

Keys Traveler

Weddings Edition

The Keys for
Weddings



Unique Venues
Reception Trends
Destination Resorts
Keys Cuisine

fla-keys.com/weddings



Bob Care (2)

Guests watch the conclusion of a Marathon-area wedding ceremony, as the bride and groom kiss under palm trees on a Grassy Key beach.

Picturesque Keys embrace weddings for everyone

There's no more all-inclusive destination in which to pledge "I do" than the subtropical

Florida Keys, the naturally romantic 125-mile-long chain of islands known as "America's Caribbean."

The Keys — framed by the azure waters of the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Gulf of Mexico to the west — are cherished for their stunning, simple beauty.

The Florida Keys & Key West, considered one of the top five U.S.

wedding destinations for mainstream couples, is equally popular with gay and lesbian duos.

It's little wonder, then, that weddings and honeymoons in the Florida Keys are in such high demand. And no passports are required.

"The Florida Keys offer enough variety of attractions that appeal to every stage of life," said Liana Pyne, wedding sales representative for the Keys tourism council.

"Because you're on U.S. soil,

a valid marriage license is easy to obtain," Pyne said. "Mothers of brides are interested in coming for rest and relaxation after a daughter's big day.

"And brides and grooms are interested in a 'mini-moon' vacation before a separate honeymoon away from their guests," she added.

TheKnot.com has named the Florida Keys a Top 50 Destination Wedding Spot, citing its "laid-back tropical island setting with all the allure of the Caribbean at a domestic price — and a more convenient location for guests."

Destination Weddings & Honeymoons magazine has cited the Keys a top U.S. locale among its "Best Wedding Destinations."

Richly historic venues, casually elegant resorts, scenic waterfront locations and beach parks, fiery sunsets and pastel sunrises add to the island chain's appeal.

Key West, the southernmost city in the continental United States, is just 159 miles southwest of Miami and 90 miles from Cuba. Driving



Key West is a wedding photographer's dream for natural and manmade photo backdrops.

there is a romantic experience in itself: the scenic Florida Keys Overseas Highway includes 42 bridges.

Commercial flights are available into Key West International Airport and mainland South Florida cities. Charter flights can be booked to Florida Keys Marathon International Airport.

Finely elegant and casually funky dining is available throughout the Keys for bridal luncheons or rehearsal dinners. Craft breweries, rum distilleries and lively nightlife offer venues for bachelor and bachelorette parties.

Because of the Keys' year-round subtropical climate, couples — a bride and groom, two brides or two grooms — and family members and guests can experience never-to-be-forgotten adventures.

Couples can marry on paddleboards or bicycles. They can exchange vows aboard tall ships, sailing vessels, glass-bottom and dive boats and luxury motor yachts throughout the Keys. Scuba aficionados can seal their vows underwater and stay in the country's only submerged recreational hotel, located in a Key Largo lagoon.

Newlyweds can charter a sailboat to the remote Dry Tortugas National Park. They can swim with dolphins or soar in a seaplane above the pristine waters of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Throughout the Keys, professional wedding planners are available to assist with attire, flowers, music, rings, catering, cakes, photographers and videographers, transportation and officiants.

— Laura Myers



Aaron Huntsman, left, and William Lee Jones complete their wedding vows at a ceremony in Key West.



A sand artist created this custom sculpture of two loving sea turtles for a couple's wedding in the Florida Keys.

Customized events among Florida Keys wedding trends

Many couples tying the knot in the Florida Keys are seeking a subtropical island experience, a customized event and personalized, creatively designed settings.

"Couples want something personal that speaks to the tone of who they are," said Julie Shreck, owner-planner of Simply You Weddings in Key West. "The biggest trend we will continue to see is anything that is personalized and unique to the couple."

Event attire for a laid-back Keys wedding? Men sometimes opt to don shorts, tuxedo jackets and sandals, with women choosing sun dresses instead of traditional gowns.

