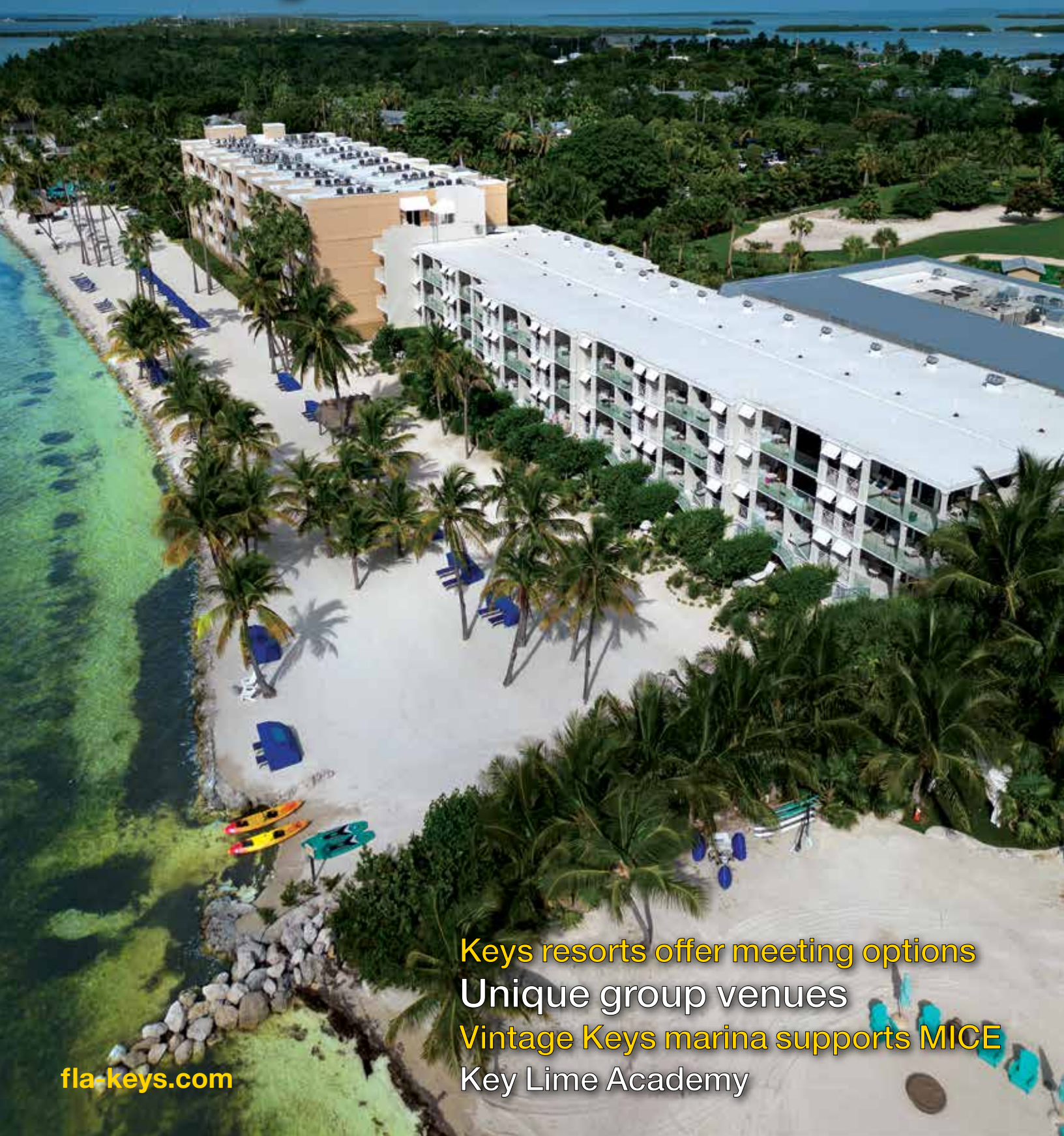


Keys Traveler

MEETINGS + INCENTIVES



Keys resorts offer meeting options
Unique group venues
Vintage Keys marina supports MICE
Key Lime Academy

fla-keys.com



Dolphin Research Center in Marathon offers team-building experiences with education about the world of dolphins.

