

QUICK TRIPS: KEY WEST



GOING TO KEY WEST

Getting There:

By Car: From Miami about 3 ½ hours.

From Ft. Lauderdale it's about 4 hours on one of the most picturesque routes in the US. The Florida Overseas Highway is a designated *National Scenic Byway* that spans 42 bridges over the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

By Air: American & United Airlines fly direct from Miami to Key West (50 min) United & Silver Airways fly direct from Ft Lauderdale (1 hour, 4 min). Roundtrip airfares start at \$290.

Information: www.fla-keys.com

WHERE TO STAY

Southernmost on the Beach: 508 South Street, Tel: 1 888-449-0633, One of 3 Southernmost properties in Key West, this one is located right on the beach with a restaurant, free parking and modern rooms making it an excellent option for families. Rates start at \$279 www.southernmostresorts.com.

The Sunset Key Guest Cottages Resort: 245 Front Street/Sunset Key, T:(305) 292-5300, This luxury Westin Resort is located on a private island, accessible only by boat. With individual cottages, sandy beaches, a pool, a spa and an excellent lounge and restaurant. Rates start at \$631 www.westinsunsetkeycottages.com.

The Marquesa Hotel: 600 Flemming St. T: (305)292-1919. An award winning small hotel located in a in the historic Old Town district with several period buildings surrounding a courtyard with 2 pools and a cafe restaurant. This romantic hotel is an excellent option for couples. Rates start at \$170. www.marquesa.com.

KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

BY KM CHURCHILL

It's 5:30 when our boat pulls out into the Gulf of Mexico. It's a small working ferry that transports supplies between the mainland and Sunset Key. So the seats are hard and the engine loud, but the ride is short – 7 minutes from dock to dock.

The Sunset Key Guest Cottages Resort is rated one of the "Top Family Hotels in the US" by *Travel & Leisure Magazine* and as the boat approaches we can see why. Nestled among the swaying palms and sandy beaches is a village of low white cottages with traditional tin roofs and wrap around porches overlooking the sea. But we have come to explore the culinary delights of its restaurant, **Latitudes**.

Flaming gas lanterns hang from the ceilings and tiki torches light the restaurant's perimeter on the beach. There's a relaxed elegance that feels sophisticated but not intimidating. In the lounge we settle into arm chairs, peruse the menu and marvel at the uninterrupted vista of blue sea and sky.

Although the bourbon brown sugar smoked chicken catches my eye, we opt for a simple starter of fresh shucked oysters followed by locally sourced coconut crusted grouper with a mango ginger sauce and butter poached Florida lobster tail with a champagne beurre blanc.

Out in the Harbor picturesque sailboats crisscrossing the bay become silhouettes when the famous Key West sunset begins; turning the cloud dusted sky magnificent shades of red before dropping into the sea.



WHERE TO EAT

Driving Down – stop for lunch or dinner on Islamorada Key (about ½ way).

The Beach Café at Morada Bay: 81600 Overseas Hwy, Islamorada, Mile Marker 81.6. Phone: (305) 664-0604. A picturesque outdoor bistro set among cooked palms on a soft white sand beach overlooking a bay dotted with islands. With salsa music and mismatched jewel colored chairs, this beautiful, casual restaurant serves a delicious lunch and dinner with a full bar. www.moradabay.com Children's Menu. Tapas & Sandwiches \$9 - \$17. Entrees \$24 - \$33

Bagatelle: 115 Duval St Phone: (305) 296-6609 Offering an all day brunch (farm fresh eggs, full bar and strong coffee) and dinner, served on the gracious verandah of a traditional Key West Victorian house. www.bagatellekeywest.com . Brunch/Lunch Entrees \$8 - \$15. Dinner Entrees \$26 - \$64

Latitudes Restaurant: 245 Front St. Phone: 305-292-5300. Alfresco fine dining served on the beach, in the verandah Lounge, or in the Hemingway Room. Also serving less expensive breakfast, lunch and lounge menus. www.westinsunsetkeycottages.com Lunch Entrees \$12 - \$21. Dinner Entrees \$26 - \$42. Lounge Small Plate Menu \$6 - \$12

Sunset Pier at Zero Duval Street: Ocean Key Resort & Spa, 0 Duval St Phone: 305-296-7701. Open 7 days a week, this wide wooden pier that stretches right out into the Gulf of Mexico offers diners a festive Key West atmosphere. Featuring live music, waterfront dining and an expansive menu with conch fritters, burgers & fries, this is one of the best places to watch the sunset. www.oceankey.com. Sandwiches & Entrees \$10-\$20

When the oysters arrive they are deliciously salty and sweet, a perfect prelude to the dinner that follows which is served at one of the enchanting candle lit tables set under the palms, on the beach.

Following a “Flight” of fanciful desserts, the ferry arrives to take us back to the mainland where we will attempt a modern version of the “Duval Street Crawl”; a stroll through Key West’s newest Craft Beer & Wine Bars.

