

Six Must-Try Activities in the Florida Keys

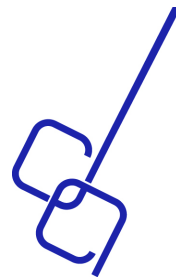
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TRAVEL USA

Six must-try activities in the Florida Keys

The [Florida Keys](#) are rightfully among the most popular areas of the Sunshine State. Here are six things to try.

CATCH THE LAST RAYS: As much as it is great to watch a brilliant orange sun sink into the sea at Mallory Square in Key West, the real fun is watching the people around you. You will meet tourists from around the world and everyone from bare-chested magicians to Jesus freaks shouting about earthly sins. Sip on a \$2 beer bought on Duval Street, then break into a cheer when the sun dips below the horizon.

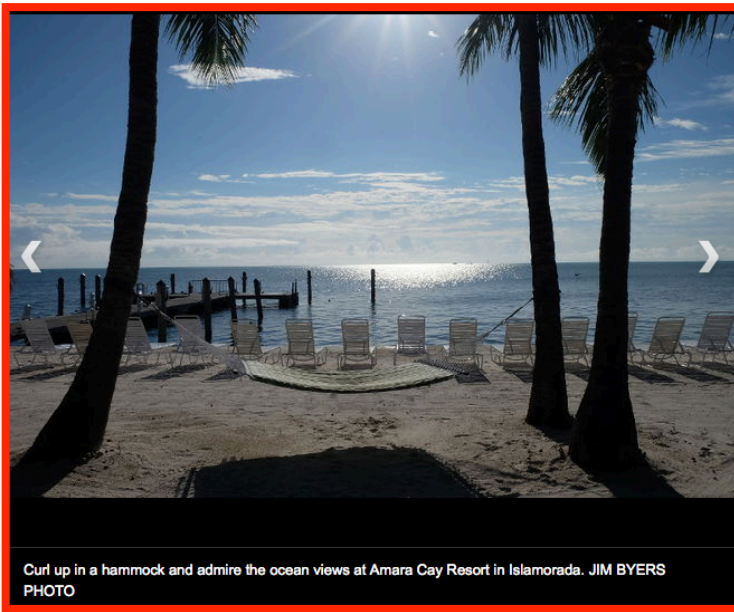
FEED THE RAYS (AND SHARKS): [Aquarium Encounters](#) in Marathon starts by putting you in a tank filled with hundreds of colourful fish, then squeezes tiny bits of food out of a plastic container to spark a feeding frenzy all around you. You also get to hold slimy squid and let a large ray suck them out of your hand. The best part is when they let you shove small fish into a glass tube separating the main tank from a glass enclosure filled with sharks. Even though there is no danger, the feeling of a massive shark grabbing food from your hand is a visceral experience that sends flashing capital letter messages to your brain that you really should not be doing this. If that is too much excitement, you can snorkel in a quiet lagoon or take the kids to touch live starfish and other critters. A dry-land option is feeding the truly giant tarpon at Robbie's Marina in Islamorada.

WE BE LIMIN': Books have been written about Florida's Key lime pie and how to prepare it, with the big debate being whipped cream or meringue as the topping. [Kermit's](#) is a famous spot in Key West where they use whipped cream, but the best version I have tried was at [Blue Heaven](#) in Key West. They do theirs with a nice, tart filling and a tall topping of meringue.

RIDE WITH ROYALTY: The [small steamer ship](#) featured in the Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn movie 'The African Queen' can still be found cruising the canals of Key Largo. The ship burps and ka-chunks a bit as it goes, but it has tons of charm. You will also learn about the area's history and colourful residents as you roll along. Families will enjoy a glass-bottom boat tour out of Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, also in Key Largo.



You can expect superb steaks and terrific seafood at Marker 88 in the Florida Keys. PHOTO COURTESY MARKER 88

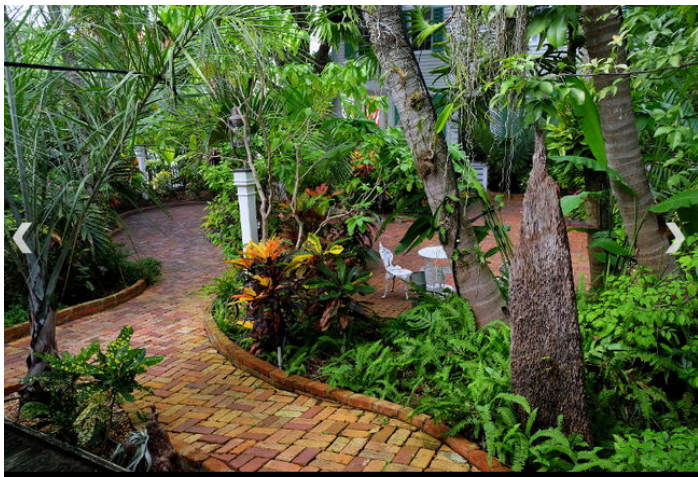


Curl up in a hammock and admire the ocean views at Amara Cay Resort in Islamorada. JIM BYERS PHOTO

A HOUSE OF A DIFFERENT COLOUR: Ernest Hemingway's house gets most of the attention, but the [Audubon House and Tropical Gardens](#) in Key West is definitely worth a stop. You will find nature drawings from Audubon himself and see beautiful period furniture in a handsome home dating to the 1840s. The garden might be the best feature, with weathered bricks, archways and a small pond underneath a thick canopy of trees.