DOLPHIN RESEARCH CENTER

Unconventional, only-in-the-Keys venues host meetings

By Laura Myers

The Florida Keys, known for their rich history and unique marine ecosystem, feature only-in-the-Keys venues for hosting small meetings while spotlighting regional heritage and environmental preservation.

The Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) headquarters is a classic conch-style house, known as the oldest building in the Upper Keys still in its original Key Largo location. The Interpretive Center provides group educational experiences about fish identification, the invasive lionfish or mangrove ecology without getting on a boat. A planned on-site two-story Marine Conservation Center with space for 80 attendees and a second-floor balcony is to have an ocean exploration gallery and three centers for discovery science, ocean outreach and program planning. It is targeted for completion by late 2024. reef.org/reef-interpretive-center-rental-rates

In Islamorada, the Florida Keys History & Discovery Center — a stand-alone 7,500-square-foot facility on the north side of the oceanfront Islander Resort — focuses on the Keys' mari-

time history, the Florida Keys Over-Sea Railroad and exhibits about the island chain's reef ecosystem. A second-floor 35-seat theater screens documentaries. The center's first floor showcases Upper Keys history including First Nation people, early Spanish treasure hunters and pirates. A Coral Reef Exploration Exhibit has three aquariums, interactive kiosks and views on monitors of coral reef ecosystems. keysdiscovery.com

In the Middle Keys, at Dolphin Research Center groups can meet dolphins and participate in memorable interactive experiences including team-building exercises with the marine mammals. It offers two separate meeting rooms: the 702-square-foot Key Largo Room and the 672-square-foot Key West Room, each with a full-screen monitor and Wi-Fi, and hosting up to 70 attendees theater-style or 44 for dinner. An airy 378-square-foot outside porch hosts smaller breakouts or an alfresco meal. dolphins.org/events

In Marathon, at Crane Point Hammock Museum & Nature Trails the midcentury 2,500-square-foot Crane House — built in 1954 and designed and furnished in the style of Wahl Sny-

der, a student of architect Frank Lloyd Wright — is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The house, unique to the Keys, can host up to 70. On-site, an antique 84-foot-long red railroad car provides space for 25 to 30 attendees. Crane Point, preserved by the Florida Keys Land and Sea Trust as one of the Keys' most sensitive environmental and archaeological sites, also features a museum, historic Bahamian-style Adderley House, Marathon Wild Bird Center, "fish pedicures," a well-stocked gift shop and nature trails. cranepoint.net

At Mote Marine Laboratory's Elizabeth Moore International Center for Coral Reef Research & Restoration on Summerland Key in the Lower Keys, groups can book a private tour of the land-based coral nursery, with

outdoor research and indoor labs, to learn how Keys scientists are restoring Florida's Coral Reef. There's classroom space for 25, and continental breakfasts and bag lunches can be arranged. Mote also offers private group tours and interactive coral experiences at its satellite coral nurseries at Reefhouse Resort & Marina in Key Largo and at Bud N' Mary's Fishing Marina in Islamorada. mote.org/locations/details/international-center-for-coral-reef-research-and-restoration/islamorada-coral-nurseryredirect

At Key West's Truman Waterfront, the

state-of-the-art 6,000-square-foot Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center offers new contemporary exhibits highlighting Florida Keys mangrove, coral and seagrass habitats. A freestanding main exhibit focuses on the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, with others showcasing the science behind coral restoration. There's also an exhibit on shipwrecks and maritime history left behind by the wrecks. A conference room seats 30 and there's access to a small kitchenette. floridakeys.noaa.gov/eco_discovery.html



Reef Environmental Education Foundation's headquarters is set to add a two-story Marine Conservation Center that can accommodate 80 attendees.

