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Ten Things You Must Do If You Want To Vacation In Key West

By Robert Cohen

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By Robert (Bob) Cohen

Planning a vacation in Key West can sometimes be a daunting task as there are so many things to do in Key West. The Key West Welcome Center can be your focal point for planning your vacation because they are in the service of assisting visitors with their vacation planning.

The Welcome Center can make all of your reservations for you so you do not have to stress over what to do, who to call or what to plan.

1. HOTELS, MOTELS, BED & BREAKFAST, VACATION RENTALS

Key West is a small island that is 1.5 by 4 miles in size with only 4,000 total hotel, motel, bed & breakfast and condominium rooms on the entire island. During special events and holiday weekends, there is usually a 3-nite minimum stay at the bed & breakfasts as well as some of the 4-star hotel resorts on the island and condominium resorts.

If you are coming in for just one night during the week, then you probably will not need advanced reservations for a hotel or motel room. Sometimes, we can get you into a nice bed & breakfast for just one night due to last minute cancellations. But, if you plan on staying for a few nights or longer, advanced reservations are definitely in order.

Working as a Concierge for a number of years, you see just when and where rooms are available for nightly rental. If you are looking for private homes for your vacation rental, then expect places that are only available for a minimum of one week. Some places are only available on a monthly basis.

On another note, if you are like me and have animal companions, they are a part of your family and do not like the idea of leaving them home when you are out having fun. Most accommodations, including the vacation rentals, are not pet friendly. The ones that have more pet friendly rooms are the bed & breakfasts. Contact the Key West Welcome Center to find out what is available that is pet friendly and

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they will make the reservations for you.

In the off-season (June 1 to December 15), accommodation rates start at about \$89 for a basic room up to a 4-star resort starting at \$200 a night. During high season (December 16 to May 31), rates can start at \$169 per night.

2. FISHING THE KEYS

If you are an avid fisherman, coming to Key West is something you will never forget. There is no better fishing in the State of Florida than there is in Key West. Try your hand at game fish such as Sailfish, Blue Marlin, Tarpon, Permit, Cobia, Wahoo or even Shark. More records have been broken here than anywhere else in the State of Florida.

There are three basic types of fishing:

1. Off-Shore

2. Back Country Light Tackle

3. Flats

OFF SHORE – Off-shore fishing is where you go for the big stuff such as Grouper, Sail Fish, Marlin, Mahi-Mahi, King Mackerel, etc. The boats are usually a six-pack (maximum six passenger) and you take turns in the hot seat. The method of hooking the fish is by trolling. You can reserve by the seat (1/2 day \$135; full day \$185), or private charters (1/2 day starting at \$600; full day starting at \$800).

BACK COUNTRY LIGHT TACKLE – This type of fishing is using a spinning rod on boats that are never bigger than 28-feet with a maximum capacity of 4 passengers. This is usually sight casting and can use either lures or live bait. You will catch things such as Mahi-Mahi, Sailfish, Tarpon, Cobia, Permit, Bone Fish, etc. These are strictly private charter with 1/2 days starting at \$450; full days starting at \$650

FLATS FISHING – This is the ultimate challenge to a fisherman because you are in waters that are rarely deeper than 2 to 3 feet and you are using either 15 lb. test line on a spinning rod, or fly fishing. These boats are specifically designed for high speeds in very shallow waters. Here you can hook into Tarpon, Permit, Bone Fish, African Pompano, and sometimes even sharks. Imagine the thrill of catching a 90 lb. Tarpon on 15 lb. test line. It will be an exercise to see who tires first; you or the Tarpon (in many cases it will be you). These boats can only take a maximum of 2 passengers. Charters for 1/2 day start at \$350; full day start at \$550.

3. SNORKEL, SNUBA AND SCUBA DIVING

Over 80% of the visitors to Key West and the Florida Keys want to go either snorkeling or scuba diving. This is due to the abundant and colorful sea life one would see while on either a snorkeling or scuba diving experience. To Scuba Dive, one must be a certified diver (PADI, NAUI, etc) as they have anywhere from Open Water Certification to Master Diver.

