free cellphone tour at 305-507-0300.

– Carol Shaughnessy

[kwhmt.org](http://kwhmt.org)

ROB O'NEAL



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

## New Road to Keys Open

**A** new \$330 million road connecting the South Florida mainland with the Florida Keys is operational.

The new "18-Mile Stretch," a segment of U.S. Highway 1 between Florida City and Key Largo, required almost seven years to construct. A dedication ceremony marking the end of the project was held in late September 2011.

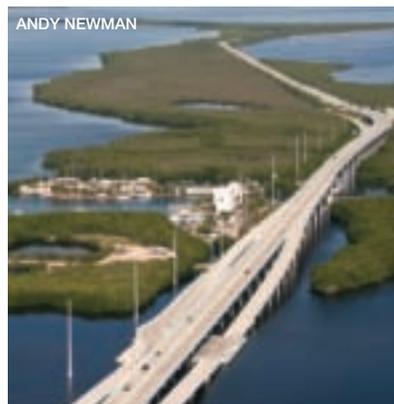
Officials said the new road features numerous safety, environmental and aesthetic enhancements for residents and visitors.

A concrete median barrier, painted Belize blue as recommended by

marine-life artist Wyland, stretches almost the entire length of the road and should drastically reduce the number of vehicular accidents.

Environmental features include almost 20 culverts and underpasses for animals such as crocodiles and Florida panthers to cross safely under the road. Outside shoulders and berms were built to prevent road pollutants from washing into Florida Bay.

The project's iconic element, the 1.25-mile-long, 65-foot-high Jewfish Creek Bridge, completed in May 2008, has created a more impressive visual driving approach to the Florida Keys.



**The Jewfish Creek Bridge is a highlight of the new 18-Mile Stretch.**

ANDY NEWMAN

# Seaplanes Offer Birds-Eye Tours of Keys



Longtime Key West residents Julie Ann Floyd and Nikali Pontecorvo like to share their “backyard” with Keys visitors — from the seat of a seaplane.

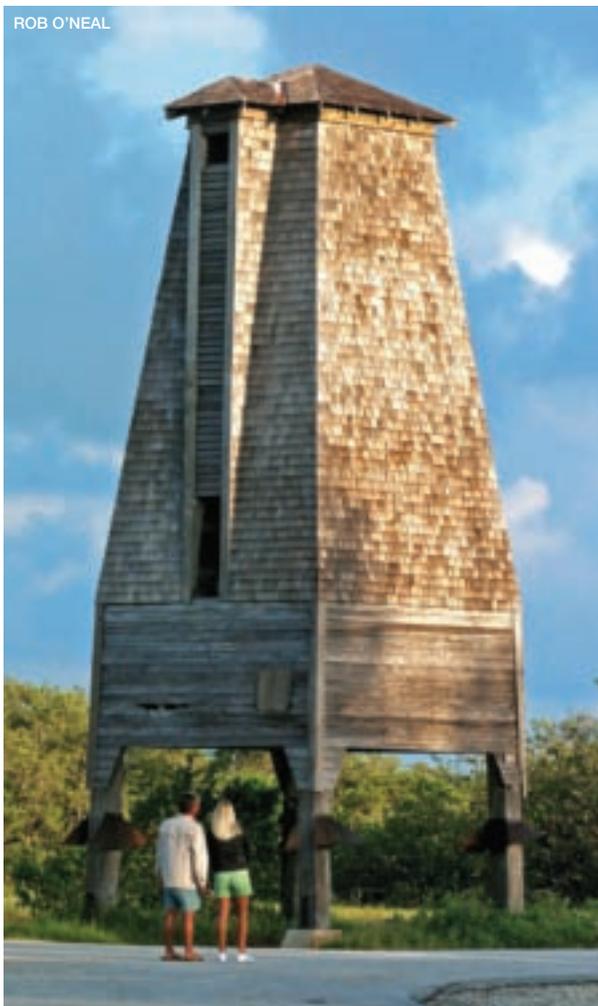
With nearly 30 years of local and regional flight experience between them, the duo created Key West Seaplanes in 2009 and offer scenic flights in a five-passenger Cessna 206 amphibious seaplane.

“We want Keys visitors to feel as connected to the area as we do,” said Floyd. “On an aerial tour ... it really shows off the beauty of the Keys — quiet, private and serene.”

The most popular services are 30- and 50-minute low-level (500 feet) island, reef and lighthouse tours. Visitors who desire a longer adventure can choose half- and full-day island-hopping excursions to neighboring Little Palm Island, Marathon and Islamorada, exploring the backcountry and bridges as well as uninhabited islands and sandbars, and a lunch of indigenous local cuisine.



ROB O'NEAL



Visitors examine the Bat Tower on Sugarloaf Key.

## Going ‘Batty’ in the Lower Keys

Behind the Lower Keys’ Sugarloaf Lodge at mile marker 17 a strange shingled tower has become a beloved local landmark.

Local residents call it the Bat Tower. It was built by early Lower Keys landowner Richter Clyde Perky as an attempt to control mosquitoes around his fishing resort.