Wedding requests include "a consistent theme of unconventional experiences such as live wedding painters, cigar rollers and steel drums with ambiance enhancers such as café lighting, live bands and sunrise ceremonies and brunch receptions," said Jennifer Tacey, senior catering sales manager for Hawks Cay Resort near Marathon.

Although Keys weddings typically have 60 to 100 guests, the average number of attendees is climbing to 120 to 200 guests, said Liz Seligman, owner-planner of Island Life Events in Islamorada.

"Clients are doing away with the traditional protocol of a reception and seeking more of a party atmosphere," Seligman said. "We create an atmosphere of a gorgeous ballroom on the beach."

Also trending are casual bayside seafood boils with natural island décor and rustic repurposed wooden tables, said Kelsey Pflieger, director of sales and marketing at Key Largo's Playa Largo Resort & Spa.

In Key Largo, Amy Slate's 31-unit Amoray Dive Resort, directly on Florida Bay, conducts memorable underwater weddings, with an underwater ceremony, a notary, flowers, catering, photography and sunset cruises for the wedding party. Couples can dive for their vows at a variety of wrecks. On land, weddings for up to 200 can be held at the resort. amoray.com

— Laura Myers



A bride and a guest get into the music with a steel drummer.

Florida Keys Destination Resorts Create Wedding Memories



By Laura Myers

Sarah Hirter and Hunter Spitzer married at Hawks Cay Resort near Marathon.

Weddings at Florida Keys destination resorts are truly memorable affairs. Planners can assist couples with almost all event elements — including wedding arrivals by boat, helicopter, seaplane or even parasail.

In Key Largo, the 12-acre “luxury inclusive” adults-only 135-unit Bungalows Key Largo bayside with a “Florida chic” design, is opening with 800-square-foot bungalows and outdoor plunge pools or tubs, Tiki-style boats and 1,000 feet of shoreline. A dedicated coordinator, several venues, full catering and spa services are on-site. BungalowsKeyLargo.com

Curio Collection by Hilton is opening its 13-acre Baker’s Cay Resort in Key Largo with 200 rooms, 17,000 square feet for weddings, a 10,000-square-foot ballroom and 7,000-square-foot lawn, two pools, waterfall grotto, nature trail with beach nooks, and pet programming and amenities. bakerscayresort.com

In Key Largo, the 14-acre, 178-room Playa Largo Resort & Spa offers an 8,600-square-foot lawn, wedding gazebo and 4,760-square-foot ballroom for 360 guests. The Autograph Collection Hotel has 10 secluded bungalows, three-bedroom beach house, full-service

spa and 6,000-square-foot beach. playalargoresort.com

Key Largo’s six-villa Dolphin Point Villas hosts weddings up to 125 in an open-air pavilion or lawn. The two-story three-wing Nautilus House villa has five bedrooms, five baths and private pool, sleeping 16. dolphinpointvillas.com

Honeymooning divers can sleep at Jules’ Undersea Lodge — the United States’ only submerged recreational hotel. jul.com

In Islamorada, the 214-room, 27-acre oceanfront Cheeca Lodge & Spa has several pools, 4,600 square feet of versatile space and a Tahitian-style Spa Island. Its



Bungalows Key Largo rooms have beautiful bayside views.

Bougainvillea Ballroom has 12-foot ceilings and 2,100 square feet for 120. Its 1,870-square-foot Sunrise Ballroom, with Atlantic views and open-air terrace, hosts 100. cheeca.com

In Islamorada, Casa Morada hosts intimate wedding ceremonies and packages with a two-hour ceremony and reception, honeymoon suite, photographer, cake, champagne toast and other amenities.

