

Keys Traveler

Weddings Edition

The Keys for
Weddings



Unique Venues
Ceremony Trends
Destination Resorts
Keys Cuisine

fla-keys.com/weddings



Bob Care (2)

Guests watch the conclusion of a Marathon-area wedding ceremony, as the bride and groom kiss under palm trees on a Grassy Key beach.

Picturesque Keys embrace weddings for everyone

There's no more all-inclusive destination in which to pledge "I do" than the subtropical Florida Keys, the naturally romantic 125-mile-long chain of islands known as "America's Caribbean." The Keys – framed by the azure waters of the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Gulf of Mexico to the west – are cherished for their stunning, simple beauty.

The Florida Keys & Key West, considered one of the top five U.S.

wedding destinations for mainstream couples, is equally popular with gay and lesbian duos.

It's little wonder, then, that weddings and honeymoons in the Florida Keys are in such high demand. And no passports are required.

"The Florida Keys offer enough variety of attractions that appeal to every stage of life," said Liana Pyne, wedding sales representative for the Keys tourism council.

"Because you're on U.S. soil,

a valid marriage license is easy to obtain," Pyne said. "Mothers of brides are interested in coming for rest and relaxation after a daughter's big day.

"And brides and grooms are interested in a 'mini-moon' vacation before a separate honeymoon away from their guests," she added.

TheKnot.com has named the Florida Keys a Top 50 Destination Wedding Spot, citing its "laid-back tropical island setting with all the allure of the Caribbean at a domestic price – and a more convenient location for guests."

Destination Weddings & Honeymoons magazine named the Keys the top U.S. locale among its "Best Wedding Destinations" of 2016.

Richly historic venues, casually elegant resorts, scenic waterfront locations and beach parks, fiery sunsets and pastel sunrises add to the island chain's appeal.

Key West, the southernmost city in the continental United States, is just 159 miles southwest of Miami and 90 miles from Cuba. Driving



Key West is a wedding photographer's dream for natural and manmade photo backdrops.

there is a romantic experience in itself: the scenic Florida Keys Overseas Highway includes 42 bridges.

Commercial flights are available into Key West International Airport and mainland South Florida cities. Charter flights can be booked to Florida Keys Marathon International Airport.

Finely elegant and casually funky dining is available throughout the Keys for bridal luncheons or rehearsal dinners. Craft breweries, rum distilleries and lively nightlife offer venues for bachelor and bachelorette parties.

Because of the Keys' year-round subtropical climate, couples – a bride and groom, two brides or two grooms – and family members and guests can experience never-to-be-forgotten adventures.

Couples can marry on paddleboards or bicycles. They can exchange vows aboard tall ships, sailing vessels, glass-bottom and dive boats and luxury motor yachts throughout the Keys. Scuba aficionados can seal their vows underwater and stay in the country's only submerged recreational hotel, located in a Key Largo lagoon.

Newlyweds can charter a sailboat to the remote Dry Tortugas National Park. They can swim with dolphins or soar in a seaplane above the pristine waters of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Throughout the Keys, professional wedding planners are available to assist with attire, flowers, music, rings, catering, cakes, photographers and videographers, transportation and officiants.

– Laura Myers



Aaron Huntsman, left, and William Lee Jones complete their wedding vows at a ceremony in Key West.



A sand artist created this custom sculpture of two loving sea turtles for a couple's wedding in the Florida Keys.

Customized events among Florida Keys wedding trends

Many couples tying the knot in the Florida Keys are seeking a subtropical island experience, a customized event and personalized, creatively designed settings.

"Couples want something personal that speaks to the tone of who they are," said Julie Shreck, owner-planner of Simply You Weddings in Key West. "The biggest trend we will continue to see is anything that is personalized and unique to the couple."

Event attire for a laid-back Keys wedding? Men sometimes opt to don shorts, tuxedo jackets and sandals, with women choosing sun dresses instead of traditional gowns.

Wedding requests include "a consistent theme of unconventional experiences such as live wedding painters, cigar rollers and steel drums with ambiance enhancers such as café lighting, live bands and sunrise ceremonies and brunch receptions," said Jennifer Tacey, senior catering sales manager for Hawks Cay Resort near Marathon.

Although Keys weddings typically have 60 to 100 guests, the average number of attendees is climbing to 120 to 200 guests, said Liz Seligman, owner-planner of Island Life Events in Islamorada.

