



Florida Keys "Family" Travel Itinerary

Being in the Keys means being close to nature, exploring the outdoors and finding an appreciation for wildlife. The Florida Keys and Key West is a destination with a relaxed atmosphere, where accommodations and restaurants can suit anyone's budget or preferences. The accommodations page on our website, www.fla-keys.com, can help you find exactly what you are looking for.

Key Largo/Islamorada

Start your day at **John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park at Mile Marker 102.5, Oceanside** www.pennekampark.com.

Discover the oldest underwater park in the world. You will be able to enjoy the Park's popular water activities including viewing the reef on a glass-bottom boat or snorkel and scuba tours, as well as canoeing and kayaking on mangrove-lined waterways. A visitor center featuring a refurbished 30,000-gallon aquarium, as well as boat rentals, nature trails, picnic pavilions and two beaches round out the variety of offerings at Pennekamp.

Founders Park and Marina at MM 87, Bayside: Located in Islamorada, the community park is huge (40 acres) and runs from US1 to the Bay. With an Olympic-sized swimming pool, nature/exercise trails, dog park, a green certified marina, several sporting fields and a beach with a concession, this park is a great place to stretch your legs and gets the kids out the car and into some exercise. An entrance fee applies to non-residents but is well worth spending the afternoon by the beach, by the pool, on the soccer field or exploring one of the nature trails. The kids will thank you for it!

Rain Barrel Artisan's Village/Giant 40' Lobster at MM 86.7, Bayside: According to Eastman Kodak, Betsy, the giant 40' lobster, is the 2nd most photographed icon in the Florida Keys, after the Southernmost Point. Seen on the Bayside at 86700 Overseas Highway, a wide variety of artwork is available. Be sure to take a selfie and a family photo in front of the giant lobster and upload to your social media page.

Islamorada/Marathon

Theater of the Sea (MM 84.5, Oceanside)

www.theaterofthesea.com.

Start your day at Theater of the Sea. Your general admission ticket includes dolphin, sea lion and parrot shows, a guided tour of marine life exhibits, lagoon-type beach and the bottomless boat ride. After enjoying the shows, guests can visit the unique gift shop, dine at Nicky's grill and sunbathe, relax and swim on the private lagoon beach. Interactive swim programs with dolphins, sea lions and rays are available at an additional cost.

Anne's Beach (MM 73, Oceanside)

This small beach offers a scenic walkway and great views of the shallows surrounding Islamorada. Pack a picnic and spend hours of fun in the sun (It has bathrooms and picnic tables). Kiteboarders can also be seen from this beach honing their craft and practicing their skills.

On your way down to Marathon, stop for breakfast and fun on the water at **Robbie's Marina** (MM 77.5, Bayside). www.robbies.com

Kids will enjoy feeding the giant tarpon and stroll through the open air shops and market. Fishing, boat rentals, state parks tours and much more are also available.

Make your way to the **Dolphin Research Center**, Home of Flipper (MM 59, Bayside)

www.Dolphins.org

Spend an hour or the whole day learning all about our family of Atlantic bottlenose dolphins and California sea lions. Make a splash in DRC's new **Shawn Rodriguez Family Sprayground!** Run through jets and streams of water which are shot from a colorful seahorse, whale flukes and other tropical and marine life sculptures while dolphins chatter and whale songs play. Hungry? **Hammer's Café** sells cold drinks, ice cream and a variety of lunch items and snacks.

The newest family attraction in the Keys is the **Florida Keys Aquarium Encounters** (MM 53, Bayside)

www.floridakeysaquariumencounters.com

This interactive Florida Keys aquarium experience allows visitors to swim amongst reef fish using a SNUBA-type underwater breathing apparatus (no certification necessary), participate in daily marine life feedings or even petting a stingray in the stingray encounter exhibit. Participation levels range from passive observation to interactive, so this is perfect for families with children of all ages and comfort levels.