REEF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOUNDATION

KEYS HISTORY & DISCOVERY CENTER



The Florida Keys History & Discovery Center focuses on Keys history and ecosystems.

Keys Traveler
Meetings + Incentives

Editor

Andy Newman

Managing Editor

Carol Shaughnessy

Senior Writer

Laura Myers

Copy Editor

Buck Banks

Keys Traveler is published by the Monroe County Tourist Development Council, the visitor marketing agency for the Florida Keys & Key West. **Director:** Stacey Mitchell; **Sales Director:** Markham McGill; **Group Sales Manager:** Jack Meier
Cover photo of Cheeca Lodge Resort & Spa in Islamorada by Andy Newman

©2023 Monroe County Tourist Development Council



ERIN MUIR

At Mote Marine Laboratory's newest facility in Key Largo, groups can book a private tour of a land-based coral nursery.

Florida Keys resorts offer enticing meeting options



By Laura Myers

Playa Largo Resort & Spa in Key Largo offers 40,000 square feet of flexible meeting space.

Meetings in the Florida Keys & Key West feature all types of resort venues — many with newly renovated and expanded group accommodations — with bucket-list outdoor adventures that seamlessly blend team-bonding activities with a breezy subtropical setting.

"Resorts throughout the Keys, many providing relaxing and scenic waterfront views, have enhanced their offerings with villas and new facilities for groups," said Jack Meier, group sales manager for the Keys' Monroe County Tourist Development Council.



Jack Meier

"With nature as a backdrop and our fresh seafood cuisine, these elements help create unforgettable, unplugged

Keys meetings," Meier added.

Meetings typically host 15 to 100 attendees. With more than 20 non-stop flights to Key West International Airport, the Keys are easily accessible from major U.S. cities and ideal for midweek meetings.

In northern Key Largo, the private 165-room **Ocean Reef Club** has an all-new lobby, state-of-the-art cooking school and 30,000 square feet of meeting space including a 7,500-square-foot ballroom and 5,500-square-foot junior ballroom. The private club offers two 18-hole golf courses, a full-service 175-slip marina and private airport. meetingsatocceanreef.com

Playa Largo Resort & Spa, an Autograph Collection Hotel in Key Largo, offers 40,000 square feet of flexible space for six to 300, includ-

ing an 8,600-square-foot outdoor event lawn. Multi-bedroom residences and new Ocean Residences — with private pools and patios — are ideal for small retreats. Groups can enjoy Mediterranean fare, fresh seafood and other dining options. playalargo.com

The 15-acre **Baker's Cay Resort Key Largo**, a Curio Collection by Hilton, has 200 pet-friendly rooms and suites, 15,000 square feet of indoor space with two panoramic waterfront ballrooms, and 12,000 square feet of outdoor space for team-building adventures and watersports. bakerscayresort.com

In Key Largo, the **Reefhouse Resort & Marina**, an Opal Collection resort, is a subtropical oasis on 17 acres with two private beaches and airy interiors. With over 50,000 square feet of meeting and event space, Reefhouse includes

nine indoor areas and outdoor venues. ReefhouseKeyLargo.com

Islamorada's 27-acre oceanfront **Cheeca Lodge & Spa** — with 243 rooms and suites, 11 stand-alone casitas and a total 70,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor event space — offers a new detached 10,000-square-foot Islamorada Ballroom. Billed as the Keys' largest, it accommodates up to 1,500 for receptions and 788 for banquet-style dinners. Each of 43 new premier oceanfront suites offers over 550 square feet, a private balcony and open-air spa tub. The Casitas at Cheeca Lodge feature personalized butler service and one- and two-bedroom units from 750 to 2,100 square feet. Casita group buyouts are offered. cheeca.com

