

## The Road Less Traveled... Driving the Florida Keys

\* Please note that all "rights" and "lefts" are in reference to driving **down the Keys**. If you are leaving Key West and driving **back up the Keys**, just reverse those rights and lefts.

**Card Sound Road:** A scenic drive between the Florida Keys & Miami/Florida City. Just a tiny bit longer than the main road (the 18 Mile Stretch), but it is absolutely beautiful with the natural ecosystem surrounding you. There is a \$1.00 toll for the bridge. FYI - Right before you get onto the bridge coming from Florida City, there is a restaurant called **Alabama Jacks** which is a fun little place to stop for a quick bite!

**Evelyn's Café MM 103.3 Bayside:** If you don't know about this place, chances are you will keep on motoring. This is a diner-inspired eatery with Mexican influences. The fish tacos are fresh and made on the spot, breakfast is served all day, the price is right and you'll be eating with local first responders so you know the food's got to be good. Cheap 'n easy, just the way we like it here in the Keys.

**John D. Pennekamp State Park MM 102.6:** Visitor Center has a 30,000 gal. aquarium that is fun to check out (open 8-5 daily). You can snorkel right off the beach, which features a Spanish wreck just 100 ft. off the shore. The Park also offers snorkeling and SCUBA diving trips.

**Pilot House Marina MM 100 (13 Seagate Boulevard, Key Largo):** located on secluded Lake Largo just a stone's throw off the highway. You could either go the uptown route and enjoy elegant waterfront dining or join the local scene at the casual glass bottom bar. That's right folks, a glass bottom bar. Either way, it's a great place to check out the scene in Key Largo.

**Denny's Latin Cafe MM 99.6:** Great Cuban coffee and food with a liquor store to boot. If you need an extra boost of some serious caffeine to get you through to the other side of the 7 mile bridge, this is your kind of place. 99600 Overseas Highway.

**Mrs Mac's Kitchen MM 99:** This Key Largo restaurant is a favorite among locals. It's located in the median at MM 99 on the Overseas Hwy. The staff is easy going, friendly and the food is fresh, simply prepared and just plain good.

**Pink Junktique MM 98.2:** Oceanside; this is a well-stocked consignment shop. Cool stuff can be found from time to time.

**Harriette's Diner MM 95.7:** Tried and true breakfast joint on the Bayside.

**Snapper's Waterfront Restaurant MM 94.5:** Located on the Atlantic Ocean, Snapper's offers great food and reasonably-priced drinks with a nice view. Watch for the sign that leads you to 139 Seaside Ave.

**Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center MM 93:** On the right side of the road; there is a large sign, but hard to see until the last minute. A great all-volunteer organization taking in injured Hawks, Owls, Herons, Sea Gulls & more. The rehabilitated birds are released back into the wild.

**Craig's Restaurant MM 90:** Home of the World Famous Fish Sandwich...90154 Overseas Hwy on the Bayside. You'll find a few pleasant surprises on the menu, reasonably priced and quick service. And as the billboard reads: Ample parking in the rear.

**Made 2 Order MM 90:** Oceanside; accessible by car or boat, this waterside eatery features an extensive breakfast & lunch menu; open 7a-3p. Great food, fresh ingredients "made 2 order", and a laid-back Keys atmosphere. A great place for vegetarians!

**Sunrise Market MM 91.8:** Great Cuban food, hi-powered coffee and pastries along with WiFi. There is a take-out/window service for those on the go.

**Founders Park and Marina MM 87:** Located at mile marker 87 (bayside) in Islamorada. The park is huge (40 acres) and runs from US1 to the Bay. An Olympic size swimming pool, nature/exercise trails, dog park, a green certified marina, several sporting fields and a beach with a concession, this park is a great place to stretch your legs and gets the kids out the car and into some exercise. Entrance fee does apply to non-residents.

**Rain Barrel Artisan's Village/Giant 40' Lobster MM 86.7:** According to Eastman Kodak, Betsy, the giant 40' lobster, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most photographed icon in the Florida Keys, behind the Southernmost Point. Seen on the Bayside at 86700 Overseas Highway, a wide variety of artwork is available.

**Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological Site MM 84.9:** This is where they used to mine the fossilized coral rock for the railroad; the old quarry shows shear cut walls of the coral rock. It offers a few trails through the natural hammock of the Florida Keys; great for a stretch of the legs.

**The Diving Museum MM 83:** If you are a dive nut, this is the place for you! They have all the diving history you can imagine, and cool old diving gear as well as a great gift shop for anything

dive related!

