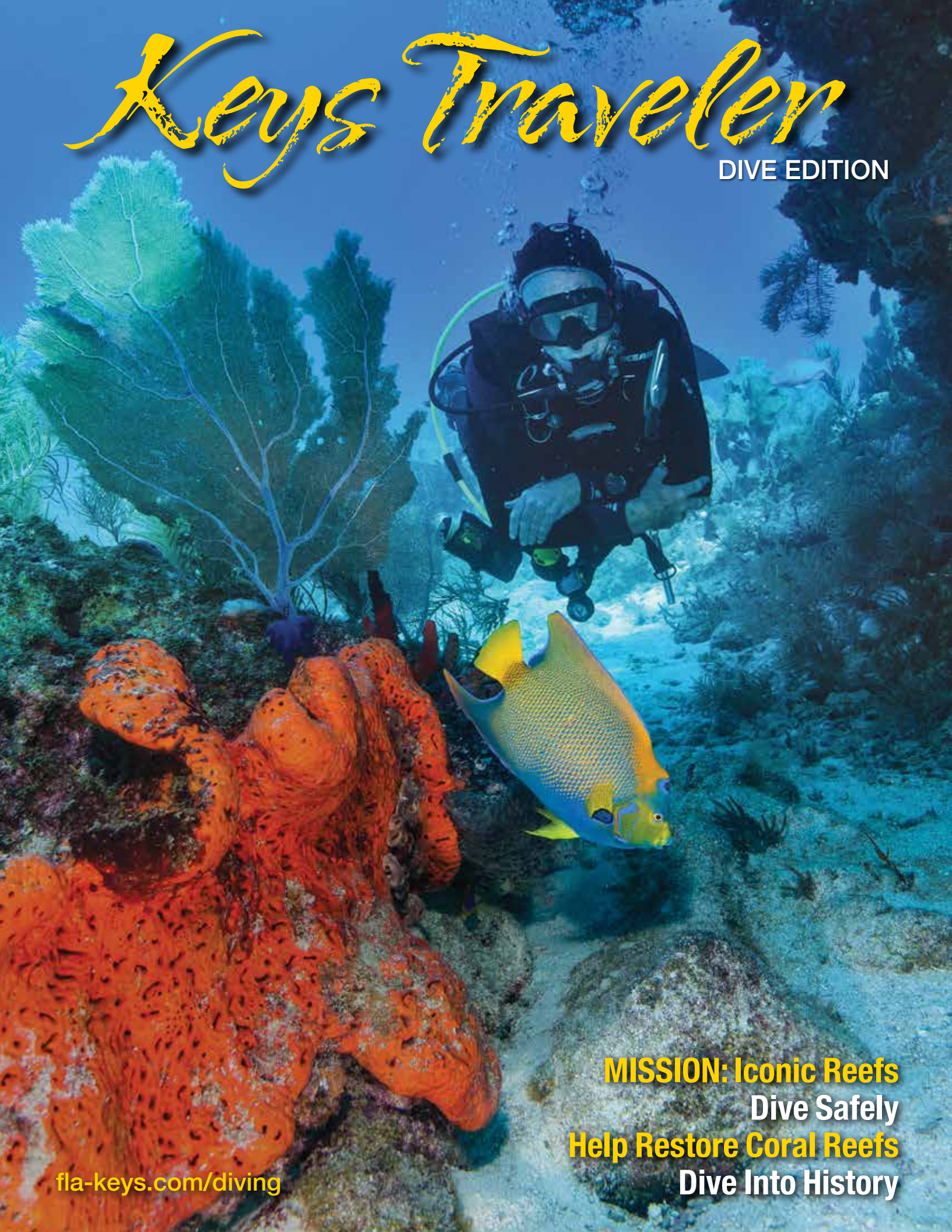


# Keys Traveler

DIVE EDITION



**MISSION: Iconic Reefs**  
Dive Safely  
**Help Restore Coral Reefs**  
Dive Into History

[fla-keys.com/diving](http://fla-keys.com/diving)

A diver prepares a reef site off Key West to outplant discs of elkhorn coral that were propagated in a nursery.

# Get Involved in Coral Restoration



Communities can play a significant role as stewards of the world's oceans.

As citizen scientists, volunteer divers and nondivers are invited to aid in reef restoration in the Florida Keys. Join marine scientists with multiple coral restoration organizations to productively give back to the living, dynamic underwater ecosystem through coral fragging workshops, coral nursery cleanings, coral outplanting trips and coral reef monitoring trips.