The **Islamorada Resort Collection** presents 376 island-inspired guest-

rooms, 12 dining outlets, 70,000 square feet of meeting space and a world-class fishing fleet. The collection includes the 110-room **Amara Cay**, the 52-unit **La Siesta Resort & Villas** and the all-new 214-room **Three Waters Resort & Marina** to be unveiled in 2024. Group activities include offshore and backcountry fishing and ocean adventures by Spray Watersports, with a curated 26-mile jet ski tour of backcountry mangroves, wildlife preserves and other attractions. islamoradaresortcollection.com

Hawks Cay Resort, a 60-acre Preferred Hotel Group Lifestyle Collection property, offers 20,000 square feet of waterfront meeting space with two ballrooms and areas for outdoor events and team-building activities, receptions and pool parties. It has 177 hotel guest rooms and 210 two- and three-bedroom townhome-style villas, six dining outlets, five swimming pools, a saltwater lagoon, on-site dolphin experience and access to fishing, diving, snorkeling, kayaking and sunset cruises. hawkscayresort.com

Marathon's 125-unit **Faro Blanco Resort**, with a classic 1950s lighthouse, is undergoing renovations and conversion to become Faro Blanco Resort, a Curio Collection by Hilton, in late 2023. The renovated property will offer 1,200 square feet of meeting space with expansive windows and outdoor event space, a new multilevel deck with bar, and cabanas. There's an adjoining 74-slip marina. faroblancoresort.com

The Middle Keys' 24-acre, 199-unit **Isla Bella Beach Resort** has more than 20,000 square feet of function space including 16,000 of outdoor space and a 2,800-square-foot Hibiscus Event Center. Offerings include on-site charters for fishing, diving and watersports; a 4,000-square-foot spa; five pools; and three food and beverage venues. islabellabeachresort.com

The 20-acre **Oceans Edge Key West Hotel & Marina** on Stock Island has 175 rooms and suites ranging from 382 to 575 square feet, six pools and a 96-slip marina. Outdoor event space overlooks the Atlantic Ocean and can accommodate up to 100. oceansedgekeywest.com

At the 100-unit **The Perry Hotel & Marina** on Stock Island, a unique dockside event lawn and pool area can accommodate up to 300 for all types of group events. perrykeywest.com

The 222-room **Marriott Key West Beachside** has 129 one-, two- and three-bedroom suites and offers an expansive 5,673-square-foot ballroom, in-house audiovisual equipment and an outdoor waterfront patio for 140. Beachside's 9,000 total square feet of meeting space includes six breakout rooms and capacity of 400 for a sit-down dinner. There's a 16-slip dock and pier. keywestmarriott.com

The legendary 311-room **Casa Marina Key West**, Curio Collection by Hilton, has completed renovations and added a new 5,000-square-foot oceanfront event lawn to its existing 11,000 square feet of indoor event space — including the 3,100-square-foot Flagler's Ballroom, a 2,600-square-foot Grand Ballroom and versatile 5,000-square-foot Keys Ballroom. New features include vibrant décor, enhanced food and beverage venues, renovations to all rooms and suites, and upgraded watersports piers. Group activities include scavenger hunts, golf tournaments and private snorkeling trips on a luxury catamaran. Nine event spaces accommodate from 10 to 500. casamarinareresort.com

Casa Marina's sister property, the 150-room **The Reach Key West**, Curio Collection by Hilton, offers 18,000 square feet of outdoor and 4,300 square feet of indoor event space. Oceanfront venues include a gazebo jutting over the Atlantic Ocean and the 3,024-square-foot Palms Lawn. reachresort.com

The 178-room waterfront **Opal Key Resort & Marina**, an Opal Collection resort in the heart of downtown Key West adjacent to Mallory Square, offers stylish guestrooms and suites. With a total of 16,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor function space, it can accommodate up to 300. On-site is a full-service 37-slip marina with watersports. opalkeywest.com

The **Keys Collection** in Key West includes **Fairfield Inn & Suites**, **Hilton Garden Inn**, **The Gates** and **24 North**, and offers 519 total guestrooms. The Sunset Green Event Lawn features over 12,000 square feet of outdoor lawn space for up to 1,000. Also available are 1,000 feet of flexible indoor meeting space, four separate poolside event locations and poolside cabanas for private functions. thekeyscollection.com

Bud N' Mary's Fishing Marina

Authentically 'Old Florida Keys'



SARA STANCZYK

Bud N' Mary's oceanfront, open-air 'barn' can accommodate up to 150 for 'Old Florida Keys' experiences.