"Clients are doing away with the traditional protocol of a reception and seeking more of a party atmosphere," Seligman said. "We create an atmosphere of a gorgeous ballroom on the beach."

Also trending are casual bayside seafood boils with natural island décor and rustic repurposed wooden tables, said Mark Calibo, director of sales and marketing at Key Largo's Playa Largo Resort & Spa.

Couples are seeking sophistication even with beachside settings. Requests may include lots of tropical foliage and sometimes vintage décor, said Susan Howarth, director of sales at Little Palm Island Resort & Spa, an exclusive island property near Big Pine Key in the Lower Keys.

"Our couples aren't really wanting over-the-top extravagant as much as they are wanting simple, elegant and intimate," Howarth said. "We're also seeing destination weddings that do not want to leave the U.S. but still want a tropical locale — warm destinations without needing a passport."

– Laura Myers



A bride and a guest get into the music with a steel drummer.

Bob Care (2)

Florida Keys Destination Resorts Create Wedding Memories

By Laura Myers
Photograph by Rob O'Neal

Weddings at Florida Keys destination resorts are truly memorable affairs. Throughout the Keys, hotels and planners can assist couples with virtually all elements — including dramatic wedding arrivals by boat, helicopter, seaplane or even parasail.

In the Upper Keys, Key Largo's new 14-acre, 144-room Playa Largo Resort & Spa offers an 8,000-square-foot event lawn, wedding gazebo and 6,000-square-foot ballroom to accommodate up to 380 wedding guests. The Auto-graph Collection Hotel — the first new-build resort in the Upper Keys

in 21 years — includes 10 secluded bungalows, a three-bedroom beach house, full-service spa and 6,000-square-foot beach. Playa Largo's "bungalope" weddings are an intimate way to marry, with accommodations in a two-level waterfront cottage and cocktails and hors d'oeuvres for nine people. Visit playalargoresort.com.

Key Largo's new six-villa Dolphin Point Villas will host wedding parties of up to 100 people. The two-story, three-wing Nautilus House estate, with five bedrooms and five baths and a private pool, can sleep 10. See dolphinspointvillas.com.

At Key Largo's Largo, a gated

sanctuary resort, up to 100 guests can gather on a private pier for bayside weddings. Largo has a 5,000-square-foot lodge and six separate 800-square-foot bungalows. Go to largoresort.com.

Adventurous honeymooning divers can experience Jules' Undersea Lodge, the United States' only submerged recreational hotel. Located underwater in a lagoon in Key Largo, the lodge has hosted more than 10,000 overnight visitors. Dive into jul.com.

In the heart of Islamorada, the 214-room oceanfront Cheeca Lodge & Spa, built in 1946, offers 27 acres of lushly manicured

The bride and groom can make a grand entrance by seaplane at Little Palm Island Resort & Spa in the Lower Keys.

and sprawling over 25 acres, the resort has 114 oceanside villas and 25 contemporary bayside townhomes. For more details, go to guyharveyoutpostislamorada.com.

In the Middle Keys, the 60-acre Hawks Cay Resort on Duck Key near Marathon — one of the Keys' largest resorts — has 25,000 square feet of waterfront function space for weddings with up to 250 guests. Events include welcome receptions, pool parties, sunset cruises, fishing excursions, on-site dolphin swims and farewell brunches. The resort features 250 two- and three-bedroom villas and 177 guest rooms. See hawks cay.com.

In Marathon at the 125-room Faro Blanco Resort & Yacht Club, known for its historic lighthouse, couples can anchor their love with a variety of wedding packages for two to 200. Event options include a jetty ceremony, yacht club lawn plated or buffet dinner reception or a "dock-tail" party on the docks at the full-service marina. The property's Hyatt Place hotel includes 1,800 square feet of flexible indoor function space and two event lawns. Visit FaroBlancoMarina.com.

In the Lower Keys, Little Palm Island Resort & Spa, on a 5.5-acre

private island just south of Big Pine Key, is regarded as one of Florida's most romantic resorts and features a three-night "Exclusively Yours" wedding package. Included are 30 one-bedroom suites, breakfast, lunch and dinner for up to 60 guests; valet parking, welcome cocktails, motor yacht transfers, watersports, resort dockage, wedding planner services, nonalcoholic beverages, taxes, fees and gratuities. Advance notice of six to 12 months is required. Examine littlepalmisland.com.

