

# Keys Traveler

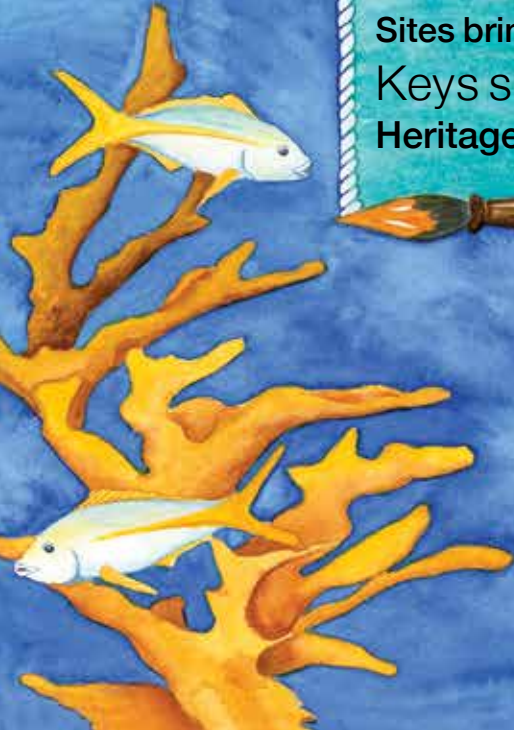
THE MAGAZINE



## FLORIDA KEYS *200 Years of Paradise*



*Soul-centered getaway*  
Sites bring past to life  
Keys shipwrecks  
Heritage of conservation



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

*Michelle Nicole Lowe*

# Happy 200<sup>th</sup> 'Birthday' Florida Keys!

One of the most iconic historic structures in the Florida Keys is the Old Seven Mile Bridge, left, originally built more than 110 years ago as the centerpiece of Henry Flagler's Florida Keys Over-Sea Railroad. A new Seven Mile Bridge, right, was completed in 1982 to carry motor vehicles, and a project to restore the old bridge was finished in 2022 that enables pedestrians and bicyclists to travel to Pigeon Key.

**2023** marks the 200th anniversary of the Florida Legislature's founding of Monroe County, which encompasses the entire Florida Keys, on July 3, 1823 — and also the 200th anniversary of the establishment of Key West's naval station.

This Keys Traveler magazine highlights the rich and colorful two-century heritage that still flavors the island chain today. It also touches on the unquenchable spirit and close-knit sense of community that underlie the subtropical island chain's cherished lifestyle.

The Florida Keys' bicentennial, and that of the naval station, are to be celebrated throughout the year. For event information, visit [fla-keys.com](http://fla-keys.com).

AERIAL IMAGE BY DAVE GROSS

COVER ART BY  
**Michelle Nicole Lowe**



Snorkeling, diving and fishing in the Florida Keys inspire watercolor artist Michelle Nicole Lowe to paint the bold, colorful marine life revealed in her art. Her ocean-loving family comes from the Bahamas via Key West. Michelle and husband Camp now enjoy raising their family in beautiful Islamorada. [michellenicolelowe.com](http://michellenicolelowe.com)

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THE MAGAZINE

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# Present-day sites bring Keys past to life

By Carol Shaughnessy

STEPHEN FRINK



The Christ of the Deep statue symbolizes John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park.

During the Florida Keys' colorful two-century history, the island chain at the southern tip of Florida has been shaped by individualists, visionaries, shipwreck salvagers, presidents and creative spirits. Today visitors can explore scores of sites that recall their presence and showcase the region's rich heritage.

For example, the Keys are the site of the United States' first undersea park, named for newspaperman and conservationist John Pennekamp. Dedicated in 1960, John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park can be found at mile marker (MM) 102.5 in Key Largo. Covering 70 nautical square miles, it's famed for glass-bottom boat and snorkel tours of the Florida Keys' coral reef and dive and snorkel tours to the Christ of the Deep statue.

Nearby at MM 104 is a favorite site for movie buffs: the Caribbean Club Bar, a lively waterfront spot established in 1938 that was one of the locations for the 1948 Humphrey Bogart film classic "Key Largo."

Echoes of the Keys' "wrecking" or shipwreck salvage heyday infuse Indian Key Historic State Park, a small island off MM 78.5 in Islamorada. Currently accessible only by kayak, it was developed by wrecker John Jacob Housman in the early 1800s. Once the Keys' second-largest community, in 1840 its buildings were burned to the ground during a Seminole Indian raid. The remains offer haunting hints of the past.

Dolphins have long been part of the Keys' natural world. Dolphin Research Center, at MM 59 on Grassy Key, dates from the 1940s when fisherman Milton Santini brought dolphins to his property. His favorite, named Mitzi, later starred (with other dolphins) in the early 1960s film "Flipper."

In 1984 Jayne Shannon Rodriguez and Armando "Mandy" Rodriguez took on the facility and founded the nonprofit Dolphin Research Center. Providing forever homes for rehabilitated animals, it's renowned for pioneering dolphin research and educational



programs that inspire marine mammal conservation. DRC attracts visitors from around the world to see and learn about its family of dolphins and sea lions.