**Mangrove Mike's MM 82.2:** This is a family diner located Bayside in Islamorada; reasonably priced; hearty breakfast & lunch served 7 days from 6a-2p.

**Lor-e-lei MM 82:** A great place to stop and eat; it is right on the water and has the perfect feel of the Keys... a good ending or beginning to your trip!

**Nikai Sushi Bar MM 81.8 @ Cheeca Lodge and Spa:** There is no signage from the highway but for those 'in the know', Nikai Sushi Bar, located within the Cheeca Lodge and Spa Resort, rock and 'rolls' it every time. Try the Keysie Japanesey or the Big Kahuna Tuna roll. You won't be disappointed.

**Midway Café & Coffee Bar MM 80.4:** Oceanside, this small but colorful café roasts their own coffee and serves up breakfast, lunch & pastries in a quaint, cozy atmosphere. And if you're traveling to Miami or to Key West, you guessed it; you're halfway there. Open 6 days 7a-3p; closed Wednesdays.

**Robbie's Marina of Islamorada MM 77.5:** The Hungry Tarpon Restaurant is a classic roadside diner with fantastic food served in a funky cement-block building. Afterwards, you can wander around back and feed the Tarpon by hand! There is a school of 50-100 Tarpon, some more than six feet long. Two dollars buys you a bucket of fish. Bring your camera. Trips to Lignumvitae Key on the Bayside and Indian Key on the Oceanside are offered here. See Micah at the Kayak Shack. He's a great musician and is very knowledgeable about the area.

**Anne's Beach MM 73.5:** On the left hand side, there are two entrances just several hundred yards apart, connected by a boardwalk, which has lots of little pavilions along it. The beach is nice, but not the typical Miami sandy beaches you might think of in South Florida. When you walk along the boardwalk, make sure you watch closely for the little & occasionally big crabs scurrying back into their holes. There are public restrooms here also.

**Long Key State Park MM 67.5:** Great little State Park; has the Golden Orb Trail - an incredible walk through many different ecosystems. If you look closely you may spot the spider that the trail is named for, the Golden Orb Weaver. They are quite beautiful! The trail takes you alongside the beach and into the hammock, transitioning in ecology along the way. They also have canoe rentals with a canoe trail mapped out!

**Leigh Ann's Coffee House MM 53.5:** Located on Sadowski Causeway in a sub-division known as Key Colony Beach in Marathon, Leigh Ann's Coffee House is a little gem tucked into a small plaza. Open for breakfast and lunch, this funky little coffee house offers homemade pastries, gourmet coffees, full breakfast and lunch as well as a wine tasting every Thursday night. Definitely off the beaten path and well worth the less than five minute detour off the main drag.

**The Plaza Grill MM 51:** Located in one of the few 'strip malls' in Marathon, the Plaza Grill brings high end dining to the middle Keys. As with most Keys dinner restaurants, the atmosphere is casual and no dress code is required. The food includes everything from fresh seafood brought in from local docks to prime steaks, veal chop and rack of lamb. The Plaza Grill offers an extensive wine list and the pre-requisite martini to accompany the 36 oz. carnivorous rib-eye.

**Marathon Deli MM 51:** Located next door to the Plaza Grill, the Marathon deli is home to the monster super sub. Custom sandwiches are available in house and for pre-order. The perfect stop for your day on the water or a picnic at one the state parks along the overseas highway.

**Turtle Hospital MM 48:** A 'must see' on your Florida Keys and/or Bucket List. The only state certified operating theater for the beloved and endangered sea turtle, this facility offers tours throughout the day and will open your mind to not only to the fragility of our oceans and the subsequent importance of conservation efforts, but also the humility, genteel qualities and longevity of this survivor from the pre-historic age.

**Keys Fisheries MM 48:** Bayside at the end of 35<sup>th</sup> Street in Marathon; this is a market, a restaurant, a marina and a working fishery. Watch the boats come in with fresh stone crabs in season and dine waterside amongst local fisherman. While there, have a liquid libation at **Keys Drinkeries**. When in Rome.....

**Lazy Days Restaurant MM 47.3 Oceanside:** Turn at 11<sup>th</sup> Street and the restaurant will be on your right. Lazy Days is a typical waterfront restaurant but there's nothing 'typical' about the food here. The entrée salads are fresh, creative and plentiful. And yes, they do serve the prerequisite fresh catch, shrimp, oysters and conch, but also offer selections for vegetarians and vegans. A nice surprise overlooking an ocean-bound canal in the middle Keys.

