

Travel



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16C** (T-R)-BB, S-F-7D-L-15C, P-C-14C, R-W, G-11C)

Florida Keys: 100 miles of Caribbean living

YOU KNOW you are approaching the Florida Keys when a brief flash of emerald green water winks at you from the side of Highway One.

This is the way to visit the Caribbean without leaving the United States, poking around in a setting out of an old Humphrey Bogart movie, exploring the world above and below the sea, enjoying a funky lifestyle unknown in any other part of the country.

You enter the Keys in a burst of billboards at Key Largo, where the wooden boat used in Bogart's movie, "The African Queen," is on display in front of the Holiday Inn and the tour boats are revving their engines in the canal nearby.

This has been a water world since the Spanish galleons sailed and sunk on nearby reefs centuries ago; the explorers, pirates, beachcombers and island lovers are still here.

THE BOATS will take you snorkeling, scuba diving, fishing or to John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, 188 square miles of living reef in an underwater park. You can see the 300 species of fish and other underwater life forms through a glass bottom boat, through a snorkeling mask or with your own dive tank.

The 100-mile-long whiplash of islands that form the Florida Keys are really an outcropping of that living reef, which curves through the upper, middle and lower keys to Key West and on toward Cuba, 90 miles away.



1-of-a-kind traveler
Iris Jones
contributing travel editor

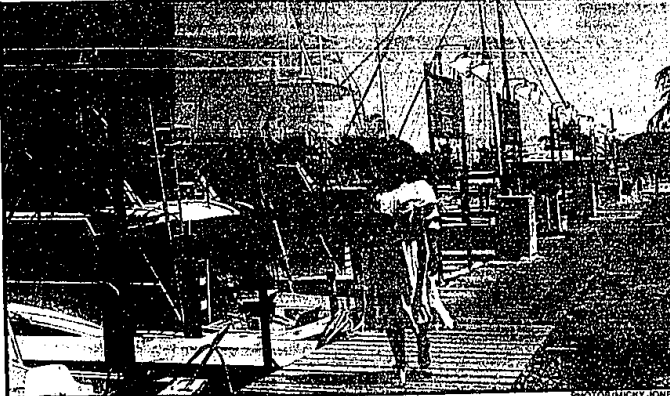
A single road rides the hump of the chain, with mile markers counting down to Mile Marker One at Key West.

HIGHWAY ONE, the longest overseas highway in the world, is main street. Travel brochures show scenic vistas, shot through palm trees, of white sailboats on emerald seas, but what wraps around your eyes as you meander south is a web of telephone and power lines, crisscrossing restaurant, hotel and dive shop signs on every side.

When the coral reef is so narrow that the road is really a causeway between two bright seas, there are only wooden telephone poles on both sides of the road. When the keys widen a few feet, there will be a billboard somewhere advertising a marina, a resort or a disco.

Drive off US 1, down passages that go a few hundred yards before they end at the sea, and you will see another glorious movie scene, but here on Highway One it's a 1940's honky-tonk movie all the way. Funky and fun, a place where some people come to visit and stay the rest of their lives.

There are resorts and roadside motels down the whole string of islands, but a handful are well known. The Ocean Beach Club, north of Key Largo, is open only to members and guests, so the best-known public accommodations on Key Largo are the Holiday Inn and Howard Johnson's International Dive Resort.



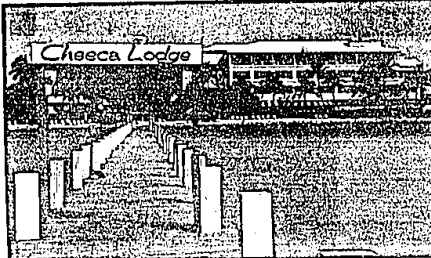
Place to stay in the Florida Keys include Cheeca Lodge (right) which was built as a lodge and a private retreat for the wealthy and is still a quiet, popular resort on the ocean side. Above, a young lady walks along the dock of Hawk's Cay, a spread of rooms, condos, marina, tennis courts and other seaside facilities in Islamorada.

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THE CHEECA Lodge at Mile Marker 82 on Islamorada was built as a lodge and a private retreat for the wealthy, and it is still a very quiet, popular retreat on the ocean side.

The cypress paneling and the hunting lodge feeling are still there, stuffed fish on the wall and all. A bright, spacious dining room looks out on a strip of man-made sand and a long fishing dock with its own resident pelicans.

There are pools, golf course, tennis courts and other play facilities on the landscaped grounds, bright balconied bedrooms, a recom-



mended dining room and two well-known Keys restaurants nearby: Mile Marker 88 and the Green Turtle. Cheeca Lodge might be a bit stuffy for some young people, who prefer the Holiday Isle Resort and the drinking and dancing at Pineapples.

