



Destination Guide: Florida Keys



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AAA Destination Guide: Florida Keys includes trip-planning information covering AAA recommended attractions and restaurants, exclusive member discounts, maps and more.

Deep-sea fishing. Quaint bed-and-breakfasts in Victorian cottages. Rocky beaches. Amiable residents. Sounds like a perfect New England setting, doesn't it? Guess again. This is the Florida Keys, and the very thought conjures up images of knockout sunsets, tangy Key lime pie, water sports, relaxation, good times—and Ernest Hemingway, arguably the most famous person associated with Key West.

Henry Flagler, a railroad developer and magnate, is perhaps less well-known, but he was immeasurably more instrumental to the future of the Keys. Flagler built the first railroad to Key West in the early 1900s, opening up the Keys to development and tourism. The railroad was destroyed by a hurricane in 1935, but the remaining infrastructure was used to construct the Overseas Highway, which allows easy access to the islands.

Today the Florida Keys—including Big Pine Key, Dry Tortugas National Park, Islamorada, Key Largo, Key West, Marathon, and Sugarloaf Key—are the epitome of easy living. You'll find plenty to do and see: art and history museums, national parks, miniature deer, Florida kitsch, kayaks and catamarans, year-round fishing tournaments, festivals, open-air pubs and restaurants featuring fish caught the same day.

There's so much to do in the Keys, it's no wonder the locals—artists, writers, parrotheads, expatriates—exhibit such an obvious zest for life. Perhaps it's all that Key lime pie.

Essentials

Put yourself in a Florida Keys state of mind with a leisurely drive on the 113-mile Overseas Highway, passing ultramarine expanses of sea, clusters of mangrove trees and scrubland, candy-colored plastic palm trees, tikis and giant seashells.

[John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park](#) in [Key Largo](#) is just one of many Keys attractions holding allure for both anglers and fans of scuba diving, snorkeling, kayaking and canoeing.

Tool around [Key West](#) on the open-air cars of the [Conch Tour Train](#), and learn about local legends, lore and landmarks.

Introduce yourself to the sleepy descendants of Hemingway's six-toed cats while learning about one of the greatest American authors at the [Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum](#).

Enter the greenhouse at the [Key West Butterfly & Nature Conservatory](#) and find yourself in a completely different world. More than 50 species of butterflies flutter from one tropical flower to another; if you're lucky, one will land on your shoulder.

Peaceful daytime and sunset cruises with The Liberty Fleet of Tall Ships feature complementary drinks and an attentive crew aboard a replica 19th-century schooner. What's not to love?

Leave the car at the hotel and do the Duval Crawl. No, it's not a dance—it's the local term for barhopping along Duval Street, Key West's main drag. Be sure to visit Sloppy Joe's and Capt. Tony's Saloon (Hemingway's favorite haunt).



It's *de rigueur* to have your picture taken at the southernmost point in the continental United States, marked by a red, black and yellow concrete buoy at the intersection of Whitehead and South streets.

You can't leave the Keys without sampling some scrumptious Key lime pie. Have a contest with your companions and try the recipes from several restaurants; every eatery in the Keys claims to have the best.

Street performers, including jugglers and cats jumping through flaming hoops, entertain daily at Mallory Square off Duval Street; raspberry and peach sorbet sunsets spill across the sky for the big finish. Sometimes the best things in life *are* free.

Essentials Map



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Essentials Details - Get additional information on AAA.com:



- GEM Attraction offers a *Great Experience for Members*



- Exclusive AAA member discounts available

1. John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park

US 1, Milepost 102.5
Key Largo, FL 33037
Phone: (305) 451-1202

2. Key Largo

3. Key West

4. Conch Tour Train

501 Front St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-5161



5. Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum

907 Whitehead St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-1136

6. Key West Butterfly & Nature Conservatory

1316 Duval St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 296-2988

7. Discovery Undersea Tours

251 Margaret St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (800) 262-0099



Restaurants

Housed in a 1930s “conch house” from a rustic fishing camp, Ballyhoo’s Historic Seafood Grille in Key Largo has retained its comfortable décor, down to the wood-beamed ceilings. The friendly staff will help narrow down your choices on an extensive list of fresh seafood from the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. You can’t go wrong with the catch of the day—served 13 ways—or all-you-can-eat stone crab. Yummy pretzel rolls are a special touch, and the wine list has choices to complement every selection.