FOODIE HEAVEN: The [Stoned Crab](#) in Key West serves sweet stone crab claws and wonderful whole snapper, while Oltremare at [Amara Cay](#) in Islamorada serves short ribs so smooth they melt before they get to your mouth. While in Islamorada, try the great seafood and fantastic steaks at [Marker 88](#). I saw actor Kyle Chandler of 'Bloodline' and 'Friday Night Lights' hanging out with friends when I was there.

WHERE TO STAY: [Parrot Key Resort](#) is a fine family spot with several pools, lots of greenery and units with nice decks and porches. [Amara Cay](#) is a pretty, boutique-style property on the water in Islamorada. There is a sandy area with hammocks alongside a breakwall, with watersports rentals a few feet away.



The gardens at Audubon House in Key West are a tropical delight. JIM BYERS PHOTO



The Key Lime Pie at Blue Heaven in Key West might be the best you'll try. Certainly their meringue takes the cake. JIM BYERS PHOTO



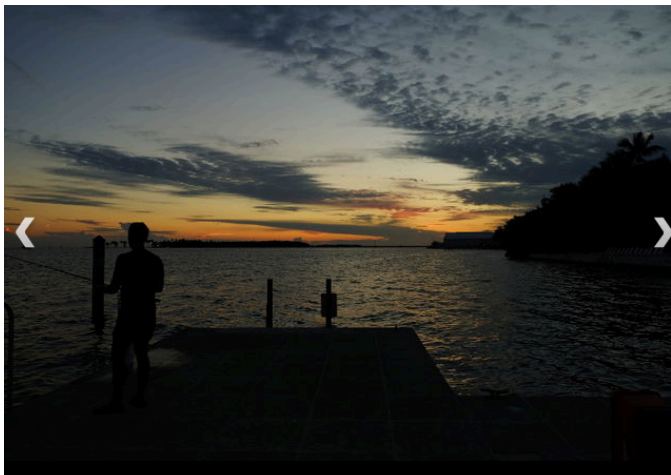
Sunsets are magical at Mallory Square in Key West. JIM BYERS PHOTO



The Stoned Crab serves up fine seafood in a lively atmosphere in Key West. JIM BYERS PHOTO



Parrot Key Resort in Key West has a series of fine pools shaded by beautiful trees. JIM BYERS PHOTO



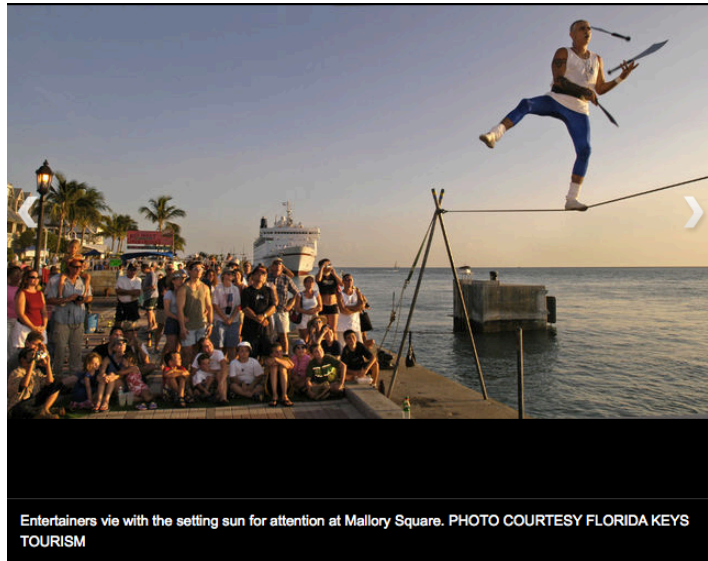
Sunsets are marvellous at Amara Cay Resort. It's a pretty, boutique-style property in Islamorada. JIM BYERS PHOTO



In Key Largo, you can take a ride on the original African Queen used in the movie of the same name. JIM BYERS PHOTO



If swimming near sharks ain't your thing, you can take the kids to check out the starfish at Aquarium Encounters if Marathon. JIM BYERS PHOTO



Entertainers vie with the setting sun for attention at Mallory Square. PHOTO COURTESY FLORIDA KEYS TOURISM