**Blue Hole MM 30:** Turn right on Key Deer Blvd & veer to the left; the low speed limit is because the Key Deer can be found walking roadside! This is especially true around dawn and dusk. You will see the Blue Hole entrance on the left; it is the only fresh water lake in the Florida Keys

and because of that, you can spot some cool wildlife at times. There are alligators that call this Hole home along with snakes, a variety of birds and occasionally some Key Deer.

**Key Deer Refuge Nature Trail:** A little further down this same road on the same side as the Blue Hole, is a really nice nature trail through the Key Deer Refuge. The whole island of Big Pine Key is a Key Deer Refuge, but this particular trail is the best marked; it is about a mile long and takes you through a variety of different ecosystems. Informative signs periodically dot the trail telling you about the native flora and fauna. It's free!

**No Name Pub:** A great little bar/restaurant known for their pizza & their well-hidden locale. From US 1, make that same right onto Key Deer Blvd you did for the Blue Hole and nature trail, but instead of veering left, you want to go straight (or follow the road on the right). You will follow this down to a stop sign, and just follow the signs to No Name Key; after a few twists and turns you will find the pub on the left. Take a dollar bill to leave on the wall!

**Sugarloaf Food Company MM 24:** On the Bayside; Ann makes some fantastic sandwiches, coffee and various desserts!

**Square Grouper Restaurant MM 22.5:** Open for dinner & lunch; some favorites are the curly-que onion rings, sweet potato french fries, creative & delicious sauces for fish and fondue, and amazing desserts!

**Blimp Road MM 21:** Drive all the way to the end and you will pass the world's smallest US Air Force Base, where they keep "Fat Albert", an aerostat balloon that reports on weather, and according to some Conchs, some secret Cuban spy stuff, too!

**Bat Tower on Sugarloaf around MM 17:** Sugarloaf Lodge is on the right side of the road. Directly after, you will see signs to "Skydive", turn right at that sign. Towards the end of this little road, you will see the old Bat Tower. A guy named Perky built this bat tower in the 1920's or 30's. He wanted to open a hotel on Sugarloaf, but the mosquitoes were too awful to have guests want to stay. So he built the bat tower so the bats would eat the mosquitoes! Good idea in theory, but after he got all the imported bats to live in his tower, they soon flew away, never to return.

**Sugarloaf Marina MM 17:** An old school Keys Marina, located Bayside.

**Near the bait shop, look for Andrea Paulson of Reelax Charters.** The super-friendly and knowledgeable Captain offers kayak trips to the backcountry. Andrea will anchor off a sandy beach and guide you through mangrove creeks where small sharks, stingrays, starfish and other aquatic creatures live.

**Kaya Island Eats MM 15:**

Located in the Saddlebunch Keys, Kaya is a funky gem of a restaurant, open for lunch (during the winter season) and dinner all year long. The menu is whimsical with its descriptions, such as 'no worry shrimp curry', rasta pasta as well as a place where you can get your conch freak on. (conch steak, conch ceviche, conch chowder). Frequented by locals who live 'up the keys', Kaya Island Eats is well worth the 20 minute ride from Key West.

**Baby's Coffee MM 15:** Originally located on Duval Street in Key West, Baby's moved "up the Keys" and has been treating lower Keys based locals for their caffeine addiction for the past decade or so. Freshly roasted beans, gourmet wines, cheeses and surprising vegan specialties make this roadside coffee shop nothing like you've ever experienced before.

**Geiger Key Smokehouse MM10 Oceanside:** Turn at the Circle K on Big Coppitt Key and follow this winding road all the way down and turn onto Geiger Road. This is a combination fish camp, Marina, RV Park and what else would you expect in the Keys? A "smoke house". The Sunday feature at Geiger Smokehouse is the barbeque dinner which begins at 4pm. The bar and deck are perfectly located for watching the sunset without the crowds and noise of Mallory Square. Line up for dinner at the outside grill and prepare to be served by caring and friendly staff that make you feel like one of the family

**Hogfish Bar & Grill MM 5:** Located in Downtown Stock Island, this open air waterfront eatery embodies the true spirit of the Lower Keys. Excellent fresh seafood, a good-pour cocktail and interesting characters make this a hard to find but locals favorite.

**Roostica MM 5:** Located on McDonald Ave, the 'gateway to downtown Stock island', this new addition to the area boasts a wood burning oven for making great pizzas and a Sunday gravy special, where dinner is served 'la famiglia' style. Weekdays Roostica offers the workingman lunch special where you get a small salad and an individual sized pizza for \$11. Beer and wine is also available.