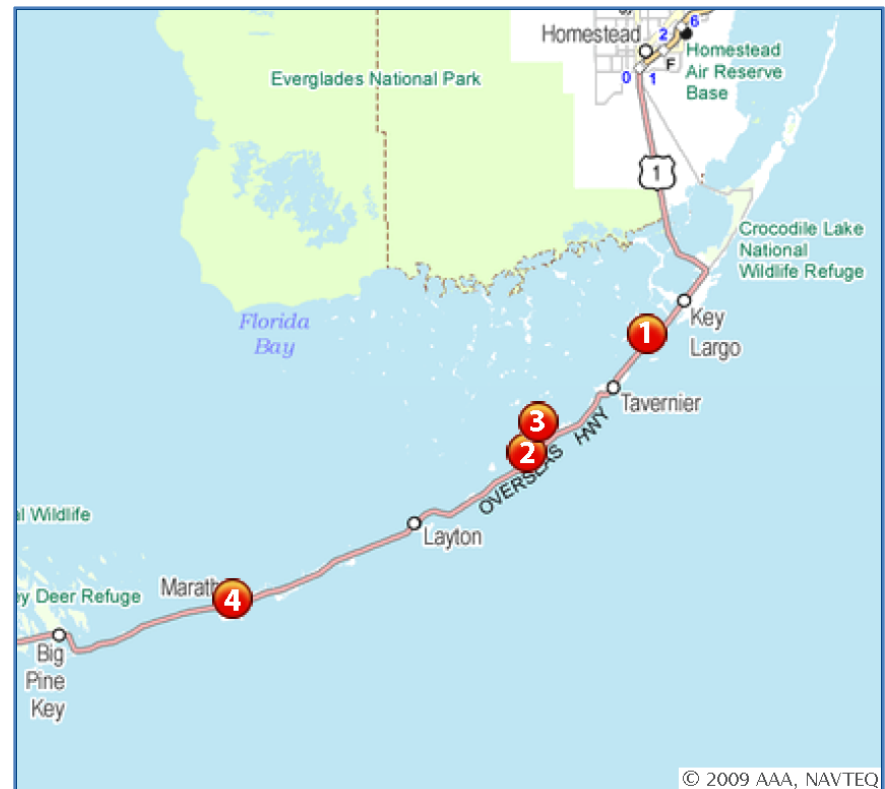


Rise and shine extra early for breakfast at the Islamorada Restaurant & Bakery/Bob’s Bunz. The lines are long but worth the wait, especially when you sink your teeth into the incredible sticky buns and pecan rolls created by talented pastry chef Robert Spencer. Egg dishes and fluffy pancakes are equally tempting. Lunch also is available at this diner-style family restaurant.

Moor your yacht to the dock in front of the Islamorada Fish Company. This open-air restaurant serves nothing but the freshest fish, assured by daily deliveries to the fish market next door. Try the stone crab claws, Florida lobster and fried fish sandwiches; the burgers and chicken dishes also are good. Sit dockside for an amazing view of the bay—especially striking when the sun slowly sinks below the horizon each evening.

Barracuda Grill isn’t your typical seafood shack with beer signs and fishing nets on the wall. Minimalist yet cozy décor and innovative meal presentations set this Marathon restaurant apart. You’ll relish the “tipsy olives” appetizer, marinated in a secret recipe. The seafood dishes are savory, and the rack of lamb or aged Angus beef are a refreshing change of pace. The wine list leans toward California wineries.