On a 27-acre private island just off Key West, Sunset Key Cottages features 40 cottages, an island beach, pool, boutique spa and the waterfront Latitudes restaurant. A three-bedroom "special event" cottage offers private beach-style space ideal for boutique weddings. Visit sunsetkeycottages.com.

In Key West, the gracious 18-room Southernmost House, an adults-only pastel-hued Victorian-style property on the Atlantic Ocean, offers 6,700 square feet of space for weddings, as well as a heated infinity pool. The Historic Hotels of America property can be booked exclusively for up to 300. Visit southernmosthouse.com.

Keys cuisine features fresh seafood

Food stations showcasing Florida Keys seafood are among top trends for wedding festivities. Creatively prepared cuisine is artfully — and organically — enhanced with fresh tropical lime and coconut, mango and papaya.

Couples often request "Floribbean"-themed menus combining indigenous Keys seafood with spicy Caribbean and Latin flavors. A Cuban-style pig roast is popular for casual rehearsal dinners.

Boat-to-table seafood — sweet Key West pink shrimp, succulent stone crab claws, fresh ceviche, yellowtail snapper or hogfish — is often requested as an entrée or in a bountiful seafood station.

Dessert trends include melt-in-your-mouth Key lime creations and metallic-gold cakes. Colorful desserts include hand-rolled, ganache-filled Key lime "cupcake sushi" cakes. Mini Key lime tarts are also popular, styled after the island chain's famous signature Key lime pie.



A showcase of indigenous Florida Keys seafood.

Andy Newman

Only-in-the-Keys venues offer intriguing options

Weddings in the balmy Florida Keys can be romantically barefoot or dressy, more elegant affairs. Unique venues found nowhere else in the world are available for pre-event festivities, nuptials, wedding receptions and honeymoons.

Unusual venues — historic forts, picturesque homes of famed authors and artists, and waterfront or underwater settings — reflect the Florida Keys' historic, literary, artistic and maritime heritage.

In Key Largo, couples can enjoy an intimate ceremony aboard the African Queen, the original vessel from John Huston's classic 1951 film starring Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn. Couples also can get married at the dock. Visit africanqueenflkeys.com.

Certified divers can exchange underwater vows at the Christ of the Deep statue, located in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and adjacent to Key Largo's John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. Couples also can marry at fascinating Pennekamp, the nation's first undersea park. Visit floridastateparks.org/park/Pennekamp.

In Islamorada, Morada Bay's Pierre's Restaurant & Lounge and The Beach Cafe are island-style settings known for their delicious cuisine and scenic sunsets. Pierre's is a two-story colonial plantation-style venue and The Beach Café fronts a palm-lined white beach overlooking Florida Bay. Across the highway is The Moorings Village & Spa, an 18-acre resort with 18 cottages and homes. Visit MoradaBay.com.

At Theater of the Sea, also in Islamorada, wedding parties can enjoy a private dolphin and sea lion show before an evening ceremony with up to 200 guests. Visit theaterofthesea.com.

In the Marathon area, couples with a love for marine mammals can marry at Dolphin Research Center on Grassy Key. During a "Private



You can take a ride and get married on the African Queen in Key Largo.

Andy Newman

Dolphin Encounter," a dolphin can serve as a wedding attendant or deliver the ring for an unforgettable proposal. Visit dolphins.org.

At Florida Keys Aquarium Encounters in Marathon, couples can schedule an event for up to 300 people amid natural mangrove hammocks and the aquarium's grounds that extend to the serene waters of Vaca Cut. Explore floridakeysaquariumencounters.com.

Bahia Honda State Park in the Lower Keys is a picturesque beach park. Couples can marry in the park or on the Bahia Honda Rail Bridge, built by Henry Flagler as part of the Florida Keys Overseas Highway. Visit floridastateparks.org/park/Bahia-Honda.

In Key West, literary aficionados can speak their vows outdoors on the grounds of the Ernest Hemingway Home & Museum. Famed author and Nobel Prize winner Hemingway lived in the Spanish colonial villa, a registered National Historic Landmark, and wrote famous works there during the 1930s. Up to 100 guests can be accommodated. Private evening house tours can be arranged. More details are at hemingwayhome.com.