Planners and advisors seeking authentic Florida Keys fishing experiences for small affinity groups can book them at Bud N' Mary's Fishing Marina complex in Islamorada, known as the Sport Fishing Capital of the World.

For decades Bud N' Mary's, owned and operated by Islamorada's legendary Stanczyk family, has been a must-stop for celebrities and avid anglers: baseball great Ted Williams, ex-presidents George H. Bush and Jimmy Carter, fly-fishing innovator Jimmie Albright, golfer Sam Snead and Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris, to name just a few.

Established in 1944 and now home to more than 50 local fishing guides and captains, Bud N' Mary's houses the Keys' largest fishing fleet.

Newly added space for meetings includes a covered 10,000-square-foot open-air oceanfront "barn" that seats 150 and a rooftop event venue, accommodating 45, with sweeping waterfront views of both Florida Bay and the Atlantic.

The 5-acre waterfront compound is ideal for groups of friends, families, buddies, girlfriends and anglers seeking

affordability, only-in-the-Keys experiences and insiders' tips from friendly locals.

Bud N' Mary's offers charters on backcountry boats, offshore vessels and a party fishing boat.

Nontraditional accommodations — all with direct on-site access to unrivaled fishing — include an oceanfront three-bedroom, two-bath house; a six-bedroom, two-bath conch-style house; the Pelican camper-trailer; a two-apartment penthouse suite with four beds; a tackle shop suite with a king and a day bed; four hotel rooms, each with two double beds and a mini fridge; four houseboats including a trawler; and an aqua lodge. Units accommodate two to six guests with a minimum two- to three-night stay and all include television, air conditioning and free Wi-Fi.

An on-site café is open daily, serving hearty breakfasts, sandwiches for departing charters and hook-and-cook options with a variety of ways to prepare that freshly caught fish right off the dock.

budnmarys.com

Keys offer angling diversity

More saltwater world records have been set in the Florida Keys — where backcountry sport fishing and saltwater fly-fishing were pioneered — than anywhere else, according to the International Game Fish Association.

"Every single saltwater fish that swims in this hemisphere can be caught from this destination," said Captain Richard Stanczyk, Bud N' Mary's owner-operator. In the Florida Bay backcountry, gamefish catches include tarpon, bonefish, permit, snook, redfish and black drum; and among Atlantic Ocean catches are sailfish, blue marlin, swordfish, mahi-mahi, blackfin tuna, wahoo, kingfish, cobia, mackerel, grouper, yellowtail and mutton snapper. fla-keys.com/fishing

Key Lime Academy

A guide to selling Keys meetings

The Key Lime Academy online platform provides helpful, descriptive information for meeting, incentive, conference and exhibition planners to help sell meetings throughout the Florida Keys & Key West.

The dedicated MICE page is a resource for meeting professionals seeking more detailed information about the destination for their programs. It features the current Florida Keys Meeting Planner Guide, with information about all Keys properties with meeting space and dedicated sales staff. In addition, the page is home to the annual Keys Traveler

Magazine, MICE edition, with easy-to-read and informative details for meetings in the island chain known as America's Caribbean.

The MICE page features information on the Upper Keys, which includes Key Largo and Islamorada; the Middle and Lower Keys, with family-friendly activities in Marathon and eco-friendly offshore experiences; and Key West, the southernmost island city in the continental United States, closer to Havana than to Miami.

fla-keys.com/kla-mice

Keys seafood: Succulent and fresh from the ocean and bay

The Florida Keys offer an abundant bounty from the sea that's unrivaled nearly anywhere else in the world.