Restaurants Map





Get maps and turn-by-turn directions using [TripTik Travel Planner on AAA.com](http://TripTik.com)


Restaurants Details - Get additional information on AAA.com;

AAA Diamond Rating information available on AAA.com/Diamonds

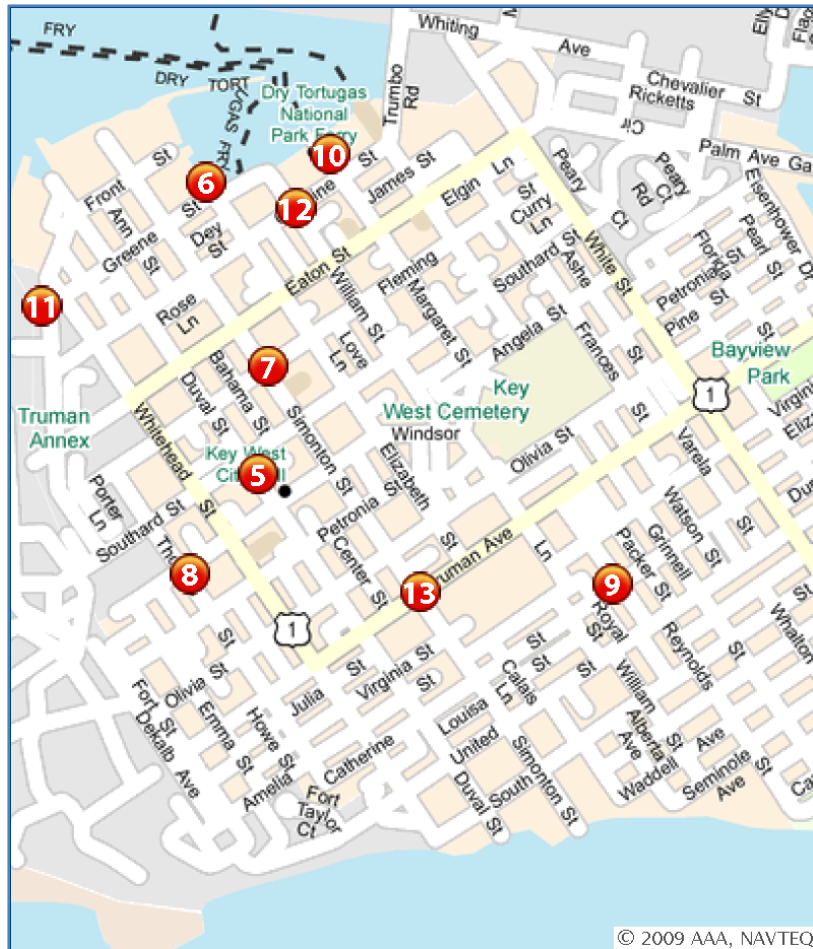
1. Ballyhoo's Historic Seafood Grille 
 MM 97.8
 Key Largo, FL 33037
 Phone: (305) 852-0822

2. Islamorada Restaurant & Bakery/Bob's Bunz 
 81620 Overseas Hwy
 Islamorada, FL 33036
 Phone: (305) 664-8363

3. Islamorada Fish Company 
 81532 Overseas Hwy
 Islamorada, FL 33036
 Phone: (305) 664-9271

4. Barracuda Grill 
 4290 Overseas Hwy
 Marathon, FL 33050
 Phone: (305) 743-3314

Restaurants Map



Get maps and turn-by-turn directions using [TripTik Travel Planner on AAA.com](#)

Elegant and understated [Antonia's Restaurant](#) in [Key West](#) blends traditional Italian cuisine with a modern Mediterranean influence. Chef Michael Mosi makes regular forays to Tuscany to unearth new recipes; the payoff is homemade pasta and praiseworthy sauces combined with seafood, chicken, veal and beef. During the day, you can watch the chef roll out fresh pasta in the front window. The wine list comprises Italian and American labels; a full bar also is available.

Restaurants Details - *Get additional information on [AAA.com](#);
AAA Diamond Rating information available on [AAA.com/Diamonds](#)*

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>5. Antonia's Restaurant </p> <p>615 Duval St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-6565</p> | <p>9. El Siboney </p> <p>900 Catherine St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 296-4184</p> |
| <p>6. Blue Heaven </p> <p>729 Thomas St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 296-8666</p> | <p>10. Half Shell Raw Bar </p> <p>231 Margaret St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-7496</p> |
| <p>7. Cafe Marquesa </p> <p>600 Fleming St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 292-1244</p> | <p>11. Latitudes Beach Cafe </p> <p>245 Front St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 292-5394</p> |
| <p>8. Conch Republic Seafood Company </p> <p>631 Greene St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-4403</p> | <p>12. Pepe's Cafe </p> <p>806 Caroline St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-7192</p> |
| | <p>13. Pisces Seafood Restaurant </p> <p>1007 Simonton St
Key West, FL 33040-6552
Phone: (305) 294-7100</p> |

Roosters roam the courtyard of Key West favorite [Blue Heaven](#), but it's the food that makes this charming restaurant so memorable. Take your place in line for tasty breakfasts including made-from-scratch "Richard's Very Good Pancakes" and a variety of Benedicts served with lime hollandaise. Fresh herbs and spices lend high flavor to equally scrumptious lunch and dinner items with a Caribbean influence, such as Jamaican jerk chicken. Vegetarians will savor such dishes as carrot and curry soup and tofu stir-fry.