In Marathon, Crane Point Hammock Museum & Nature Trail is among the Keys' most important archaeological sites. The 63.5-acre tract at MM 50.5 contains evidence of prehistoric Indian artifacts and was the site of an early Bahamian village. Its Adderley House, a classic Bahamian-style home built in 1904, is the oldest Keys house outside Key West. The must-explore spot also features a museum, lagoon, plant nursery and several nature trails.

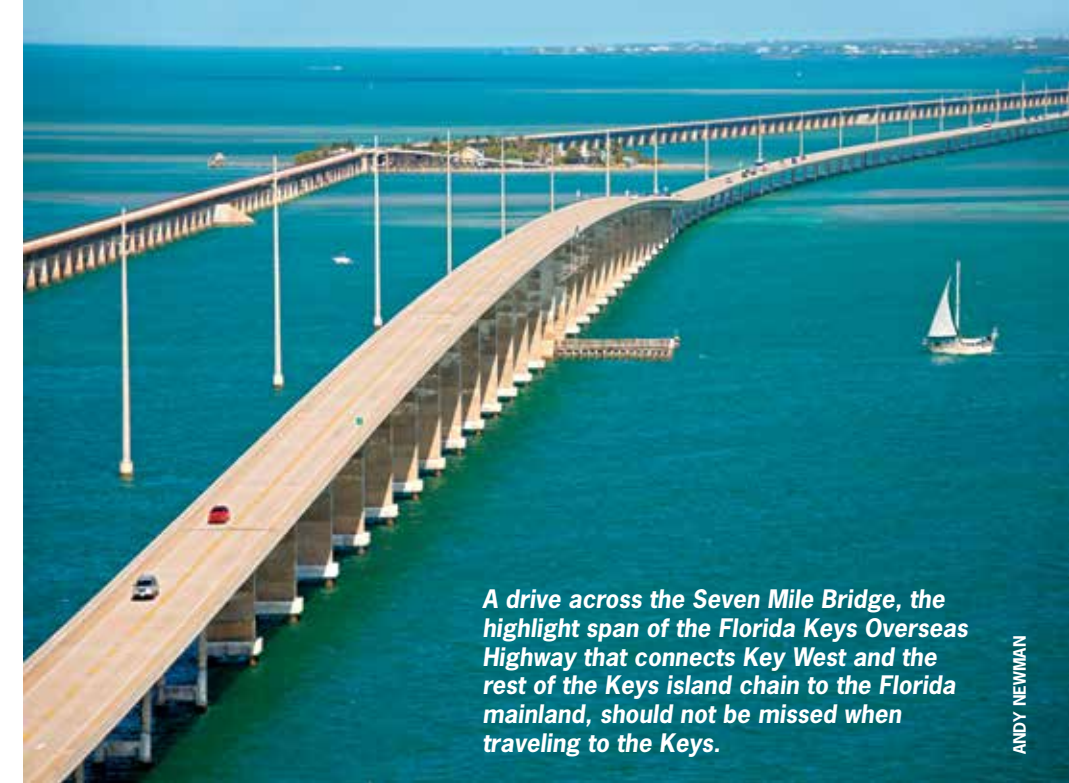
It's a "bucket list" experience to drive across the Seven Mile Bridge, one of the world's longest segmental bridges and the centerpiece of the iconic Florida Keys Overseas Highway. The majestic span, stretching above the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, connects Marathon to the Lower Keys.

Paralleling it is the Old Seven Mile Bridge, part of the Florida Keys Over-Sea Railroad that was conceived by visionary Henry Flagler and completed in 1912. Called the eighth wonder of the world, the railroad connected the Keys with each other and mainland Florida for the first time.

Beneath the old bridge at MM 44.8 lies the tiny island of Pigeon Key, a former work camp for laborers constructing the bridge. Now featuring restored buildings and a museum, Pigeon Key offers visitors a journey back in time.



The Truman Little White House Museum features the original piano and poker table used by the former commander in chief.



A drive across the Seven Mile Bridge, the highlight span of the Florida Keys Overseas Highway that connects Key West and the rest of the Keys island chain to the Florida mainland, should not be missed when traveling to the Keys.

ANDY NEWMAN

It's accessible by tram or by walking or bicycling a refurbished section of the Old Seven Mile Bridge.

On Big Pine Key is the historic 2-acre fruit farm Grimal Grove, established by 1950s-era inventor and recluse Adolf Grimal, who amassed hundreds of rare fruit trees and created raised garden beds. In 2013 Patrick Garvey and Growing Hope Initiative restored the property as a tropical fruit park — now billed as the continental United States' first and only breadfruit grove. The property is located off MM 30.5 at 258 Cunningham Lane. Visitors can tour by appointment or on Saturday mornings, sampling sweet and

sour exotic fruits (including breadfruit) and learning Grimal's story.