There are two interesting side trips from Islamorada: by boat to Indian Key State Historic Site or Lignumvitae Key State Botanical Site. The latter, the highest natural elevation on the Keys, rising to a full 16 1/2 feet above sea level.

IF YOU like to mix the barefoot life with full-service resort, you will probably stay at Hawk's Cay, a spread of rooms, condos, marina, tennis courts and other seaside fa-

cilities given the American Automobile Association's four-diamond award at Mile Marker 61 near Marathon. It has elegant dining rooms: Keys residents also frequent Le Pub.

If you like to mix class with casual and inexpensive, go two miles south to Grassy Key Dairy Bar. It isn't on the water but the kids who work at Hawk's Cay say it has the best seafood, along with beer and wine, in a Keys atmosphere. They also like Herb's, a honky-tonk where you shuck oysters and clams at the table.

One of the unexpected things about the Keys is this: it is a water world but it doesn't have a lot of good sunning beaches. The best I saw was at Bahia Honda State Park, between Marathon and Key

West. It has 276 acres of palm-fringed beaches that front both the ocean and the Gulf side.

BY THE TIME you get to Bahia Honda Key you have driven the Overseas Highway to Mile Marker 37 and are on the home stretch to Key West. The diving is sensational along the whole chain of keys but of special interest at Looe Key National Marine Sanctuary, accessed only by private boats from local dive shops.

The National Key Deer Wildlife Refuge, along with the National Great White Heron and Key West Wildlife Refuges, are all headquartered on Big Pine Key, habitat for endangered deer called the Key Deer.

There's more, of course, but Key West is ahead and it is time to start thinking about "going to sunset." We'll do that next week, but if you would like to get settled in while you're waiting, here is what the accommodations look like in Key West.

There are dozens of ordinary hotels and motels, of course. The only other AAA four-diamond resort on the Keys, other than Hawk's Cay is Marriott's Casa Marina Resort on Key West, a hotel with its own interesting history.

THE OVERSEAS Highway follows the line of the railway that went to sea: built by Henry Flagler in 1912. The railway was wiped out by a hurricane in 1935, but by then Flagler had built this glamorous hotel for passengers who embarked from Key West for Havana.

The Casa Marina is on the opposite end of Key West from the old town. It has all the facilities for resort lovers: beach, tennis courts, swimming pools, restaurants, gift shops, boat docks, the works.

If you prefer to stay in the "Old Town," as I did on this trip, I highly recommend the Pier House, a contemporary ramble of grey clapboard built around gardens at the edge of the sea near Mallory Square.

Wyndham Hotels is opening a new luxury hotel this week called The Ranch, a five-story, 150-room place designed to reflect the "Victorian-Bahamian" charm that makes the Conch houses of Key West so popular.

There are also some nice guest houses in Key West. I visited and was impressed with Eaton Lodge, a beautiful restored house in the old city.

For information, contact Florida Keys Visitor Information, P.O. Box 4651, Key West, Fla. 33041.

Ski club off to Europe

The Livonia Ski Club, sponsored by the Livonia Parks and Recreation Department, is organizing a one-week ski trip to Courmayeur, Italy, with an optional extra week to the French and Italian Riviera.

The ski week is scheduled for March 8-16 and costs \$870 per person for two people in a condominium. That includes roundtrip air fare from Detroit to Milan, Italy, seven nights condo lodging, a free six-day ski pass. Optional one-day excursions are available to Chamonix, Geneva, Aosta and either Cervinia or Zermatt.

Courmayeur is near the French-Swiss border. It hosts the world's largest cablecar, which whisks 150

skiers from the center of town to the main skiing area in three minutes.

If you choose the additional week, it will cost \$1,374 per person, two in a room for the two weeks March 8-23, including bus transportation, seven nights in deluxe hotels, a one-day excursion to Monte Carlo and another to Cannes, continental breakfast and other things.

A deposit of \$500 per person should be sent to John and Isabelle Seguin, 24669 Applecrest Drive, Novi, 48050. For more information, call them at 348-8883. The Livonia Ski Club meets on the first Thursday of each month, at the American Legion Hall, 15585 Beech Dale, north of Five Mile in Redford.

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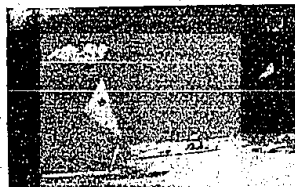
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For a true change of pace, visit Altos de Chavon, an authentic reproduction of a 16th-century village, with unique shops, galleries, restaurants and more.



Altos de Chavon, the artist's colony

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