

Key West: Living the Laid Back Life

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

The outposts of the States have always fascinated me, with Hawaii and Alaska of course not even on the contiguous American mainland. And, even though Key West is at least part of a mainland state, Florida, it's only connected to it by a series of impressive bridges. Located more than 100 miles away from the end of the Florida mainland, it's not a quick journey to get there. Enter the first paragraph here. You may include links and bolded text, but use no other formatting.

Many people may know Key West from Disney cruises, as it's the first stop on the Western Caribbean itinerary, but if you want to drive there, it's a good three hours from Miami. It also has an airport, linking it to a variety of places, although we found on our flight out that the planes that use it can be on the small side!

Once you arrive in Key West, you immediately get the feeling that it's not just located a long way from the American mainland, but that it's also a million miles away in terms of its atmosphere. It's famously laid back and it seems that anything goes. We were surprised at some of the more "adult" advertisements, shall we say, that we saw along Duval Street, the main road in Key West, during the evening hours. However, the relaxed atmosphere doesn't mean that you get poor service here. In fact, it's anything but. We were very impressed with everyone we met during our stay, who were all eager to help, but equally, they were quite happy to stop and chat and answer any questions we had. There's definitely an island mentality here and that's reinforced when you realize that, for any major sport event or concert, you have to head up to Miami. From Key West, that feels like half a world away.

The whole place is just two miles by four miles and that came home to us when we headed up to the rooftop viewing area of our hotel, the Crowne Plaza on Duval Street. From there, we could see all sides of the island, with Mallory Square to the north. A quiet place during the day, by night, it's packed with people eager to watch the famous Key West sunsets, with entertainers to help the time go by.

Nearby is [Mel Fisher's Maritime Museum](#), which contains the finds of the great man's life. He spent many years searching for wrecks just off Key West and eventually hit metaphorical and physical gold, finding two Spanish wrecks, which yielded an amazing amount of jewels, including raw emeralds, and gold and silver bars. One of the highlights here is the opportunity to lift a gold bar -- and they're a lot heavier than you expect them to be, I can tell you!

At the other side of the island is the place that you have to visit, if for no other reason than to get your photo taken here. This is the southernmost point of the continental United States and, from here; you're only 90 miles from Cuba. We were fascinated to see that, as well as the famous photo spot, there's also the southernmost hotel, house, ice cream parlor and bed and breakfast place around here. Interestingly though, it's not full of souvenir stalls, like many places, which was a pleasant change.

One of the main sights that everyone heads for here is the [Hemingway House](#). As its name suggests, this was home to Ernest Hemingway for a number of years and it's a beautiful Spanish-style property, made out of coral rock. It was designed to be hurricane proof and so it's proved to be over the years. Hemingway wrote a great number of his works here in his study and it's clear that he enjoyed life. Having been round the house, it's not hard to understand why. It's set in some lovely grounds, which include a swimming pool, and is nicely secluded away from everyone.

One of the highlights here are the unusual six-toed cats, all of which, bar one, are supposed to descend from Hemingway's original cat Snowball. They're very well looked after and are a joy to see. Having heard how well they're treated here, I'm not surprised that they all stay put.

Anyone who's heard about Hemingway's life in Key West will probably be aware of his fondness for various bars here and particularly one called Sloppy Joe's. His favorite haunt, it still draws the crowds today, as does Margaritaville, created by Floridian singer Jimmy Buffet. If you like to enjoy life in the evenings, Key West is a great place to come.

Despite that, there's still plenty for everyone to enjoy and we loved our time here. It's a perfect stop on a cruise, as you can see most of the main attractions in one day here, the island is so small.

To get around to see all these sights, we used the Old Town Trolley Tour, which had a bus stop right outside our hotel, and we found it to be a great way of touring the island. The drivers were full of great anecdotes about the sights you can find here and the history of Key West.

One of the most famous parts was the decision by the island to secede from the U.S. in 1982, after the U.S. Border Patrol introduced a check-point at Florida City, the entrance to mainland Florida. Key West residents were infuriated by the decision and "seceded" [Ed.- Not that any other authority has recognized the secession.] Ironically, it still

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remains the Conch Republic and retains the claim to be a separate nation to this day, as the documents to end their secession have still never been signed.

Having visited the place, perhaps it may as well be a separate state, as it certainly feels like one. Key West is a very unique place and definitely one that everyone should try to visit at least once in their lifetime. Personally, I can't wait to go back. Maybe one day we'll finally head there with the Disney Cruise Line ...

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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