Inspired by a book titled “Bats, Mosquitoes, and Dollars,” Perky decided to rely on mosquito-eating bats to solve his problem, and constructed a roost to house them based on the author’s specifications.

Completed in September 1929, the 30-foot-tall unpainted tower reportedly cost nearly \$10,000.

Perky then purchased a secret “bat bait” from the author. Bats were supposed to be drawn irresistibly by the bait, adopt the tower as their home and leave it nightly to devour the area’s mosquitoes.

Keys legend offers two versions of what actually happened. Some say Perky installed bats that flew away almost instantly and never returned. Others say the bait remained in the tower for a year without attracting a single wandering bat.

These days, the Florida Keys’ Mosquito Control forces combat the pesky insects. The bat tower, however, still stands behind Sugarloaf Lodge, an offbeat monument to a “batty” Keys idea.

– Carol Shaughnessy

# Sushi Dazzles Crowds at Key West New Year's Eve



“Sushi” plays to the crowd during last year’s New Year’s Eve celebration.

**F**or visitors to Key West’s annual New Year’s Eve festivities, “sushi” doesn’t mean a tasty Japanese morsel served with spicy wasabi. Instead, it refers to a “spicy” female impersonator who goes by the same name.

While New York City is world-renowned for its New Year’s Eve “ball drop” in Times Square, Key West celebrates the holiday by staging an

## Key Largo has Cultural Programming Group

**A** popular series of first-rate, affordable entertainment, educational programs and musical events accentuates Key Largo’s cultural offerings, courtesy of the Friends of the Key Largo Cultural Center.

In addition to regularly scheduled theater produc-

annual “drag queen drop” starring Sushi, portrayed by Gary Marion.

Dressed in an elegant gown, Sushi presides over events while perched in a gigantic red high-heel shoe that’s suspended beside the second-story balcony of the Bourbon Street Complex.

Far below, thousands of revelers throng Key West’s famed Duval Street to watch performances by

tions and informative lectures, six weekend evening concerts round out summer months between June and August.

All performances take place at the 250-seat theater inside the Murray E. Nelson Government and Cultural Center in Key Largo.

[flkcc.org](http://flkcc.org)

talented female impersonators and listen to Sushi’s offbeat commentary from her “throne” in the shoe.

As the seconds tick down to midnight, the shoe carrying the dazzling diva is lowered toward the cheering crowds, landing as the clock strikes and a new year begins.

Fittingly for Key West, whose official One Human Family philosophy epitomizes the island’s atmosphere of acceptance and diversity, spectators range from gay and straight couples to party-loving singles and families with children — all eager to start the new year with a bit of “Sushi.”

– Carol Shaughnessy

[bourbonstpub.com/newyeareve.html](http://bourbonstpub.com/newyeareve.html)

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ANDY NEWMAN (2)

Artist Pasta Pantaleo, who conceived the Morada Way Arts & Cultural District, works on a painting while Billy Davidson provides background music.

## Islamorada Showcases Cultural Vibe at Monthly Art Walk

Visitors to the Purple Isles are discovering a greater cultural awareness as more fine arts, music and culinary nuances of Islamorada are emerging in the recently established Morada Way Arts & Cultural District.

Eclectic galleries offering affordable original artwork are featured at the district's Third Thursday Art Walk, where visitors can take in the sights, sounds and tastes of Islamorada as they discover and obtain stimulating, one-of-a-kind fine art.

The evening walkabout is scheduled 6 to 9 p.m. on the third Thursday of every month, featuring national and Keys-based artists and art galleries at Morada Way between mile markers 81 and 82.

Host establishments include the Redbone Gallery and Pasta Pantaleo Signature Gallery, each housing collections of Florida's offshore and inshore saltwater fishing art; Gallery Morada, offering original artisanal and limited-edition pieces, and the Matecumbe Studio Gallery, a hip and eclectic blend of photography, fine art, pottery and functional ceramics that is home to interactive workshops led by local artist David Meyers.

During their stroll along the Old Highway between the historic 1935 Hurricane Monument and the Green Turtle Inn, attendees can sample wines and "culinary art" from local eateries while they discover the creative output of young, seasoned and up-and-coming artists who live in the Keys.

Among them are Michelle Lowe, a local watercolor and oils artist who grew up in South Florida and the Keys. Her time spent in the water and on boats inspired her to paint the surrounding flora, fauna and fish.

"Art Walk is an amazing event for artists," said Lowe. "We get to meet the other local artists in the Florida Keys, as well as the gallery owners and art collectors that live here in Islamorada or are visiting."

— Julie Botteri

[moradawayarts.org](http://moradawayarts.org)

Scan for Video



Islamorada artist Michelle Lowe displays some of her creations.

The best souvenirs are the ones you leave behind.



The Florida Keys  
& Key West  
... come as you are®

Down here in The Keys, you can swim in pristine waters, kayak through unspoiled mangroves, delve into the Everglades or help restore our precious coral reefs. In fact, we're so focused on preservation, even your memories will last forever.

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