Destination weddings for over 20 guests require booking of all 16 guest suites for a minimum of two nights. Private space for up to 80 guests is offered. casamorada.com

The Moorings Village, also in Islamorada, is a luxurious 18-acre resort with 18 cottages and homes made famous by the popular Netflix thriller-drama series, “Bloodline.” Intimate weddings for up to 10, including bride and groom, can be booked with accommodations. Larger events are hosted at Morada Bay Beach Cafe and Pierre’s Restaurant & Lounge, bayside across the Highway. themooringsvillage.com

The 25-acre oceanfront Islander Resort is renovating with contemporary cottage-style units and screened-in lanais, a 6,000-square-foot lawn with event space, 2,760-square-foot Blue Marlin Ballroom and Tarpon Terrace and 114 oceanside villas. IslanderFloridaKeys.com

Sixty-acre Hawks Cay Resort on Duck Key has 20,000 square feet of waterfront, two ballrooms for 480 guests or 450 banquet-style. Events include welcome receptions, pool parties, sunset cruises, fishing excursions, dolphin encounters and

farewell brunches. The Preferred Hotel Group Lifestyle Collection resort reopened with a \$50 million renovation in fall 2018 and has 250 two- and three-bedroom villas and 177 guest rooms. hawkscay.com

The 24-acre, 199-unit Isla Bella Beach Resort is to open early 2019 in

Marathon with more than 20,000 square feet of function space: a 3,800-square-foot Hibiscus Event Center and 16,000 square feet of outdoor space, a mile of shoreline and oceanfront event area. On-site amenities include five pools, a 4,000-square-foot spa and four food and beverage venues. islabellabeachresort.com

The 125-room Faro Blanco Resort and Yacht Club, a Hyatt Place, at Marathon’s landmark Faro Blanco Lighthouse offers wedding packages for 200. Options include a waterfront jetty ceremony, plush reception lawn, plated or buffet dinners and a “dock-tail” marina party. faroblancoresort.com

Oceans Edge Resort & Marina near Key West features an outdoor venue for casual weddings and

ceremonies for 10 to 150 guests. The resort, opened in 2016, offers 175 water-view suites and rooms, six swimming pools, scenic harborwalk and open-air bar and grill. An on-site marina has 111 wet and 52 dry slips for access to Gulf and Atlantic islands. oceansedgekeywest.com

The 100-room The Perry Hotel Key West at Stock Island Marina Village, accommodates small weddings for 65 at Matt’s Stock Island Kitchen & Bar. Its 700-square-foot Grand Suite balcony overlooks a deep-water marina. perrykeywest.com

On a 27-acre island just off Key West, Sunset Key Cottages has 40 cottages, private beach, zero-entry pool and two whirlpools, spa, two tennis courts and upscale waterfront Latitudes restaurant. A three-bedroom Paradise Cottage is ideal for boutique weddings. sunsetkeycottages.com

In Key West, the 18-room, oceanfront Victorian-style The Southernmost House offers 5,000 square feet of space and heated infinity pool. The Historic Hotels of America property can be booked exclusively for 300. southernmosthouse.com

Keys cuisine features fresh seafood

Food stations showcasing Florida Keys seafood are among top trends for wedding festivities. Creatively prepared cuisine is artfully — and organically — enhanced with fresh tropical lime and coconut, mango and papaya.

Couples often request “Floribbean”-themed menus combining indigenous Keys seafood with spicy Caribbean and Latin flavors. A Cuban-style pig roast is popular for casual rehearsal dinners. Boat-to-table seafood — sweet Key West pink shrimp, succulent stone crab claws, fresh ceviche, yellowtail snapper or hogfish — is often requested as an entrée or in a bountiful seafood station.

Dessert trends include melt-in-your-mouth Key lime creations and metallic-gold cakes. Colorful desserts include hand-rolled, ganache-filled Key lime “cupcake sushi” cakes. Mini Key lime tarts are also popular, styled after the island chain’s famous signature Key lime pie.



A showcase of indigenous Florida Keys seafood.

Andy Newman

Only-in-the-Keys venues offer intriguing options

Weddings in the balmy Florida Keys can be romantically barefoot or dressy, more elegant affairs. Unique venues found nowhere else in the world are available for pre-event festivities, nuptials, wedding receptions and honeymoons.