One of the finest places to eat in Key West, [Cafe Marquesa](#) is worth the splurge. Chef Susan Ferry serves up a creative blend of American, Asian and Caribbean cuisine at this cozy 50-seat restaurant adjoining [The Marquesa Hotel](#). The menu changes seasonally, with such choices as

macadamia-crust ed yellowtail snapper with mango vanilla butter and grilled prosciutto-wrapped Black Angus filet. The Key lime Napoleon is a luscious twist on the ubiquitous pie.

Like most Key West restaurants, the fish is fresh and the servers are friendly at [Conch Republic Seafood Company](#). Large aquariums, nautical décor and local musicians playing cover songs complete the casual setting on the marina. The Floridian and Caribbean cuisine features such favorites as Key West shrimp, grilled dolphin and tuna, conch chowder and fritters and blue-crab cakes. Bold diners may indulge in the raw bar and a rum bar with more than 80 varieties.

For serious Cuban cuisine, make a trip to [El Siboney](#). Off the beaten path in Key West, the family-friendly restaurant is a favorite among local Latin Americans. Expect a wait for such Cuban favorites as ropa vieja, arroz con pollo, picadillo, fried plantains and award-winning Cuban sandwiches. Artwork on the walls pays tribute to the restaurant's namesake, a mythical Caribbean Indian chief.

At Key West's dockside [Half Shell Raw Bar](#), you might be overdressed if you're wearing long pants. Breathe in the salty air and watch boats slowly rock in the marina while you dine at simple wood tables. The down-to-earth menu features fresh oysters and shrimp served many ways, including raw, fried, steamed or in a po-boy sandwich. Oysters Rockefeller is about as fancy as it gets. Drink it all down with an ice-cold beer.

A short boat ride from [The Westin Key West Resort & Marina](#) transports you to [Latitudes Beach Cafe](#), located on an island just off Mallory Square. Tiki torches and a beachfront view of the Gulf of Mexico create a romantic backdrop; the cuisine (and the mood) is Caribbean with Asian and American accents. Menu highlights include lobster Thermidor, seafood bouillabaisse and herb-crust ed rack of lamb.

[Pepe's Cafe](#) is the oldest restaurant in Key West and perhaps its best-kept secret. Locals come here for the comfort food and relaxing ambience. Meatloaf and mashed potatoes are a favorite, and every

Thursday is Thanksgiving. The brick walls hold photos of celebrities who have dined here; a large bougainvillea tree provides shade on the patio.

All signs point to [Pisces Seafood Restaurant](#) for memorable seafood served in an intimate setting with modern flair. Signed Andy Warhol prints adorn the walls, but the true art lies in Chef Andrew Berman's contemporary American cuisine. His menu includes such imaginative creations as Pisces Aphrodite (seafood wrapped in pastry), black grouper bouillabaisse, raspberry roast duckling and his signature dish, lobster tango mango. Toast the chef with a selection from the award-winning wine list.

