

Keys to the Keys

Vacation Agent

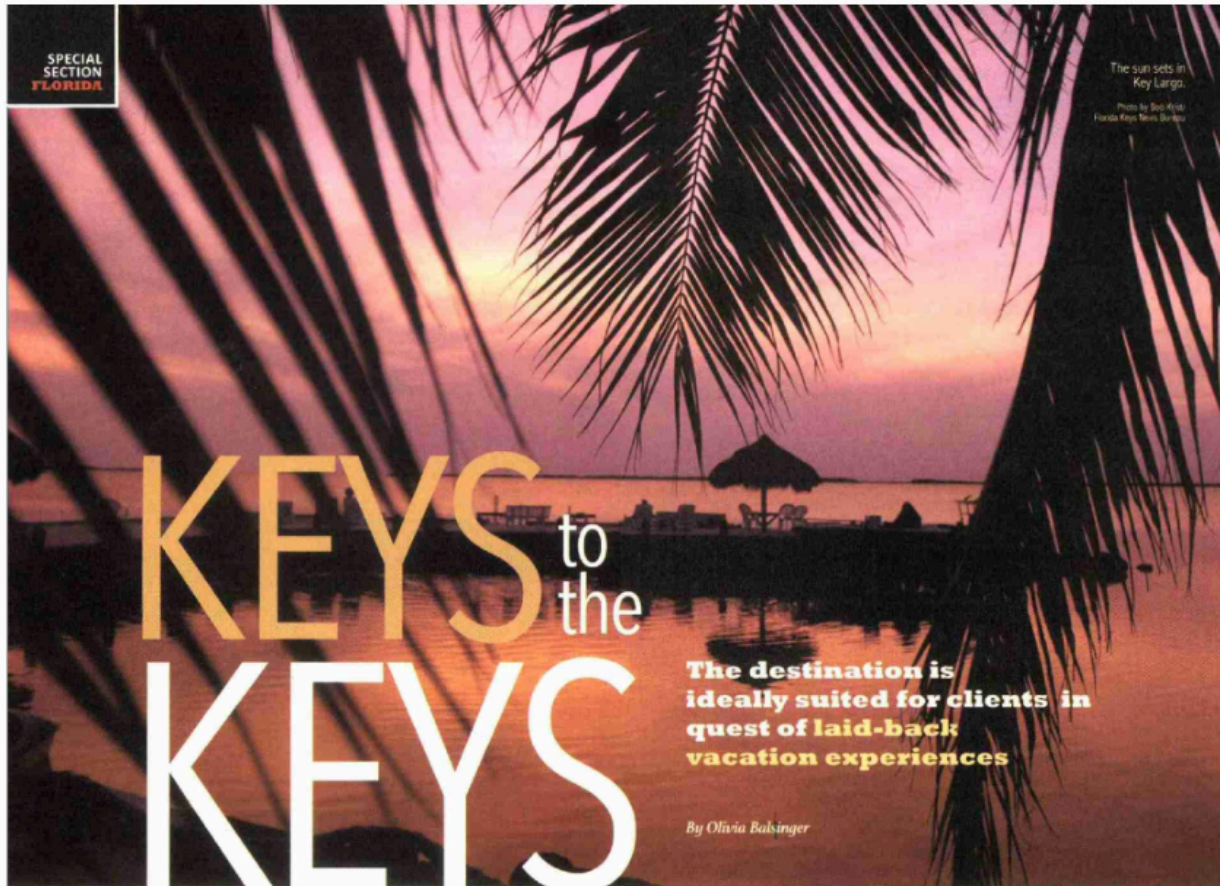
February 2016

Unique Visitors/Month: 28,000

Color Ad Value: \$21,549.00



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SPECIAL
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FLORIDA

The sun sets in
Key Largo.
Photo by Bob King
Florida Keys Tourism Bureau

KEYS to the KEYS

The destination is ideally suited for clients in quest of laid-back vacation experiences

By Olivia Balsinger

Import a San Francisco vibe into the Caribbean, where beautiful, sunny weather prevails. Add authentic rum, a laid-back attitude, and flair from neighboring Cuba, and this is the Florida Keys. Unlike other popular Florida destinations, clients will feel more relaxed without the crowds of Orlando or bright lights of Miami. The Keys are a destination for clients who crave a tropical paradise with a quirky culture and vibrant history.