History fans in Key West can tour both the Harry S. Truman Little White House Museum, Florida's only presidential museum, and the Ernest Hemingway Home & Museum where the legendary author lived and wrote for most of the 1930s.

Truman spent approximately six months of his 1945-53 presidency in Key West, running the country from the roomy "Little White House" at 111 Front St. Museum visitors will discover items including the original piano and poker table used by the former commander in chief, as well as a presidential limousine that guests can ride in.

Hemingway's Spanish Colonial home provides a glimpse into American literary history. In the second-story studio on the 907 Whitehead St. property, he wrote some of his most notable works including "To Have and Have Not," a novel set in Depression-era Key West. Dozens of cats roam the grounds, some six-toed and said to be descended from a feline given to Hemingway.

Just across the road at 938 Whitehead St. is the Key West Lighthouse & Keeper's Quarters. Completed in 1848, the lighthouse guided mariners through local waters until it was decommissioned in 1969. An 88-step spiral staircase leads to an observation platform atop the light, offering a panoramic view. Historic artifacts, photos and journals tell the stories of courageous male and female lighthouse keepers.

# Keys have a heritage of conservation

TIM GROLLMUND



*Divers with the Key Largo-based Coral Restoration Foundation harvest coral clippings in an underwater nursery.*

shipwrecks and other archaeological wonders, extensive seagrass beds, mangrove-fringed islands and 6,000-plus species of marine life.

Divers and snorkelers from all over the world are drawn to the Keys to view the reef ecosystem safeguarded by the sanctuary.

In recent years — motivated by challenges faced by coral reefs around the globe — several organizations have spearheaded coral restoration efforts in the Keys. Pioneering scientists are developing ever-improving methods to propagate and maintain dozens of important coral species, while preserving genetic diversity, and are steadily restoring endangered corals by replanting new growths from Keys coral nurseries to the reef.

From the creation of the first wildlife refuge to today's coral restoration, protecting the environment remains a guiding principle in the Keys ... and a promise to future generations.

— Carol Shaughnessy



ANDY NEWMAN

*A blue heron takes flight in the Florida Keys.*

For more than 110 years, conservation efforts have protected the Florida Keys' natural resources, demonstrating a commitment to environmental stewardship and resolve to preserve native plants, animals, marine life and the continental United States' only barrier coral reef.

Efforts date from 1908, when the Key West National Wildlife Refuge was designated to create a safe haven and breeding ground for native birds and other wildlife.

Lying west of Key West and accessible only by boat, the refuge covers thousands of acres of shallow saltwater and mangrove islands. It provides nesting, roosting and foraging habitat for hundreds of species of birds from wading birds to raptors, and a nesting ground for endangered sea turtles.

The area is open to nature enthusiasts for activities such as wildlife viewing, photography, responsible recreational

boating, fishing, diving and snorkeling.

In 1938, the Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge was established to provide safe nesting and breeding areas for the large North American wading bird and other avian species. Stretching from north of Marathon to just north of Key West, it features almost 200,000 acres of open water and islands in the Gulf of Mexico — an area often called the backcountry. Primary access is by kayak, canoe or shallow-draft motorboat.

The National Key Deer Refuge was created in 1957 in the Lower Keys to protect the endangered Key deer and other wildlife.

About the size of a large dog, the deer are found nowhere else in the world and were almost extinct in the 1950s. Since then, in a heartwarming environmental success story, the population has rebounded dramatically.

The refuge encompasses some 9,200 acres and includes pine rockland forests,

tropical hardwood hammocks, freshwater wetlands, salt marsh wetlands and mangrove forests. Nature trails on Big Pine Key are particularly appealing, but it's important to remember that feeding Key deer is prohibited.

The Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1980 in upper Key Largo. It includes habitat and nesting sites favored by the American crocodile and hardwood hammock forest areas that shelter the Key Largo wood rat and other species. The remote preserve is generally closed to the public.

In 1990, the U.S. government established the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary to protect Keys waters including the coral reef that parallels the island chain.

The sanctuary now encompasses 3,800 square nautical miles of waters surrounding the entire Florida Keys. Within its boundaries lie nationally significant marine resources, historic



*Key deer socialize on Big Pine Key. Feeding the diminutive deer is strictly prohibited.*

ROB O'NEAL

## *Treat yourself to a soul-centered sojourn in the Florida Keys*

**F**ollowing the intense stress and challenges of recent years, when vacationing you deserve far more than a chance to soak up some sun, do a little sightseeing, sample local cuisine and depart — essentially unchanged — after a few days.

And “far more” is what you'll find in the Florida Keys.

A Keys vacation is an opportunity for personal renewal and meaningful activities that nurture body, mind and spirit. A time to discover rejuvenating, memorable and even transformational pursuits. A respite for replenishing your stress-depleted soul while connecting to a genuine culture, community and lifestyle.

In the subtropical Florida Keys, from the northernmost island of Key Largo to the southernmost shores of Key West, opportunities abound to experience “unplugged” relaxation, in-the-moment enjoyment and activities that support personal wellness.