If you have never done scuba diving before, there is something called SNUBA which gives you an experience similar to Scuba, but instead of having a tank strapped to your back, the regulator in your mouth is attached to a 20-foot long air hose attached to a compressor on the surface. This way you get

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the experience of being underwater without having to get certified.

If you want to see what it is like to Scuba Dive, you can take a Resort Course which gives you enough training to go out with an instructor on what is called a 2-tank dive in up to 45 feet of water.

Snorkel trips start at \$35 per person, Snuba starts at \$95 per person, Scuba starts at \$90 per person and resort courses start at \$155 per person.

4. FT. JEFFERSON AT THE DRY TORTUGAS

Day trips to the Dry Tortugas has to be the most popular excursion in Key West as you get to the Dry Tortugas by either a high speed catamaran or by seaplane.

The Catamarans take a little over two hours to go about 70 miles west of Key West and they give you about 4.5 hours at the Dry Tortugas. The Seaplane takes about 35 minutes to get there and they give you about 2.5 hours on the island.

Ft. Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas is 16 acres in size and it is the largest coastal fort in the United States. It just draws you into its history when the historian tells you about the place. This is a trip you do not want to miss.

Boat prices to the Dry Tortugas start at \$110 to \$129 depending on the boat, and the seaplane costs start at \$189 per adult.

5. GLASS BOTTOM BOAT EXCURSIONS

The Glass bottom boats give you the experience of seeing the sea life at the Living Coral Reef. We call it a "Dry Snorkel" trip as it is like snorkeling without getting wet.

Large tropical fish, colorful coral await you at the reef. Prices start at \$35 per person.

6. FINE DINING IN KEY WEST

Key West is privileged to have so many fine restaurants that it would be difficult to chose which ones to eat at.

We have everything from the fast food chains, all the way to 4 diamond quality restaurants. Other than a few minor exceptions, you do not have to make a reservation and you never ever have to dress up for dinner.

Key West has what we call, "Key West Casual" which means shirt, shorts and sandals and this is the code of dress for every place in Key West.

You can have something as simple as a good hamburger or Conch Fritters, to something as extravagant as Lobster Mango Tango (lobster sautéed in Brandy and covered with a Mango Salsa). The choice is yours in Key West.

7. DINNER CRUISES

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Many people come to the Keys for its fabulous sunsets. Why not have your sunset and a 3-course gourmet dinner along with it. A sunset dinner cruise is the way to go.

On one of the dinner cruise boats, the chef will prepare your food while the captain of the dinner cruise takes you on a wonderful journey around the Key West Harbor and once you sample this wonderful cuisine on this dinner cruise, you will wonder how he does it for such a low price.

Formerly a chef at a 4 diamond restaurant, he will present you with mouth-watering options for your meals and it includes domestic and imported beers, wines and champagne.

Dinner cruise prices are from \$65 to \$75 per person not including tax and gratuity. Private Charters for the dinner cruise are available for special functions and weddings. The one we prefer for your dinner cruise has a maximum seating of 20 so this is ideal for a nice sunset wedding and dinner cruise.

8. AERIAL TOURS

Want to see Key West from the air?

Take a aerial tour in either a biplane or a helicopter to see Key West from the air. Aerial tour trip times vary depending on what you want to see. Biplane rides start at \$120 for two people and helicopter rides start at \$99 for 3 people to see the coral reef from the air.

9. KAYAK TOURS AND RENTALS

If you want to really see the coastline of the lower Keys and Key West, there is no better way to see it than on one of our wonderful Kayak Tours.

Take a trip with an environmental scientist or someone that was born and raised here and knows the mangroves like the back of their hand.

Visit some of the Marine and Bird Sanctuaries and see some of the life forms that you would never see otherwise.

Prices start at \$40 per person for a tour.

10. SUNSET SAIL

One of the more popular things to do in Key West is to see the sunset from the water.

Take a sunset sail on either a sailing catamaran or a schooner.