The Keys, which lie about 15 miles south of Miami and 90 miles north of Cuba, are often referred to as America's Caribbean. The archipelago is home to more than 1,700 islands along a 112-mile stretch. Some islands, like Key West, are quite developed and populated, while others remain more undeveloped.

Here's a brief overview of what your clients will find in the Florida Keys.

In Key West, the locally owned Old Town Trolley provides insight and anecdotes not necessarily found in guidebooks. Riders also receive complimentary admission to

The Overseas Railroad Museum, which chronicles the life of Florida tourism pioneer Henry Flagler and his efforts to build a railway to Key West.

Many historical figures and artists fell in love with Key West for good reason. A trip to the Keys is incomplete without visiting The Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum, where the famed author lived for 10 years with his second wife and several six-toed cats (some of whose descendants still roam the property!). A guided tour is the best way to learn about Hemingway's life.

For clients looking for an all-day activity, Fury Water Adventures offers sail excursions to the Great Florida Reef, the third-largest coral barrier reef system in the world. Throughout the afternoon, passengers can ride personal watercraft, parasail and swim (lunch is included.)

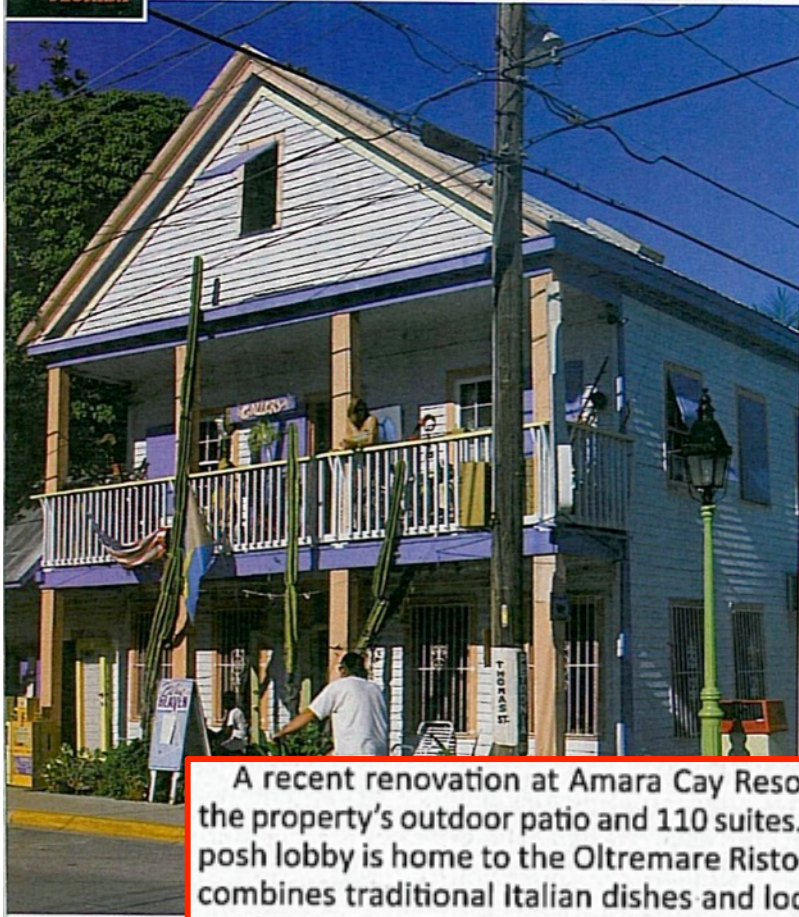
A tour of Key West's First Legal Rum Distillery will add spice to any client's itinerary. The first for the Florida Keys, the distillery is located in a former Coca-Cola

bottling plant that was converted into a pre-Prohibition era bar. Tours culminate with tasting a variety of rum flavors.

One of the most sentimental traditions in town is the nightly Sunset Celebration, a carnival that takes place in Malloy Square with street performers and musicians, local arts and crafts displays, and psychic readings. Even though it happens 365 days a year, hugging and clapping ensues each night at the closure of yet another day.

Another way clients may watch a Florida Keys sunset is with a glass of wine on a historic schooner. Danger Charters Wind & Wine Sunset Sail serves wine, beer, and hors d'oeuvres, while enthusiastic crew members explain what is being served.