The Harry S. Truman Little White House, Florida's only presidential museum, offers lush palm-framed gardens and three lawns that span an acre. The museum can host indoor rehearsal dinners. During his administration from 1945 to 1953, President Truman spent 11 working vacations at the sprawling West

Indian-style residence. For specifics, go to trumanlittlewhitehouse.com.

Get a marriage license

Applying for a marriage license is a relatively simple procedure in Florida's Monroe County, home of the Keys.

Applicants must be at least 18 years old to marry. Couples under 18 should contact the county clerk's office for legal requirements.

A valid photo identification with date of birth — such as a driver's license, passport, student or military ID, or foreign registration card — is required.

Current cost of the license is \$93.50, with a discounted rate for Florida residents showing proof of premarital class attendance.

Monroe County's Clerk of Court has several Keys locations.

Offices are in Key West at the Monroe County Courthouse, 500 Whitehead St.; in Marathon at the Marathon Branch Courthouse, 3117 Overseas Highway or mile marker 48.5 oceanside; and on Plantation Key at the Upper Keys Government Center, 88820 Overseas Highway or mile marker 88.5 bayside.

Once obtained, the license must be used within 60 days. Couples marrying in the Keys can also obtain a marriage license anywhere in Florida.

For additional required details, visit clerk-of-the-court.com or call 305-292-3458 in Key West; 305-289-6027 in Marathon; or 305-852-7145 on Plantation Key.

Planning timetable for Keys weddings

At least a year (12 months) before desired wedding month

- Select Florida Keys venue and wedding date
- Choose alternate backup venue
- Hire full-service or day-of wedding planner
- Research hotels, secure hotel room block
- Research flights into airports: Key West (EYW), Marathon (MTH), Miami (MIA), Fort Lauderdale (FLL), Fort Myers (RSW), Naples (APF)
- Review policies for obtaining a Florida marriage license
- Announce engagement, take engagement photos
- Create personal wedding website as information source

Nine months before wedding

- Visit Florida Keys for tour of venue, food tastings, hair and makeup sessions; meet with wedding planner and vendors
- Choose wedding party (bridesmaids, groomsmen, attendants)
- Create gift registry
- Begin shopping for attire: wedding and bridesmaid dresses, groom and groomsmen or attendant apparel
- Create guest list and gather email and physical addresses
- Send "save the date" cards with location and hotel room block details

Six months before wedding

- Book travel, discuss details with wedding party
- Coordinate with planner to secure vendors (photography, catering, cake, flowers, décor, music, officiant, transportation, hair and makeup)
- Purchase wedding rings
- Create itinerary, including group activities, for guests with details on welcome reception, rehearsal event, wedding and farewell brunch; include suggestions for individual Keys activities and how to book
- Book group activities with required deposits
- Order invitations

Three months before wedding

- Mail invitations
- Confirm all event details (floral arrangements, photography package, song lists, menus, cake, etc.) with vendors
- Order guest favors, welcome bags and thank you gifts for bridesmaids, groomsmen, attendants and family
- Begin writing vows and choose readings for ceremony

Two months before wedding

- Confirm documentation, begin process to obtain marriage license

One month before wedding

- Ship amenities for wedding and reception to venue or planner
- Contact hotel with details on welcome bags for delivery to guests
- Finalize hotel room block and release extra rooms
- Print programs, itineraries, welcome letters
- Finalize last-minute details with vendors
- Finalize wedding timeline and guest itineraries with wedding planner
- Create seating chart and give to wedding venue
- Complete attire fittings; arrange for steaming of wedding attire

Two weeks before wedding

- Create photo list for photographer
- Confirm details for pre-nuptial events: bachelor, bachelorette parties
- Share, post contact information with wedding party

At least one week before wedding

- Pack, travel to the Florida Keys
- Conduct final meetings with wedding planner, venue and hotel
- Pick up marriage license

fla-keys.com/weddings

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Cover photograph of Samantha and Benjamin Spaulding, following their wedding in Islamorada, by Bob Care.