Attractions

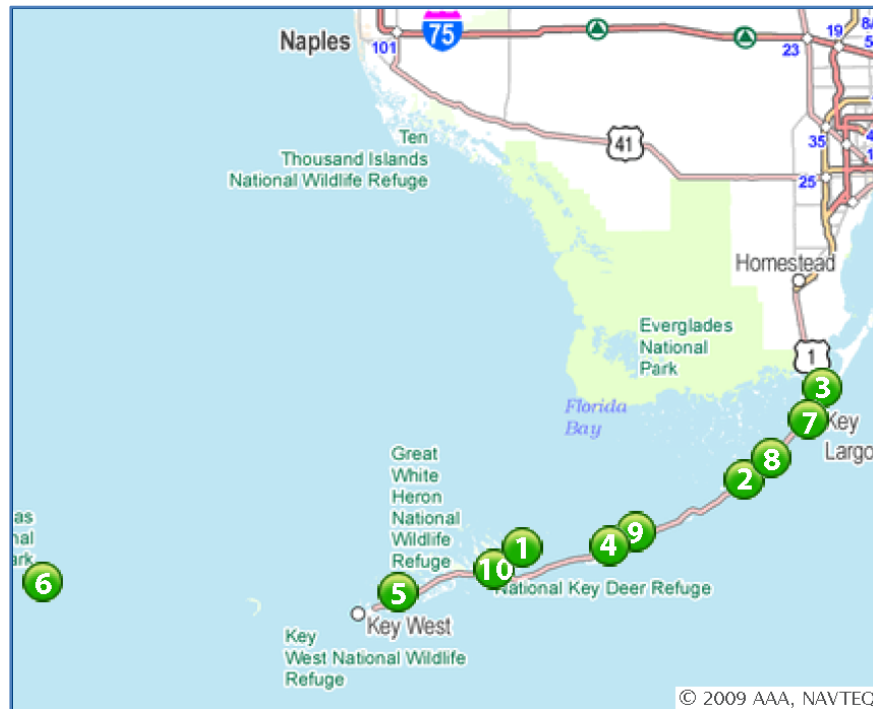
In an area with dozens of attractions, you may have trouble deciding where to spend your time. Here are the highlights for this destination, as chosen by AAA editors. GEMs are "Great Experiences for Members."

There's more to the Florida Keys than Key West. In fact, the Keys consist of some 1,700 islands. The largest and most populous—[Big Pine Key](#), [Islamorada](#), [Key Largo](#), [Key West](#), [Marathon](#) and [Sugarloaf Key](#), along with [Dry Tortugas National Park](#)—are the hot spots for fun, fishing, sightseeing and water sports.

Immerse yourself in the Florida Keys lifestyle at [John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park](#) in Key Largo. Take to the waters via glass-bottom boats, scuba diving or snorkeling to see the park's main attraction: its living coral reefs. Landlubbers will appreciate the park's nature trails, beaches and a 30,000-gallon saltwater aquarium. At [Theater of the Sea](#) in Islamorada, you can swim with dolphins and sea lions or catch them in the act in live shows; parrots perform too. Observe marine creatures on a bottomless boat ride through a 3-acre saltwater lagoon. And don't forget to pet the resident cats.

Interacting with dolphins also is encouraged at the [Dolphin Research Center](#) in Marathon. Depending on your budget (and how wet you want to get), you can watch narrated demonstrations, shake flippers and paint a

Attractions Map




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T-shirt with an Atlantic bottlenose dolphin, or become a trainer or researcher for a day. Wander the nature trails at the 8,700-acre [National Key Deer Refuge](#) in Big Pine Key to peer at the diminutive Key deer, an endangered species ranging in height from 25 to 30 inches. The best time to see these dog-sized creatures is at dawn and dusk.

When you arrive in Key West, the [Conch Tour Train](#), a AAA GEM attraction, should be first on your list. Not only will the ride help you get your bearings, you'll also learn about Key West's history, architecture and famous residents, including an author, a painter and a president.

[Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum](#) was the home of one of Key West's most illustrious citizens. Highlights include Hemingway's writing studio, decorative tiles in the kitchen and Art Deco bathroom, the first swimming pool in Key West and a cat cemetery. Guides regale visitors