Meanwhile, in the lower keys, clients should visit The Turtle Hospital in Marathon, one of the world's only state-licensed veterinary hospitals dedicated to the treatment of sea turtles. Guided educational tours show how the hospital treats injured turtles while allowing visitors to observe them.



A recent renovation at Amara Cay Resort enhanced the property's outdoor patio and 110 suites. Amara Cay's posh lobby is home to the Oltremare Ristorante, which combines traditional Italian dishes and local seafood.

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One of the most quintessential Florida Keys experiences is visiting Robbie's Marina, which has been in operation for more than 18 years on the Lower Matecumbe Key. From snorkeling trips and fishing charters, to quirky Keys shops, the marina has it all.

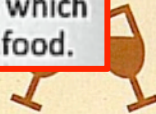
On the accommodations front, The Keys provides your clients with an eclectic array of options. Three to consider include the Sunset Key Cottages, Amara Cay Resort and the Playa Largo Resort & Spa in Key Largo.

A five-minute boat ride from the Westin Resort Harbor, Sunset Key Cottages' remote location provides travelers with a getaway from the lights of Key West. Sunset Key staffers leave a wicker basket with fresh treats on the porch each morning. The property has an infinity pool and bar, multiple tennis courts, a spa, a private white-sand beach and boat access, and a ferry that runs between Key West and the island. Latitudes Restaurant, located on the resort property, offers locally sourced tropical fruits and fish prepared with classical cooking techniques.

A recent renovation at Amara Cay Resort enhanced the property's outdoor patio and 110 suites. Amara Cay's posh lobby is home to the Oltremare Ristorante, which combines traditional Italian dishes and local seafood.

The Playa Largo Resort & Spa in Key Largo, set to open in early 2016, will have 144 luxury rooms and suites, a private marina, multiple bars and restaurants, a secluded white-sand beach, a full-service spa and fitness center, and a beach house for private or corporate functions. Visit www.fl-keys.com or call 800-352-5397.

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK



Clients will better understand Key West's quirkiness by visiting the gay-friendly bars and unique restaurants on Duval Street. Known as the "Longest Street in the World," Duval spans from the Gulf of Mexico to the Southernmost Point in the Continental USA. Clients can also visit Jimmy Buffet's original **Margaritaville** or enjoy a Frozen Pain In The Ass and music at Hemingway's favorite bar, **Sloppy Joe's**.

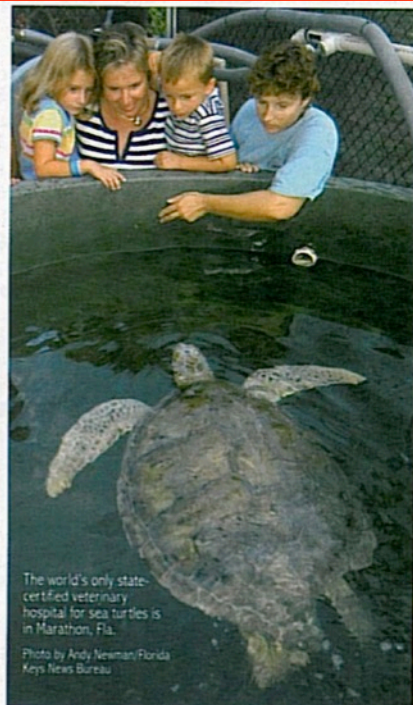
Blue Heaven, a property that once hosted boxing matches refereed by Hemingway, as well as cock fighting, is now home to the BLT (bacon, lobster and tomato) Eggs Benedict and arguably one of the airiest Key Lime pies in the city.

For a formal sit-down experience, suggest a **Toes in the Sand Dinner** at Casa Marina, A Waldorf Astoria Resort. Dinner is served on the hotel's white-sand beach so diners can relax, listen to the waves, and feel the sand between their toes while enjoying a refined meal.



Top: The Blue Heaven restaurant in Key West hosted boxing matches in the 1930s that were officiated by author Ernest Hemingway. Photo by Andy Newman/Florida Keys News Bureau.

Above: A busker juggles on a tightrope at the daily sunset celebration in Mallory Square in Key West. Photo by Bob Krist/Florida Keys News Bureau.



The world's only state-certified veterinary hospital for sea turtles is in Marathon, Fla.

Photo by Andy Newman/Florida Keys News Bureau.