GUINNESS & GHOSTS

Secreted behind tropical vegetation on the corner of Duval & Caroline Streets is our first stop, an emerald green mansion. Built in 1838, and a haunted feature on many Key West Ghosts Tours, this former home of Dr. Porter is now an artisanal craft beer and wine bar called **The Porch.**

Inside, a small bar takes up one corner of the formal parlor and colored Christmas lights frame menu boards behind it. Under a chandelier in the former dining room, are high-top tables, a discrete flat screen TV and built-in bookcases full of wine.

The Draft beers number 18 and the bartender tells us that - in addition to 12 wines by the glass - he has 70 bottled beers to choose from. We select a Chocolate Cherry Porter and a Cigar City’s Apple Pie Cider then decamp to a table on the front porch.

The porter is smooth and Chocolaty and the cinnamon scented cider has a refreshing tart apple bite. Two craft brews later but no ghosts



WHERE TO DRINK

Hogs Breath Saloon: 400 Front St. Phone: (305) 296-4222. "The Breath" is one of the most popular bars in Key West; open on 3 sides, with no roof and a crooked tree – plastered with license plates - growing right up through the middle. It's a classic.
www.hogsbreath.com/keywest

The Porch: 429 Caroline St..Phone: (305) 517 6358. An artisanal craft beer and wine bar located in a haunted Victorian mansion. www.theporchkw.com

Point5 Tapas & Wine Bar: 915 Duval St. Phone: (305) 296 0669. With a James Beard invited head chef, this is the place to stop for a late night snack. Try the Moscow Mule cocktail made with homemade ginger beer. www.915duval.com

La Te Da Hotel : 1125 Duval St. Phone ☎877) 528-3320. With 3 bars : The Terrace, the « By George » piano bar and the Crystal Bar – home of the La Te Da Cabaret – you've got plenty to choose from here.
www.lateda.com

The draft beers number 18 and the bartender tells us that - in addition to 12 wines by the glass - he has 70 bottled beers to choose from. We select a Chocolate Covered Cherry Porter and a Cigar City's Apple Pie Cider then decamp to a table on the front porch.

The porter is smooth and chocolaty and the cinnamon scented cider has a refreshing tart apple bite. Two craft brews later but no ghosts sighted, we head back into the festive parade of people on Duval Street and head south, toward our next stop.

DISCO & DUCK

915 Duval Street looks like a frosted wedding cake with candlelight flickering in the front garden, on the verandah and all along the second story balcony.

On the first floor of this typical Key West gingerbread confection is the fine dining restaurant **Nine One Five**. Owner, Stuart Kemp has twice received the honor of a *James Beard* invitation and continues to impress the professionals at *The New York Times*, *Travel & Leisure Magazine* & *The Guardian* with his eclectic menus.

But tonight we are headed upstairs to the groovy **Point5 Tapas & Wine Bar**. The atmosphere up here is island chic with its sleek wood interior. French doors open onto a wrap around balcony with tables out front and couches along the side. DJ's spin here every Saturday night.

From our perch on the second floor balcony we have a bird's eye view of Duval Street where the party is just getting started. We opt for a half bottle of Ken Wright Cellars Pinot Noir, and order a homemade pizza to nibble. The wine is all plum and spice, a perfect match for the Duck Confit Pizza with caramelized onions, goat cheese, pine nuts & fresh rosemary. When it arrives, we wish we'd ordered two!



WHAT TO DO

Rent Scooters: \$50 a day for one rider, \$70 to \$100 for a 2 person scooter

Dry Tortugas National Park: Accessible only by boat or plane. The entrance fee for the park is \$5.00
<http://www.nps.gov/dрто/index.htm>

Key West Butterfly and Nature Conservatory: 1316 Duval Street, Phone: (305) 296-2988 General Admission \$12.00, Children 4-12 years \$8.50, Under 4 years Free, <http://keywestbutterfly.com/info.htm>

The Earnest Hemingway Home & Museum: 907 Whitehead St. phone: (305) 294 1575 Adults \$13, Children \$6 (5 and under Free) www.hemmingwayhome.com

Mac's Sea Garden & Cuban Coffee Queen: 280 Margaret St. <http://www.cubancoffeequeen.com>

Sunset Celebrations: Mallory Square. Free nightly Arts & Music Festival
<http://www.sunsetcelebration.org>

Then, re-invigorated by our petite repast, we head back out into the night. Stepping in and out of pockets of light and music that spill from the bars, we stroll arm in arm toward our final stop, the La Te Da Hotel.

COCKTAILS & CABARET

When we arrive the hotel is hopping with people and live music. The two indoor bars, The "By George" Piano Bar and The Crystal Bar – home of the La Te Da Cabaret Show – are humming and we are lucky to find seats at the open air **Terrace Bar**.

Everything here is refined: the live jazz, the beautiful dark wood open air bar with soft up lighting and slow tropical fans, even the service is spectacular.

We watch our mixologist craft our top-shelf cocktails then we relax, soaking up the atmosphere. The night is warm and a Cole Porter song drifts over from the piano bar, we smile at each other over our sparkling Champagne Cocktails; clearly we have fallen for the famous allure of Key West.