Another great place is **Crane Point Museum, Nature Center & Historic Site** (MM 50.5, Bayside)

This 64-acre tropical oasis of hardwood trees, nature trails and educational displays is a paradise for adults and children. You will discover the Adderley's home, the Marathon Wild Bird Center, the Museum of Natural History where parents and children can learn about everything from the life cycle of sea turtles to how Native Americans forged a living from the sea. Outside is a children's activities area that includes a wooden pirate ship feature for playing, and a touch tank for getting up close and personal with some of the creatures of the Keys. Trolley tours of the botanic gardens and historic sites can also be arranged. www.cranepoint.net

Spend the afternoon at the **Turtle Hospital** (MM 48.5, Bayside)

www.turtlehospital.org

You are invited to take a guided educational tour of the hospital facilities and the sea turtle rehabilitation area. This educational experience lasts approximately 90 minutes and provides a presentation on sea turtles as well as a behind-the-scenes look at the hospital facilities and rehabilitation area. At the end of each program guests are invited to feed the permanent resident sea turtles.

Watch the sunset alongside the world famous Seven Mile Bridge! There are several areas to watch one of the Florida Keys magical sunsets, but none more iconic in the middle Keys than from the area surrounding the Seven Mile bridge. There is a parking area at the north side of the old bridge and this area is perfect for picture taking, viewing and for closing out another memorable day in the Florida Keys.

Lower Keys

On your way to Key West, make a stop at **Bahia Honda State Park** (MM 37, Oceanside)

www.bahiahondapark.com

Featuring an award winning beach and historic bridge, Bahia Honda State Park has been voted as one of the top ten beaches in the US. This state park offers a beach/picnic area for the entire family with gift shop, snack bar, kayak rentals, daily snorkeling tours to the protected **Looe Key National Marine Sanctuary** as well as swimming on both the bay and Oceanside of the Florida Keys and iconic vistas of the old Bahia Honda bridge.

Blue Hole MM 30: Turn right on Key Deer Blvd & veer to the left; the low speed limit is because the Key Deer can be found walking roadside! This is especially true around dawn and dusk. You will see the Blue Hole entrance on the left; it is the only fresh water lake in the Florida Keys and because of that, you can spot some cool wildlife at times. There are alligators that call this "Hole" home along with snakes, a variety of birds and occasionally some Key Deer.

Key Deer Refuge Nature Trail: A little farther down this same road on the same side as the Blue Hole is a really nice nature trail through the Key Deer Refuge. The whole island of Big Pine Key is a Key Deer Refuge, but this particular trail is the best marked; it is about a mile long and takes you through a variety of different ecosystems. Informative signs periodically dot the trail telling you about the native flora and fauna. It's free!

Key West

Have your family picture taken in front of the **Southernmost Point Buoy** at the corner of South Street and Whitehead Street. (Use it for your holiday cards or profile photo on your social media page.)

Children and parents will enjoy discovering the history of Key West via the **Conch Tour Train** (children 12 and under ride for free) www.conchtourtrain.com

The tour lasts 90 minutes and begins at the Front Street Depot and ends right in Mallory Square. There are three stops which allow you to purchase refreshments, shop, explore and catch a later train.

Stroll along **Mallory Square** and enjoy the nightly Sunset Celebration with [arts and crafts exhibitors](#), [street performers](#), [food carts](#) and [psychics](#). The Mallory Square Sunset Performers put on a show every night, 365 days a year and it is free.

The Key West Aquarium is open every day from 10 AM – 6 PM and includes a touch tank to explore the wonders of our surrounding waters. www.keywestaquarium.com

The Butterfly and Nature Conservatory is open daily 9 AM – 5 PM www.keywestbutterfly.com

There are several options for hands-on family-friendly activities that are free of charge and they are as follows:

The Children's Playground is adjacent to Higgs Beach. This has been recently upgraded and there are areas of shade, different levels of equipment catering to all age groups and a beachfront restaurant is accessible from this area. Plenty of parking.

Eco-Discovery Center is open Tuesdays – Saturdays, 9 AM – 4 PM
http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/eco_discovery.html

Key West Wildlife Center is open daily 9 AM – 5 PM <http://www.keywestwildlifecenter.org/>

No trip to Key West is complete without the U.S. National Parks Service most remote park: **Ft. Jefferson Dry Tortugas National Park**, located just 70 miles west of Key West in the Gulf of Mexico. Accessible only by boat or seaplane, this all day excursion includes a narrated 2 ½ hour ride out to the civil war-era fortress, a guided history tour once on the island, a continental breakfast served on board with a full picnic style lunch served on the island, a plethora of opportunities to witness rare birds nesting in this remote rookery and frequent sea turtle and dolphin sightings. The **Yankee Freedom** departs Key West at 8 AM and will return around 5 PM. <http://www.drytortugasinfo.com/yankee-freedom>