The vibrant natural world, clear tranquil waters and vast open spaces —

paired with an uncontrived appeal and easygoing vibe — make the Keys a perfect place to breathe deeply, reconnect with self-care practices and embrace new adventures.

For example, banish stress while gliding through the backcountry shallows in a kayak, watching graceful seabirds dip and dance against a pure blue sky. Try paddleboard yoga, using the board as a mat for a session that realigns body and mind in an open-air saltwater “studio.”

Or dive into the blue Atlantic, exploring the Keys' coral reef ecosystem while slowing your breathing and opening your eyes to undersea beauty.

Discover adventures that feed the spirit — inspirational guided art or photography experiences, viewing dolphins in the wild, picnicking on a secluded outisland surrounded by sea and sky, communing with nature in a Keys wildlife refuge or journeying to the remote and timeless realm of Dry Tortugas National Park.

Even wading in the shallows off one of the Keys' many beaches can be a meditative occasion, as you still your mind by focusing on sun-warmed sand and the lull of lapping waves.

In addition to mindful and enriching activities, visitors to the island chain will find plenty of opportunities for beauty, health and wellness therapies that can enhance a self-care journey. Numerous rejuvenating day spas feature massages, facials, body and beauty treatments to restore, energize and soothe.

In fact, the Keys are the perfect place to rediscover passions, reset priorities and reawaken a sense of wonder. So treat yourself to the vacation you richly deserve ... a soul-centered sojourn in the Florida Keys.

*A couple explores a sandbar off the Lower Keys.*

# Anglers' lore and lures



Legendary NFL and collegiate football coach Jimmy Johnson, a Florida Keys resident, displays a nice mahi-mahi caught on his boat off Islamorada.

By Doug Kelly

ANDY NEWMAN (2)

The greatest fishing lure ever made wasn't a fancy plug. Instead, Mother Nature made a string of islands known collectively as the Florida Keys that have lured millions of anglers to enjoy a bounty of tenacious game fish. It's an allure that never stops giving.

This fascination didn't develop overnight. Until the early 1900s few visitors could explore the fortuitous convergence of fertile ecosystems such as flats, reefs and deep waters of the Gulf Stream. That began to change in 1912 with Henry Flagler paving the way — or, more accurately, railing the way — with his railroad connecting Florida's mainland to the subtropical islands stretching from Key Largo to Key West.

Twenty-six years later, Flagler's railroad was transformed into the Florida Keys Overseas Highway. That made it a cinch for visitors to jump in their jalopies and discover rod-bending battles with bonefish, tarpon, grouper, snapper, sailfish, tuna and scores of other gamesters. Tackle stores and marinas blossomed, as did fishing clubs and a series of year-round tournaments. A group of expert anglers chucked the urban lifestyle to become pioneer fishing guides in the tranquil Keys.

Ernest Hemingway made Key West his home in the 1930s and Zane Grey started a fishing camp on Long Key. When their fingers weren't pecking away on a typewriter, they instead gripped bulky big-game fishing rods or nimble spinning rods. Newspaper pictures of the writers battling triple-digit blue marlin or double-digit bonefish caught the eye of anglers worldwide.

Decades later television would spur growth with new crops of fishing guides like Jimmie Albright and Stu Apte.

The late President George H.W. Bush came to the Keys often; before, during and after his presidency to fish for bonefish, permit and tarpon in Islamorada. He even had an angling contest named for him, the George Bush/Cheeca Lodge Bonefish Tournament that was staged for almost 10 years.

Celebrities got into the act too.

"My life as an Olympic skier was racing down the world's biggest mountains at 80 miles per hour," said tarpon angling expert Andy Mill. "I never thought that rush would ever be matched until I hooked my first tarpon in the Florida Keys."

"They can be massive, exploding out of the water and taking your breath away as they cartwheel through the air."

Football coaching legend and Islamorada resident Jimmy Johnson put it this way: "Sometimes I take my boat out alone before sunrise and fish the blue Gulf Stream waters for dolphin, sailfish and wahoo and get back to my dock in Islamorada by lunch. The solitude and satisfaction I get from that is so invigorating that it energizes me for the rest of the day."

Visit the Florida Keys for world-class fishing and make your own piece of history.

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

**Late President George H.W. Bush, right, with a permit caught and released in 1995 off Islamorada. Bush's grandson, Jeb Jr., also released a permit.**



# Early wreckers, treasure hunters and modern divers seek shipwrecks

Ever since the Florida Keys were settled two centuries ago, the island chain has been known for its residents' adventurous seafaring spirit.

Today, that spirit remains among the Keys' most appealing attributes. It's alive in museums and attractions, tales of sunken treasure and dive trips to famed shipwreck sites.

Many early settlers in Key West and Islamorada were wreckers — salvaging goods from ships that sank along the continental United States' only living coral barrier reef that parallels the Keys. Their strict code mandated rescuing crews and passengers first, but they also profited from salvaged cargo. In the mid-1800s, wrecking made Key West the wealthiest city per capita in the U.S.