Attractions Details - *Get additional information on [AAA.com](#):*

 - Exclusive AAA member discounts available

1. Big Pine Key

2. Islamorada

3. Key Largo

4. Marathon

5. Sugarloaf Key

6. Dry Tortugas National Park

7. John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park

US 1, Milepost 102.5
Key Largo, FL 33037
Phone: (305) 451-1202

8. Theater of the Sea

84721 Overseas Hwy
Islamorada, FL 33036
Phone: (305) 664-2431



9. Dolphin Research Center

58901 Overseas Hwy
(US 1) MM 59
Grassy Key, FL 33050
Phone: (305) 289-1121



10. National Key Deer Refuge

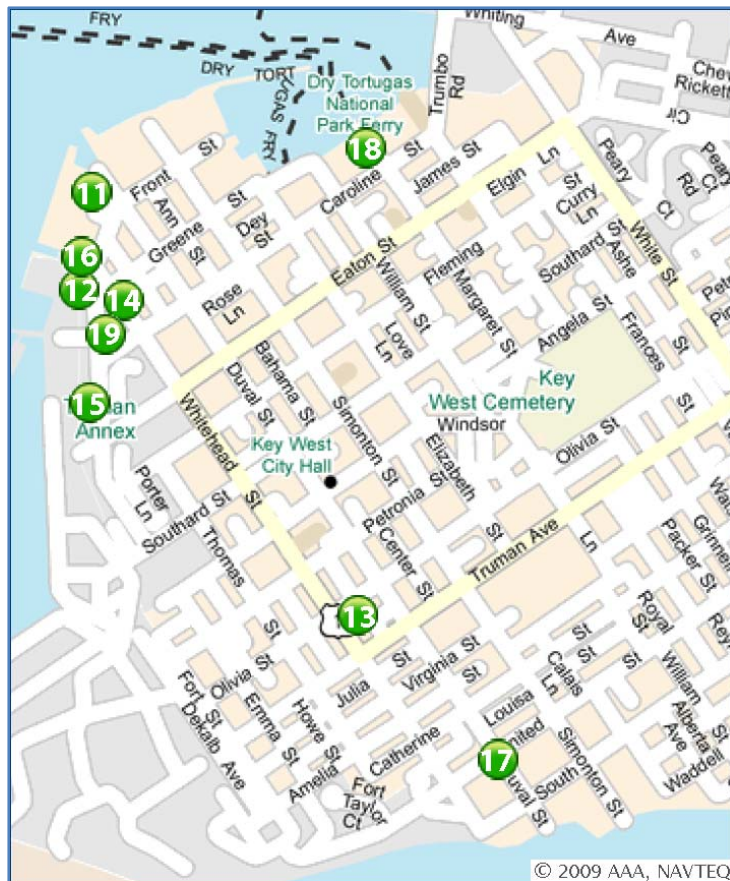
179 Key Deer Blvd
Big Pine Key, FL 33043
Phone: (305) 872-0774

with humorous tales about the author's life. Twenty-eight original engravings painted by artist and ornithologist John James Audubon, who visited here in 1832, decorate the [Audubon House and Tropical Gardens](#). Owned by harbor pilot Capt. John Geiger, the American Classic Revival home features 18th-century antiques and a 1-acre garden with rare tropical plants.

Learn little-known facts about President Harry Truman at the [Little White House Museum](#). Truman stayed here 10 times during his term, enjoying the beach, fishing and playing poker while discussing policies and working at his living room desk.

Delve into other aspects of Key West's diverse past at the [Key West Museum of Art & History at the Custom House](#); collections include folk art, Ernest Hemingway mementoes (including his bloodstained World War I uniform), Fantasy Fest costumes and "In Their Own Words: The History of Key West 1822-1940."

Attractions Map



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To see art created by Mother Nature, meander the path at the [Key West Butterfly & Nature Conservatory](#), where butterflies of amazing hues, tiny gem-colored birds, soothing waterfalls, New Age music and tropical plants and flowers create a miniature Eden. You may never want to leave.

However, you can't go to Key West without taking to the sea—even if it's just to get your feet wet. With the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Gulf of Mexico on the other, there's no shortage of ocean-going attractions,

Attractions Details - Get additional information on [AAA.com](#):



- GEM Attraction offers a *Great Experience for Members*



- Exclusive AAA member discounts available

11. Key West

12. Conch Tour Train
501 Front St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-5161



13. Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum
907 Whitehead St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-1136

14. Audubon House and Tropical Gardens
205 Whitehead St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-2116

15. Little White House Museum
111 Front St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-9911

16. Key West Museum of Art & History at the Custom House
281 Front St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 295-6616



17. Key West Butterfly & Nature Conservatory
1316 Duval St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 296-2988

18. Discovery Undersea Tours
251 Margaret St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (800) 262-0099



19. Mel Fisher Maritime Museum
200 Greene St
Key West, FL 33040
Phone: (305) 294-2633

whether your preference is on top of the water or under it. Enjoy a gentle sea breeze as you cruise the waters aboard a reproduction of a 19th-century schooner or clipper ship with The Liberty Fleet of Tall Ships, you can even hoist the sails and steer. Glass-bottomed boats let you explore living coral reefs without donning a wet suit on [Discovery Undersea Tours](#). Marvel at the undersea world as guides eagerly point out sea cucumbers, tropical saltwater fish and other creatures of the deep.