Unusual venues — historic forts, picturesque homes of famed authors and artists, and waterfront or underwater settings — reflect the Florida Keys' historic, literary, artistic and maritime heritage.

In Key Largo, couples can enjoy an intimate ceremony aboard the African Queen, the original vessel from John Huston's classic 1951 film starring Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn. Couples also can get married at the dock. Visit africanqueenflkeys.com.

Certified divers can exchange underwater vows at the Christ of the Deep statue, located in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and adjacent to Key Largo's John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. Couples also can marry at fascinating Pennekamp, the nation's first undersea park. Visit floridastateparks.org/park/Pennekamp.

In Islamorada, Morada Bay's Pierre's Restaurant & Lounge and The Beach Cafe are island-style settings known for their delicious cuisine and scenic sunsets. Pierre's is a two-story colonial plantation-style venue and The Beach Café fronts a palm-lined white beach overlooking Florida Bay. Across the highway is The Moorings Village, an 18-acre resort with 18 cottages and homes. Visit MoradaBay.com.

At Theater of the Sea, also in Islamorada, wedding parties can enjoy a private dolphin and sea lion show before an evening ceremony with up to 200 guests. Visit theaterofthesea.com.

In the Marathon area, couples with a love for marine mammals can marry at Dolphin Research Center on Grassy Key. During a "Private



You can take a ride and get married on the African Queen in Key Largo.

Andy Newman

Dolphin Encounter," a dolphin can serve as a wedding attendant or deliver the ring for an unforgettable proposal. Visit dolphins.org.

At Florida Keys Aquarium Encounters in Marathon, couples can schedule an event for up to 300 people amid natural mangrove hammocks and the aquarium's grounds that extend to the serene waters of Vaca Cut. Explore floridakeysaquariumencounters.com.

Bahia Honda State Park in the Lower Keys is a picturesque beach park. Couples can marry in the park or on the Bahia Honda Rail Bridge, built by Henry Flagler as part of the Florida Keys Overseas Highway. Visit floridastateparks.org/park/Bahia-Honda.

In Key West, literary aficionados can speak their vows outdoors on the grounds of the Ernest Hemingway Home & Museum. Famed author and Nobel Prize winner Hemingway lived in the Spanish colonial villa, a registered National Historic Landmark, and wrote famous works there during the 1930s. Up to 100 guests can be accommodated. Private evening house tours can be arranged. More details are at hemingwayhome.com.

The Harry S. Truman Little White House, Florida's only presidential museum, offers lush palm-framed gardens and three lawns that span an acre. The museum can host indoor rehearsal dinners. During his administration from 1945 to 1953, President Truman spent 11 working vacations at the sprawling West

Indian-style residence. For specifics, go to trumanlittlewhitehouse.com.

Get a marriage license

Applying for a marriage license is a relatively simple procedure in Florida's Monroe County, home of the Keys.

Applicants must be at least 18 years old to marry. Couples under 18 should contact the county clerk's office for legal requirements.

A valid photo identification with date of birth — such as a driver's license, passport, student or military ID, or foreign registration card — is required.

Current cost of the license is \$86, with a discounted rate for Florida residents showing proof of premarital class attendance.

Monroe County's Clerk of Court has several Keys locations.

Offices are in Key West at the Monroe County Courthouse, 500 Whitehead St.; in Marathon at the Marathon Branch Courthouse, 3117 Overseas Highway or mile marker 48.5 oceanside; and on Plantation Key at the Upper Keys Government Center, 88820 Overseas Highway or mile marker 88.5 bayside.

Once obtained, the license must be used within 60 days. Couples marrying in the Keys can also obtain a marriage license anywhere in Florida.

For additional required details, visit clerk-of-the-court.com or call 305-292-3458 in Key West; 305-289-6027 in Marathon; or 305-852-7145 on Plantation Key.