Keys visitors can relive that era at the Key West Shipwreck Treasure Museum, featuring re-enactors and salvaged artifacts, or at Islamorada's Indian Key Historic State Park, a small island once a busy port established by wrecker Jacob Housman in the 1800s.

A century earlier, fleets of Spanish



CAROL TEDESCO

A model depicting the sinking of the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha* in 1622 is at Key West's Mel Fisher Maritime Museum. Other items on display include gold chains, cannons, navigational instruments, coins and silver bars.

galleons regularly sailed past the Keys carrying goods and treasures from the New World back to Spain. Many sank in the area, including 13 ships from Spain's 1733 fleet.

Among the galleons was *La Capitana*, the flagship of the 1733 fleet, which sank off the Upper Keys. In the late 1930s, pioneering diver Art McKee began salvaging the vessel's remains — recovering cannons, silver and gold coins, weapons, navigational instruments and silver bars.

His exploits are chronicled in an exhibit at the Florida Keys History of Diving Museum in Islamorada.

The Keys' most famous wreck is immortalized at Key West's Mel Fisher Maritime Museum. The museum showcases artifacts and treasures from the Spanish galleon *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, lost in a 1622 hurricane and discovered off Key West in 1985 by shipwreck salvager Mel Fisher.

Contemporary adventurers can indulge

their own seafaring spirit by diving the Keys' Shipwreck Heritage Trail. Featuring nine wreck sites stretching from Key Largo to Key West, the trail was established by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary to spotlight Keys maritime history.

Its wrecks range from the 18th-century San Pedro to modern cargo and military ships and artificial reefs. Among them is the *Thunderbolt*, intentionally sunk in 1986 some 4 miles south of Marathon.

Three other significant vessels also beckon Keys divers. The 510-foot Spiegel Grove, the third-largest ship ever intentionally sunk to create a new reef, is positioned about 6 miles off Key Largo in 130 feet of water. It has attracted divers, fish and other marine life since its 2002 sinking.

The 210-foot freighter *Adolphus Busch Senior* lies in Lower Keys waters approximately 5 miles southwest of Big Pine Key. Divers have been exploring the artificial reef since it was sunk in 1998.

The second-largest vessel ever to be sunk as an artificial reef is the 523-foot *General Hoyt S. Vandenberg*, scuttled in 2009 about 7 miles off Key West. Its hull rests on sand at depths averaging 145 feet, but its superstructure rises to about 45 feet below the surface.

Only a few ships that sank in Florida Keys waters carried gold or other rich cargoes. But from Spanish galleons to modern-day artificial reefs, they all offer treasured adventures for divers.

ANDY NEWMAN



The 523-foot *Vandenberg*, a former missile-tracking Air Force ship, begins to sink May 27, 2009, 7 miles south of Key West, to become an artificial reef.

# Mario's magic



## The art of Mario Sanchez

For decades the Florida Keys have been called “islands of the arts,” home to scores of visual artists whose work enhances local galleries. That creative vibe is one of the island chain’s most enticing attributes.

Perhaps the best-known artist in Keys history is the late Mario Sanchez. During a career that spanned well over 70 years, Sanchez depicted the Key West of his youth with intricate detail and affectionate humor.

Internationally acclaimed as a leading Cuban American folk artist, he died in 2005 at age 96.

Mario Sanchez’ subjects were street vendors and shopkeepers, dancers and musicians, gossiping women and chicken thieves, mischievous children, native fish and Cuban cigarmakers at work. All were portrayed in bas-relief carvings called intaglios and painted with brilliant primary colors.

His pieces feature creative renderings of real people who shaped Key West from World War I through the Depression. His work also spotlights island landmarks including Ernest Hemingway’s former home, the Key West Lighthouse and the San Carlos Institute.

But Key West wasn’t Sanchez’ only inspiration. One of his famous images depicts a Florida Keys Over-Sea Railroad train steaming across a bridge in the Keys, as trains did from 1912 to 1935. Blue water, fishing boats and a small populated island lie below the bridge.

When Sanchez worked, he first sketched images on brown paper grocery bags. He then transferred them to cedar wood and created his intaglios, incorporating subtle humor and reflections of Key West’s intrinsic diversity.

[galleryongreene.com/mario-sanchez-1](http://galleryongreene.com/mario-sanchez-1) • [kwaahs.org/collections](http://kwaahs.org/collections)

With simple brushes, chisels and unparalleled creativity, he preserved and memorialized the rich history of his island home.

In late 2017, Sanchez was posthumously inducted by Washington, D.C.’s prestigious Smithsonian American Art Museum — the first Key West artist to earn the honor — with a piece placed in the museum’s permanent collection.

Representing both Sanchez’s personal heritage and Key West’s early cigar industry, the painting depicts the artist’s father reading to cigarmakers at the Gato Cigar Factory.

In the 1890s, the factory employed 500 Bahamian, American, Cuban, Chinese, Jewish and Italian men and women who selected tobacco, cut and rolled or fabricated cigars. As they did, they listened to readings by a factory *lector* to break the work’s monotony.