Average monthly sunrise and sunset times for the Keys

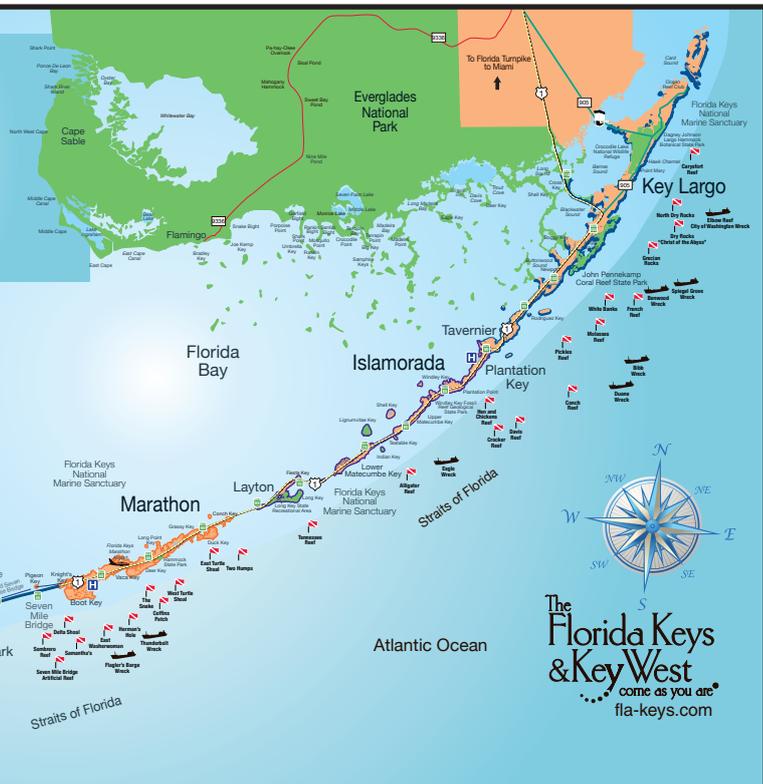


MONTH	SUNRISE	SUNSET
January	7:15 a.m.	6 p.m.
February	7 a.m.	6:20 p.m.
March*	6:45 a.m.	6:30 p.m.
	7:30 a.m.	7:40 p.m.
April	7 a.m.	7:50 p.m.
May	6:45 a.m.	8 p.m.
June	6:40 a.m.	8:15 p.m.
July	6:45 a.m.	8:20 p.m.
August	7 a.m.	8 p.m.
September	7:15 a.m.	7:30 p.m.
October	7:25 a.m.	7 p.m.
November*	7:30 a.m.	6:45 p.m.
	6:45 a.m.	5:40 p.m.
December	7:05 a.m.	5:40 p.m.

*Months with Daylight Savings Time shifts

More precise times at: timeanddate.com/sun/usa/key-west

Traveling Tips to the Florida Keys



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.

Driving Directions

From Miami International Airport (MIA), take LeJeune Road south to 836 West. Take the Florida Turnpike 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) east to the Miami exit, and south to the Turnpike Extension.

Driving Data to Keys/Key Largo

FROM	MILES	KM	HOURS
Miami	50	80	1
Fort Myers	200	320	4
Tampa	300	480	6
Orlando	280	450	5.25

Distance from Miami

REGION	MILES	KM	MILE MARKER
Key Largo	50	80	107-90
Islamorada	76	122	89-66
Marathon	111	178	65-45
Lower Keys	128	205	45-4
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



facebook.com/floridakeysandkeywest



[@thefloridakeys](https://twitter.com/thefloridakeys)



youtube.com/FloridaKeysTV



keysvoices.com



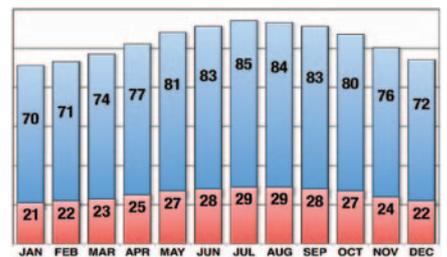
[@thefloridakeys](https://instagram.com/thefloridakeys)

Weather/Climate

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 the peak of summer, 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 subtropical 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 the average monthly air temperatures for the past 30 years, according to the Key West weather office. Temperatures in blue shades are Fahrenheit and those in light red are Celsius.



Help and More Information

If you're traveling in the Keys and need any help, call the toll-free visitors assistance line at 1-800-771-KEYS. It's staffed 24 hours a day. To contact visitor offices in the Keys, call 1-800-FLA-KEYS. The Keys website at fla-keys.com has a live chat feature with visitor information specialists available during regular U.S. weekday business hours to aid travelers in vacation planning.