Many of the younger crowd like the sunset sail on the sailing Catamarans because they can have a great party while on the sunset sail. This is very popular with the Spring Breakers during that time of year as it includes as much beer and wine one can consume in a 2 hour time frame.

A sunset sail on a schooner, however, is a lot more romantic as you can see the sails glistening when the colors of the sky change and you know that you helped to raise the sails on this sunset sail

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excursion.

During the months of November thru April, you can have your sunset sail and a buffet dinner all in one on one of the clipper ships that come in from Boston for these months.

Sunset sail pricing starts at \$30 and goes up to \$75 if you want the dinner cruise on the clipper ship.

In conclusion, by using the expert services of the Key West Welcome Center, you will save money, save time and be absolutely sure that you getting exactly what you want and not what someone else wants.

The Key West Welcome Center has been in business under the current ownership for over 10 years. The current manager of the Welcome Center has lived in the Keys for almost 16 years and knows the place like he has lived here all his life. If there is something you need to know about Key West, he is the person to ask.

Robert R. Cohen
General Manager
Listed in Strathmore's Who's Who in America

I firmly believe that we have the best Reservations Service in the Key West area and we can make all your dreams come true. Use the Key West Welcome Center for all your reservations:

www.keywestwelcomecenter.com

Born and raised in New York City, and with a passion for photography, apprenticed with a master photographer in Manhattan during his junior and senior year in high school. In November of 1967, he joined the Navy to be a photographer and served with the Navy Combat Camera Group based out of San Diego for two years. He continued his military service and in 1983, while stationed in the

Washington, DC area became Navy Photographer of the Year for his production of a multimedia show about the Navy Recruiting Command.

In 1984, he was discharged with a medical disability for his back and stayed in the DC area until 1987 when he and his wife (who was military) got transferred to NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium where they stayed for a little over 3 years. Robert worked as one of two Diplomatic Photographers for the U.S. Embassy in Brussels.

Returning to the states in 1990, he started his own photography business as well as working as a computer technician for the hospitality industry in Key West. Here is where he learned who in Key West owned what as well as who could he rely on for services.

In 2003, Robert started working as a concierge and the following year became the manager of the Key West Welcome Center.

Family-Friendly Spring Break Tips

By Kent Krueger

You want to take the family on a nice vacation in the Spring but you don't want Junior to learn what "chug, chug, chug, chug" means yet. You want to have a nice "family" vacation without getting caught up in the "Girls Gone Wild" atmosphere that traditionally surrounds Spring Break. Here are some tips.

Try to take your vacation when most college students are still in school. Spring Break for college students can be from the end of February to the end of March, but most colleges have vacation the first two weeks of March. Plan your vacation after the first two weeks of March.

Avoid the traditional Spring Break college destinations: Jamaica, Cancun, Acapulco, Montego Bay, the Bahamas, South Padre Island off of the state of Texas, Daytona, South Beach, Key West and Panama City, which are all in the state of Florida. Basically anyplace warm, with sand and with beer. However you don't have to bring your family to Nome, Alaska either. Again, the off-peak college spring break times these destinations can be great, but that doesn't account for the high school kids who have left the parents at home.

Choose a destination that is "family friendly" such as Disney World in Orlando. There could be a few college students donning a pair of mouse ears completely wasted but since Orlando is far from the beach it is more likely to be a fluke. Look for vacations advertised as "family friendly", a ski vacation, Disney Land in California, or a trip to Colorado or Destin, Florida as these are all good possibilities. You can also check out your state tourism web sites for ideas of where to go where the drinking age is not an issue. Check out magazines like "Family Fun" which feature family vacation destinations every month for ideas.

Finally, remember --- if you happen upon a partying college student, relax, one day it will be Junior's turn.

Kent Krueger has been in the travel industry over 3 years. He has advised individuals and corporations on travel ideas, savings and marketing vacation rentals. Kent is President of The Rental Network (

<http://www.rentals2remember.com>

) and eVaca.com.



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