During the industry’s heyday Key West’s factories produced 100 million hand-rolled cigars each year; the city was dubbed “the cigar manufacturing capital of the world.”

Today many of Sanchez’ pieces can be found at Key West’s Gallery on Greene, whose director Nance Frank is a renowned expert on his work, while others are housed at the island’s Custom House Museum. Viewing them provides art lovers a window into Key West’s multifaceted and multicultural past ... thanks to the magic of Mario Sanchez.



Mario Sanchez



By Greg Tromba

## Sea-to-sea rainbow flag symbolized Key West’s pride

During Key West Pride in June 2003, a 1.25-mile-long rainbow flag was unfurled along the length of the island’s Duval Street, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean, in a sea-to-sea demonstration of diversity and pride.

Now known around the world, the massive flag was sewn in Key West in 2003 by rainbow flag creator Gilbert Baker to mark another milestone: the 25th anniversary of his original banner’s debut.

Baker spent three months on the island, working with dedicated helpers to sew approximately 17,600 linear yards of fabric — over 3 tons — into the world’s longest rainbow flag.

Aside from honoring the original flag’s birth, the Key West banner re-created Baker’s original eight-color design. Pink and turquoise were sewn into the banner alongside the now-traditional red, orange, yellow, green, indigo and violet.

The gigantic flag was unfurled along Duval by several thousand volunteers, with its ends dipped simultaneously into the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. The sea-to-sea demonstration supported Key West’s longstanding reputation as a leader among LGBTQ+ destinations.

The historic event was conceived by the late Key West

businessman Gregg McGrady. It came to fruition when Key West Pride 2003 co-chairs Heather Carruthers and Tom Wheaton met Baker by chance in San Francisco.

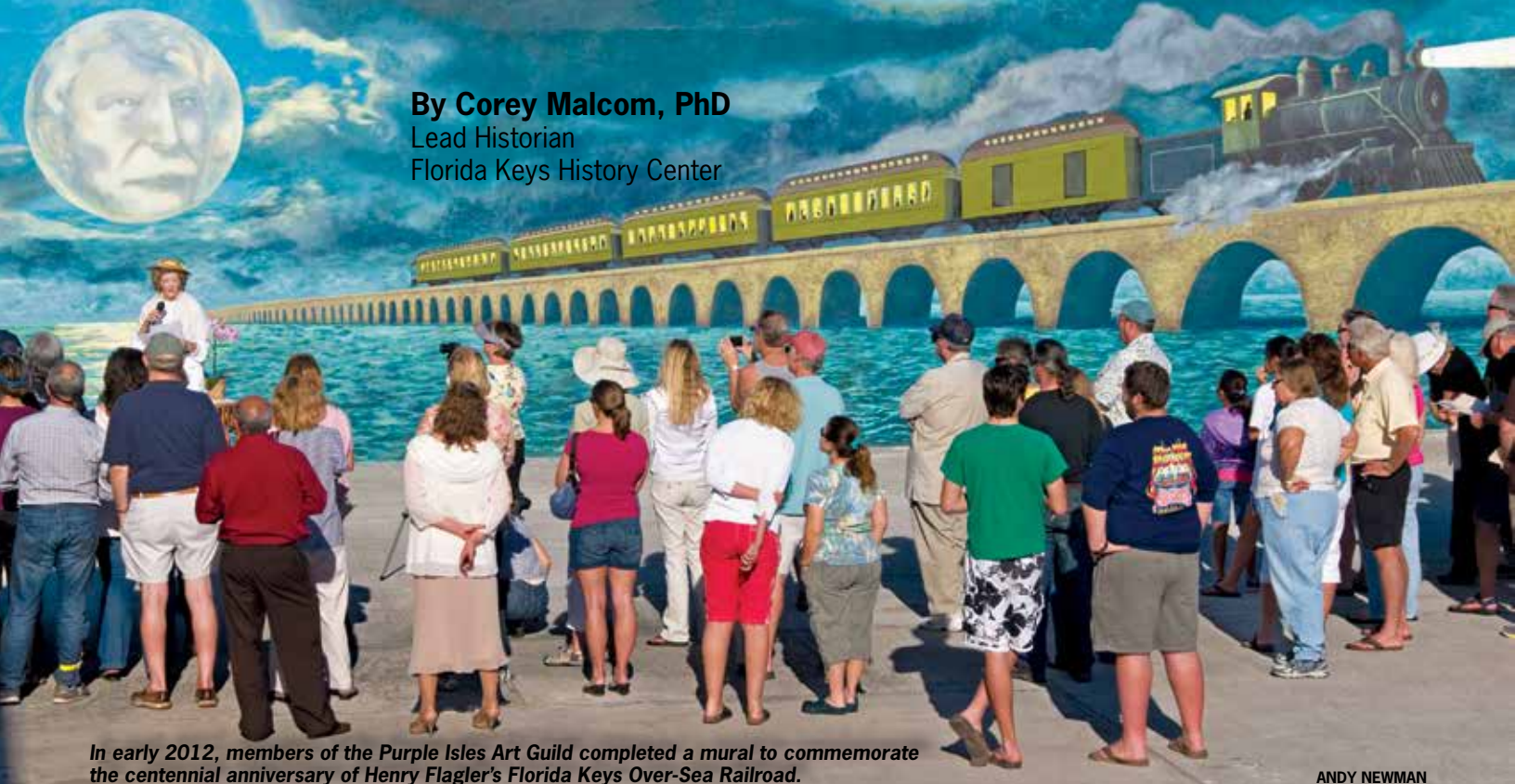
“Key West is so proud that we were able to play an instrumental role in 2003 with Gilbert Baker to celebrate the rainbow flag’s 25th anniversary with our sea-to-sea flag,” said Kevin Theriault, executive director of the Key West Business Guild, one of the United States’ oldest gay business associations.