Planning timetable for Keys weddings

At least a year (12 months) before desired wedding month

- Select Florida Keys venue and wedding date
- Choose alternate backup venue
- Hire full-service or day-of wedding planner
- Research hotels, secure hotel room block
- Research flights into airports: Key West (EYW), Marathon (MTH), Miami (MIA), Fort Lauderdale (FLL), Fort Myers (RSW), Naples (APF)
- Review policies for obtaining a Florida marriage license
- Announce engagement, take engagement photos
- Create personal wedding website as information source

Nine months before wedding

- Visit Florida Keys for tour of venue, food tastings, hair and makeup sessions; meet with wedding planner and vendors
- Choose wedding party (bridesmaids, groomsmen, attendants)
- Create gift registry
- Begin shopping for attire: wedding and bridesmaid dresses, groom and groomsmen or attendant apparel
- Create guest list and gather email and physical addresses
- Send "save the date" cards with location and hotel room block details

Six months before wedding

- Book travel, discuss details with wedding party
- Coordinate with planner to secure vendors (photography, catering, cake, flowers, décor, music, officiant, transportation, hair and makeup)
- Purchase wedding rings
- Create itinerary, including group activities, for guests with details on welcome reception, rehearsal event, wedding and farewell brunch; include suggestions for individual Keys activities and how to book
- Book group activities with required deposits
- Order invitations

Three months before wedding

- Mail invitations
- Confirm all event details (floral arrangements, photography package, song lists, menus, cake, etc.) with vendors
- Order guest favors, welcome bags and thank you gifts for bridesmaids, groomsmen, attendants and family
- Begin writing vows and choose readings for ceremony

Two months before wedding

- Confirm documentation, begin process to obtain marriage license

One month before wedding

- Ship amenities for wedding and reception to venue or planner
- Contact hotel with details on welcome bags for delivery to guests
- Finalize hotel room block and release extra rooms
- Print programs, itineraries, welcome letters
- Finalize last-minute details with vendors
- Finalize wedding timeline and guest itineraries with wedding planner
- Create seating chart and give to wedding venue
- Complete attire fittings; arrange for steaming of wedding attire

Two weeks before wedding

- Create photo list for photographer
- Confirm details for pre-nuptial events: bachelor, bachelorette parties
- Share, post contact information with wedding party

At least one week before wedding

- Pack, travel to the Florida Keys
- Conduct final meetings with wedding planner, venue and hotel
- Pick up marriage license fla-keys.com/weddings

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Benjamin Spaulding, following their

wedding in Islamorada, by Bob Care.

Average monthly sunrise and sunset times for the Keys

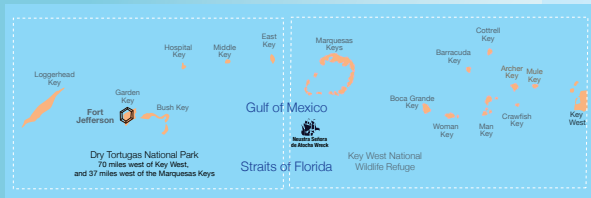


MONTH	SUNRISE	SUNSET
January	7:15 a.m.	6 p.m.
February	7 a.m.	6:20 p.m.
March*	6:45 a.m.	6:30 p.m.
	7:30 a.m.	7:40 p.m.
April	7 a.m.	7:50 p.m.
May	6:45 a.m.	8 p.m.
June	6:40 a.m.	8:15 p.m.
July	6:45 a.m.	8:20 p.m.
August	7 a.m.	8 p.m.
September	7:15 a.m.	7:30 p.m.
October	7:25 a.m.	7 p.m.
November*	7:30 a.m.	6:45 p.m.
	6:45 a.m.	5:40 p.m.
December	7:05 a.m.	5:40 p.m.