Pink shrimp, spiny lobster, stone crab, hogfish, yellowtail and mutton snapper, mahi-mahi and black grouper are among local delights that can be grilled, broiled, blackened, baked or fried.

This freshest of fish, caught in the Atlantic Ocean or scooped out of Florida Bay, is succulently seasoned with flavors of the Keys — mango, coconut, papaya and avocado. Group menus typically include some of these delectably delicious choices.

Team-building functions often feature catch-and-cook fishing events full of adventure, rivalry, gamesmanship and comradery. Keys corporate meetings or retreats often focus on protection of the environment, catch-and-release fishing practices and seafood sustainability.

Three types of Keys seafood are particularly tasty standouts.

Sweet stone crab claws,

served with drawn butter or chilled with mustard sauce, are a renewable resource. Fishermen harvest only the claws, returning crabs to the sea to regenerate their claws.

Key West pink shrimp are light, flavorful and generally sweeter than other crustaceans.

Spiny clawless Florida lobsters, served up steamed or broiled with drawn butter or refreshingly cold, are another favorite.

Attendees can top off a memorable dinner by savoring infinite varieties of the Keys' signature dessert: tart, tangy and sweet Key lime pie, crafted from the juice of tiny Key limes.

True and authentic Key lime pie is always yellow, never green. As one of the Keys' favorite pie chefs, Kermit Carpenter always describes the iconic dessert as "pucker perfect."

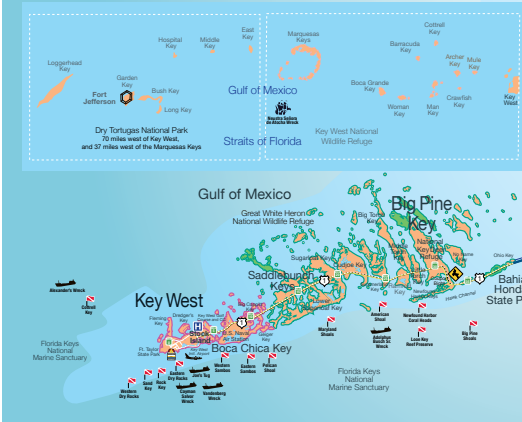
fla-keys.com/food-drink



Key West pink shrimp and fresh Florida Keys stone crab claws are delectable favorites on any dining table.

NICK DOLL

Traveling Tips to the Florida Keys



@floridakeysandkeywest



@thefloridakeys



@thefloridakeys



@flkeyskeywest



FloridaKeysTV



keysvoices.com

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 (State Road 91) 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) south to the Miami exit, and south to the Turnpike Extension.

Driving Data to Keys/Key Largo

FROM	MILES	KM	HOURS
Miami	58	93	1
Fort Myers	200	320	4
Tampa	300	480	6
Orlando	280	450	5.75
Jacksonville	490	780	10

Distance from Miami

REGION	MILES	KM	MILE MARKER
Key Largo	58	93	108-90
Islamorada	76	122	90-63
Marathon	111	178	63-40
Lower Keys	135	217	40-4
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

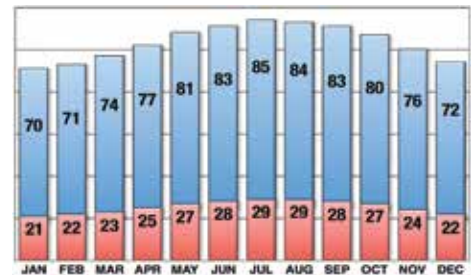
Weather/Climature

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 summer's peak, 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 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 past 30-year monthly air temperatures from the Key West weather office. Temperatures in blue shades are Fahrenheit and those in red are Celsius.



Help and More Information

If you're traveling in the Keys and need any help, call the toll-free visitor assistance line at 800-771-KEYS. It's staffed 24 hours a day. To contact visitor offices throughout the Florida Keys, call 800-FLA-KEYS, weekdays during normal business hours. The Florida Keys' fact-filled website is at fla-keys.com.



Keys Info