Baker, who died in 2017, created the original flag in 1978 as a symbol of gay and lesbian pride in response to anti-gay activities. He watched it grow from a symbol of gay pride into a symbol of pride for all people.

Since the Key West flag’s debut, sections of the iconic banner have been displayed at prestigious events including the 2010 Winter Olympics and New York’s World Pride Parade. They have also been shown in Scandinavia, Europe and cities across the U.S.

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

Above: “Over the Beautiful Florida Keys” – By Mario Sanchez



**By Corey Malcom, PhD**  
Lead Historian  
Florida Keys History Center

In early 2012, members of the Purple Isles Art Guild completed a mural to commemorate the centennial anniversary of Henry Flagler's Florida Keys Over-Sea Railroad.

ANDY NEWMAN

# A brief history of the Florida Keys

Native people first inhabited the Florida Keys some 4,000 years ago.

They lived in villages up and down the island chain and survived largely by living off the bounties of the sea – fish, turtles and conch were staples of their diet.

But their lifestyle changed abruptly with the arrival of the first Spanish explorers.

In 1513, Juan Ponce de Leon sailed the Florida Coast and encountered the Keys, which he called the "Martyrs" because he thought they resembled floating heads of suffering men. Ponce de Leon also discovered the swift Gulf Stream current between the Keys and Cuba. This "river in the sea" flowed toward Europe and offered a boost in speed for ships, a discovery that forever changed transatlantic shipping.

Following this course, Spanish galleons loaded with New World riches traveled past the Keys on their way home. But

lies the Florida Reef, and hurricanes sometimes drove vessels into its teeth. In 1622 and 1733, Spanish treasure fleets lost many ships, souls and riches to the infamous ship trap.

In 1821, after centuries under Spanish control, Florida was ceded to the United States. In 1822, Lt. Matthew Perry planted the U.S. flag on Key West, establishing it as a U.S. territory and opening the island for commerce.

A fledgling community began to grow and Monroe County, the area government of the Keys that also includes a portion of the Florida Everglades, was incorporated July 3, 1823.

Though geographically isolated, Key West was not immune to outside strife. When the Civil War

erupted, the U.S. Army was already present on the island and kept it under Union control. During the four-year conflict, Key West was a base for the naval blockade of the Confederacy. Also in the 1860s, Cubans began to chafe at Spanish rule, an instability that led leading cigar manufacturers to move their businesses to Key West. Key West was a revolutionary



ROB O'NEAL

After Jimmy Buffett released his famed hit "Margaritaville" in 1977, it bolstered Key West's popularity as a vacationers' mecca. In 2011, Buffett played on Duval Street, before fans known as "Parrot Heads."

supporter, and pro-independence leader Jose Marti visited regularly, seeking financial, political and tactical support.

Cuba was freed from Spanish rule in 1898, after the U.S. battleship Maine sailed from Key West to Havana, where it mysteriously blew up; an event that drew the U.S. into the Spanish-American war.

At the dawn of the 20th century, Key West was a growing commercial port, and the visionary tycoon Henry Flagler saw an opportunity to capitalize on that by building the Florida Keys Over-Sea Railroad from the mainland to Key West Harbor so goods could then be carried northward by rail. "Flagler's Folly" took 10 years to build, but in 1912, the first train arrived in Key West. The railroad was revolutionary in that, for the first time, the islands were accessible by means other than boats. And with trains traveling along the entire island chain, Key Largo, Islamorada, Marathon and Big Pine Key began to thrive and grow.