*Months with Daylight Savings Time shifts

More precise times at: timeanddate.com/sun/usa/key-west

Traveling Tips to the Florida Keys



The 125-mile-long Florida Keys island chain is linked to mainland Florida by U.S. Highway 1, the Overseas Highway. Visitors can fly into Miami International Airport (MIA) or Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL) and from there can reach the Keys by airport shuttle bus or rental car. Travelers can reach Key Largo, the gateway to the Keys, in about an hour from Miami or an hour and 45 minutes from Fort Lauderdale.

Air Service to the Florida Keys

For an up-to-date roster of commercial airlines and on-demand charter operators serving Key West International and Florida Keys Marathon International Airports, go to fla-keys.com/how-to-get-here.

Driving Directions

From Miami International Airport (MIA), take LeJeune Road south to 836 West. Take the Florida Turnpike (State Road 91) south toward Key West.

The Turnpike ends at U.S. 1 in Florida City. Follow U.S. 1 south about 22 miles to Key Largo and you and your travel companions are now in the Florida Keys.

From Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL), exit the airport and follow the signs for I-595 West. Take 595 to the Florida Turnpike and follow the signs for the Florida Keys.

From farther north, take the Florida Turnpike south to just below Fort Lauderdale, where Exit 4 joins the southern portion of the Turnpike that ends at U.S. 1 in Florida City. Follow U.S. 1 south into the Florida Keys.

From Florida's west coast, take I-75 (Alligator Alley) east to the Miami exit, and south to the Turnpike Extension.

Driving Data to Keys/Key Largo

FROM	MILES	KM	HOURS
Miami	50	80	1
Fort Myers	200	320	4
Tampa	300	480	6
Orlando	280	450	5.25

Distance from Miami

REGION	MILES	KM	MILE MARKER
Key Largo	50	80	107-90
Islamorada	76	122	89-66
Marathon	111	178	65-45
Lower Keys	128	205	44-5
Key West	159	254	4-0

Via Bus

Bus/shuttle connections from MIA and FLL to the Florida Keys allow traveling to the Keys without renting a car.

Via Boat

Ferry connections from Fort Myers or Marco Island to Key West are offered via the Key West Express. Voyages take approximately 3.5 hours.

Extensive details on getting to the Florida Keys & Key West are available at:

fla-keys.com/how-to-get-here



facebook.com/floridakeysandkeywest



[@thefloridakeys](https://twitter.com/thefloridakeys)



youtube.com/FloridaKeysTV



keysvoices.com



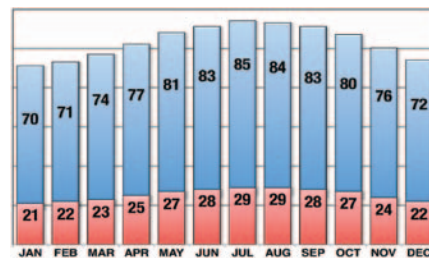
[@thefloridakeys](https://instagram.com/thefloridakeys)

Weather/Climate

Wherever you are right now, chances are the weather is better in the Florida Keys. That's true even on a summer day. The hottest it's ever been in Key West is 97° F (36° C), and that was in 1880. At the peak of summer, the average high air temperature is about 89° F (32° C). The Keys are devoid of superhighways or urban sprawl to absorb and radiate the sun's heat. And the subtropical islands are cooled by sea breezes.

In the winter, the Keys are typically the warmest region in the continental U.S. There has never been a frost in Key West, according to the U.S. Weather Service.

Below are the average monthly air temperatures for the past 30 years, according to the Key West weather office. Temperatures in blue shades are Fahrenheit and those in light red are Celsius.



Help and More Information

If you're traveling in the Keys and need any help, call the toll-free visitors assistance line at 1-800-771-KEYS. It's staffed 24 hours a day. To contact visitor offices in the Keys, call 1-800-FLA-KEYS. The Keys website at fla-keys.com has a live chat feature with visitor information specialists available during regular U.S. weekday business hours to aid travelers in vacation planning.