The waters of Key West also have been host to many shipwrecks. The [Mel Fisher Maritime Museum](#) reveals some of their bounty, such as a treasure trove of artifacts from the 1622 shipwreck of the *Atocha* which

included gold jewelry, silver ingots, coins, gems and pottery. Shackles, cannons and pewter pieces from a wrecked slave ship also are on display.

If you can tear yourself away from Key West, take a ferry or seaplane to [Dry Tortugas National Park](#). You'll have an entire day for bird-watching, swimming, fishing, picnicking, exploring shipwrecks while snorkeling and diving, or touring Fort Jefferson; you also may camp overnight.

Events

In addition to its many cultural and historic landmarks, this destination hosts a number of outstanding festivals and events that may coincide with your visit. No matter what time of year you visit the Florida Keys, you'll have no trouble finding a fun event to attend; here's a sampling. GEMs are "Great Experiences for Members."

At the [Marathon Seafood Festival](#), held in March, feast upon the freshest fish culled from Marathon's unusually deep bays. Lobster, grouper, conch, shrimp, snapper and stone crab await your appetite; boat and plane shows, live music, arts and crafts and a nautical flea market flesh out the festivities.



The Seven Mile Bridge begins in Marathon, and every April 1,500 runners compete in the [Seven Mile Bridge Run](#) to race from one end to the other. Cheer them on while taking in the beauty of the vivid sapphire waters stretching to the horizon.

Blow your own horn in a conch-shell-blowing contest during Key West's [Conch Republic Independence Celebration](#) commemorating 1982's short-lived liberation of the Keys. April's weeklong event includes drag queens sprinting in stilettos in a "drag race," a bed race featuring wildly decorated beds, and a pirate's ball.

It will be hot, hot, hot at May's [Cuban American Heritage Festival](#) in Key West, and we're not just talking about the weather. Shake your groove

thing as you join the Coast-to-Coast Conga Line; salsa dance lessons, Latin music concerts and a cigar dinner add to the fun.

In July, dive or snorkel in the clear waters of Looe Key Reef in Big Pine Key for the [Underwater Music Festival](#). You'll be reelin' and rockin' to tunes played by undersea musicians surrounded by a beautiful coral reef and its colorful denizens, including angelfish, parrotfish and yellowtail.

Head back to Key West for some more frivolity. The [Hemingway Days Festival](#) in late July pays homage to the isle's adopted son, Ernest Hemingway. Activities include a look-alike contest, literary readings, a marlin tournament, a Caribbean street fair and a short-story competition.

Key West earns its nickname of "Key Weird" during [Fantasy Fest](#) in late October. Mingle with some 70,000 others if you dare at this adult-themed saturnalia where Mardi Gras meets Halloween. Wacky costume contests, parades and parties galore are some of the highlights.

Make merry during November's [Pirates in Paradise](#) celebrating Key West's nautical history. Sail on a tall ship for a pirate attack on Fort Zachary Taylor and explore the living history village and market. Treasure hunts, strolling minstrels, a walk-the-plank contest and a pirate tavern enhance the experience.

Unusual things drop at midnight during the [New Year's Eve Key West Celebrations](#), including a conch shell, a drag queen in a giant high heel shoe and a pirate wench from a tall ship. Fireworks blaze over Key West Harbor, welcoming a new year of good times in the Keys.

Insider Info

Little Deers

The Florida Keys are famous for their coral reefs, Key lime pie, dazzling sunsets, and marine wildlife, but one small creature indigenous to the area is relatively unknown outside the islands: the Florida Key deer. A tiny subspecies of the much larger Virginia white-tailed deer, Key deer are the smallest race of deer in North America, measuring only 25-30 inches at the shoulder (about the height of an Irish Setter) and weighing between 45-75 pounds. These Lilliputian creatures vary in color from reddish brown to slate gray and exist nowhere else in the world but Big Pine Key. You'll find these endangered animals at the 8,700-acre National Key Deer Refuge, which draws some 90,000 annual visitors.