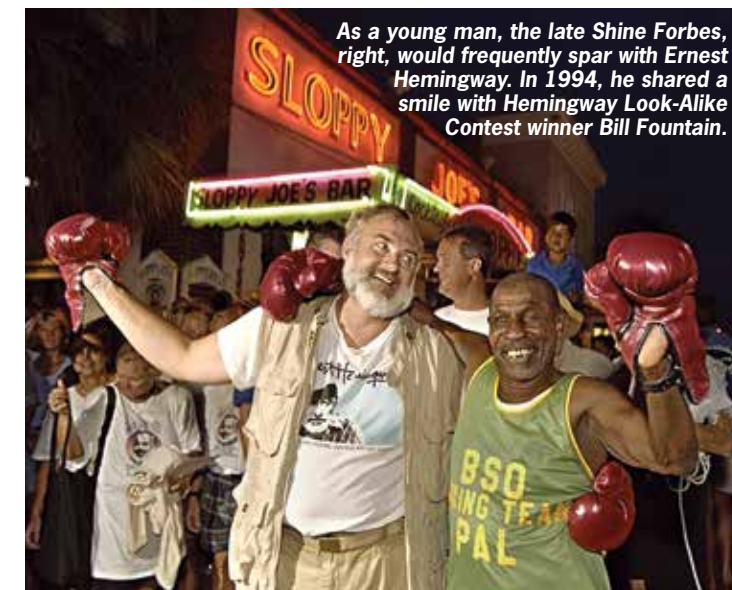
After a ferocious hurricane devastated the Upper Keys in 1935, washing away train tracks and bridge approaches, the railroad, already in financial straits, was abandoned. This was also during the Great Depression, when Keys communities were going broke and losing residents.

The federal government instituted a rescue plan designed to make Key West a tourist destination, rich in arts and culture. With renowned author Ernest Hemingway already living on the island, setting a tone, the plan was largely successful. The Florida Keys Overseas Highway, built on the former railroad bed,

opened in 1938, allowing new visitors easier access to the Keys.

When World War II broke out, the U.S. Navy increased its presence at Key West, and the island became a "Navy town." In the Cold War era, the idyllic but strategically vital base hosted Presidents Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy. Key West's military role in keeping communism and Soviet influence in check was highlighted in the tense weeks of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. On another front at much the same time, massive shrimp beds were discovered in the waters of the far western Keys. This led to a financial windfall for fishermen in the form of "pink gold." Key West was booming.

In the mid-1970s, because of changing technologies, the Naval Station closed, stifling the local economy. Shrimp catches declined, too. Things looked grim, but the Keys once again turned toward tourism to bolster the economy. A gay community also arrived in Key West and brought a fresh spirit; arts were revitalized, and grand but decaying "Conch houses" were brought back to life.



As a young man, the late Shine Forbes, right, would frequently spar with Ernest Hemingway. In 1994, he shared a smile with Hemingway Look-Alike Contest winner Bill Fountain.

Residents and visitors celebrate the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Conch Republic at Mallory Square in Key West.



ANDY NEWMAN (2)

residents and visitors alike.

Ostensibly, agents were searching for drugs and illegal immigrants. Keys locals were incensed and on April 23, 1982, staged a "secession" ceremony in Key West to protest, proclaiming the region the independent Conch Republic.

The roadblock eventually faded away and never returned, but the Conch Republic continues and is celebrated each April with an anniversary party.

On a more serious note, a significant commitment to protecting marine resources was initiated in 1990 with the beginning of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Wider roads and bridges and more hotels were built, opening the door even wider to the place famed singer Jimmy Buffett had dubbed "Margaritaville."

In April 1982, without warning, the U.S. Border Patrol established a roadblock at the top of the Florida Keys Overseas Highway, causing major delays for

Today, the Florida Keys bear a mix of earlier influences: Spanish and Bahamian surnames are still common, as is a love for Cuban coffee and cigars; Navy pilots and Army Rangers train in the skies and waters; a hard-working "live and let live" tropical lifestyle is punctuated with parties and festivals; and, of course, everyone in the Keys is somehow connected to the ocean.

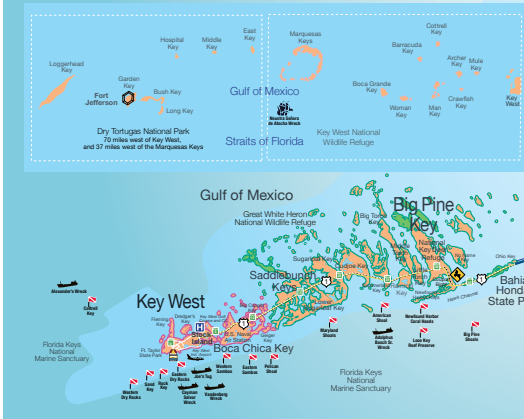
In every way, Florida's southernmost islands are unlike anywhere else ... something that has been true for centuries.

[keyslibraries.org/fkhc](http://keyslibraries.org/fkhc)





# Traveling Tips to the Florida Keys



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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](http://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, -62 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](http://fla-keys.com/how-to-get-here)

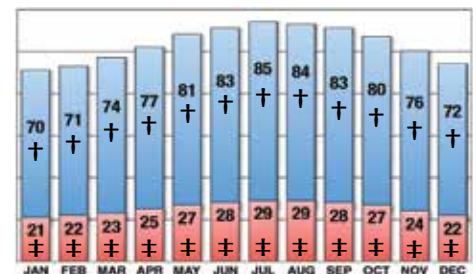
## Weather/Climat

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



Keys Info