Approximately 700-800 Key deer survive at the refuge—a vast improvement over the 1940s and 1950s, when they numbered fewer than 50 and were being hunted to extinction. Today, urban development is the greatest threat as new communities create more traffic, forcing deer to cross busy roads to reach water and grazing areas. Motorists kill an estimated 30-40 deer each year.

Most deer fatalities occur along US 1 and Key Deer Boulevard, and several agencies—the Nature Conservancy, the Florida Department of Transportation, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, county government and local citizens groups—have banded together to address the loss. The posted speed limit is now 35 mph on the stretch of US 1 running through Big Pine Key, greatly lowering the risk of collisions, especially at dawn and dusk when the deer come out to feed.

Visitors are often tempted to treat the darling deer like pets, rather than wild animals, but feeding Key deer is illegal. Small herds sometimes roam near hotels looking for a handout. It's important to remember that any

physical contact with the deer lessens their natural fear of humans and increases their risk of injury, disease, poaching and dog attacks.

While the Key deer's chances for survival have increased, the future is still in jeopardy. Drive carefully, and help protect these beautiful and fascinating creatures—one of the Florida Keys' best-kept secrets.

Content for this destination guide compiled by AAA Travel Editors

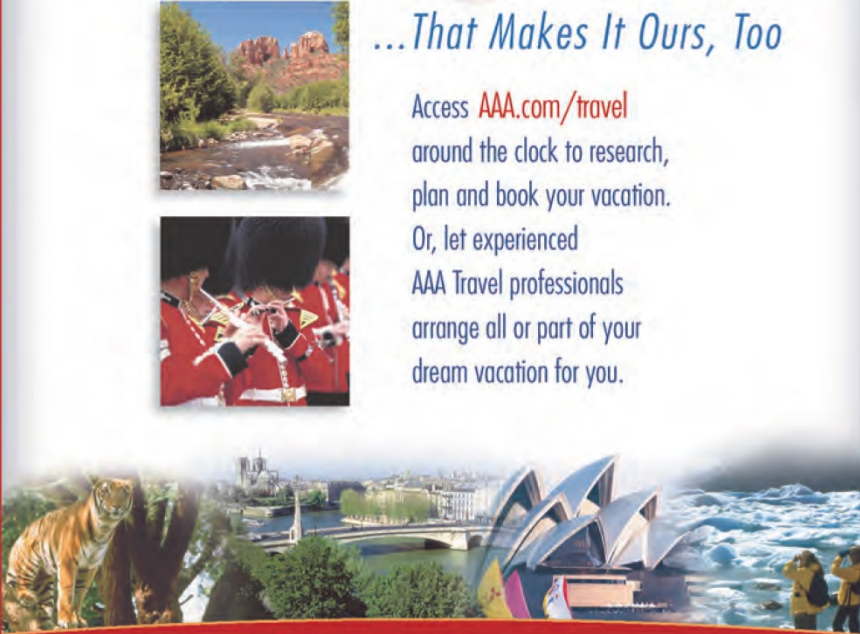
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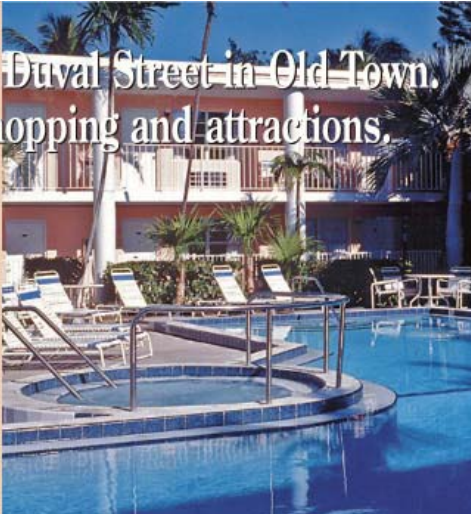
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*Rates are for single/double occupancy and are subject to availability. Rates are per room, per night and are not combinable with other offers or group rates. Tax and resort fees are additional.