Florida Keys coral restoration entities include:

- Reef Renewal USA
- Coral Restoration Foundation
- I.CARE
- Mote Marine Laboratory with three separate locations including the Elizabeth Moore International Center for Coral Reef Research and Restoration on Summerland Key, the Islamorada Coral Nursery and the Key Largo Coral Nursery.

Each organization is devoted to overcoming the challenges coral reefs face, developing ever-improving methods to propagate and maintain dozens of important coral species while preserving genetic diversity.

Volunteers learn about impacts on Florida's reefs in informal educational workshops that explore restoration of endangered staghorn, elkhorn and boulder corals — critical reef-building species that



A nursery-grown coral is outplanted using tie-wraps and a nail at a Florida Keys offshore restoration site.

Mote Marine Laboratory (2)

have the best chance to propagate and create new habitats.

## Keys Traveler DIVE EDITION

**Editor:** Andy Newman **Managing Editor:** Julie Botteri **Copy Editor:** Buck Banks

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Cover photo by Tim Grollmund

# Dive Safely

## The Importance of Physical Health, Certification Level

One of the most significant things a person can do to enhance his or her dive safety, before submerging, is to be physically fit. This doesn't mean you need to run 3 miles two weeks before going on a dive vacation.

Instead, divers of any age should embrace a fitness lifestyle that includes diet and exercise.

Aerobic exercise – walking, running, using a treadmill – is important to get your heart beating. Swimming in a pool, outdoor or indoor, can also be a year-round activity to maintain physical strength and endurance.

From a physical standpoint, what is required of a diver? Most fundamentally, to get back to the boat at the end of the dive.

You may be forced to go beyond your normal personal limits during a dive if the waves kick up, there's current or you end up too far from the boat and tired when you surface. Divers must be prepared to operate at a certain level of safety and efficiency.

The condition of your dive equipment is equally critical. Have it inspected and professionally serviced to ensure it is operating correctly – especially if it has been at least a year since your last dive.

Are you current with your certification level? Enroll in a refresher course in a pool, lake or quarry at home if you haven't been diving in a year or more. Dust off the cobwebs and get comfortable again with your gear. It's a modest investment of time and money to improve upon underwater skills and, more importantly, boost your diving confidence.

### When You Dive

Now that you've booked a Florida Keys dive vacation, how can you be a better, safer diver once you get on the boat?

Keys dive charter operators stress diving within your certification level.

If you're an open-water diver, you'll want to enjoy one of the Keys' wonderful shallow reefs.

If you're an advanced open-water diver or higher, the Keys have deeper shipwrecks to explore as well.

Listen closely to the dive boat crew's safety briefing. Not all Keys dive operators provide a dive guide. It's important to understand

the crew's thorough review of how best to get off and on the boat as well as navigating the dive site, potential currents, hand signals and monitoring not just your air supply but also your dive buddy's.

In the event a dive accident occurs, the Florida Keys are equipped with emergency medical services including a hyperbaric chamber. Any advanced medical treatments needed are readily accessible on mainland Florida.

Diving in the Florida Keys is available for nearly all ages and all certification levels. The goal among dive professionals is that you have an enjoyable, safe dive vacation.



Student divers follow an ascent line to the surface after a training dive in the Florida Keys.

## Remember...

- Be physically fit before you dive.
- Professionally inspect and service dive gear before you get in the water.
- Take a refresher course.
- Dive within your certification level.
- Listen closely to crew safety briefing.



See our Dive Safety Video

# Keys Sanctuary and Partners Team Up to Preserve Coral Reefs

By Scott Atwell

It's old (10,000 years), it's large (stretching from North Key Largo to the Dry Tortugas), it's unique (the only living barrier coral reef in the continental United States) and don't even ask how much it's worth (hint: the answer will start with a B).

All of which is to say the decision to increase coral reef coverage in the Florida Keys was not so much a decision as it was a requirement — even in the face of unprecedented pressures from man and mother nature alike.

Mission: Iconic Reefs (M:IR) is one of the largest collaborative coral reef restoration efforts the world has ever seen, made possible through years of restoration practice, research and innovation that have laid the comprehensive foundation to even dream — much less start — such a bold endeavor.

Launched in December 2019 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the program is to add over half a million mature corals to seven iconic reefs throughout the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, with a goal to significantly increase coral cover.

The work is expected to take up to 20 years, driven by current restoration partners including Coral Restoration Foundation, Mote Marine Laboratory and Reef Renewal USA — organizations that are each true leaders in the coral restoration field. These practitioners grow corals in land-based and in-water nurseries and then outplant them to the iconic sites, where they can grow and fill in gaps along the reefs that have emerged over the last 40 years.

Meanwhile, partners at the Smithsonian Institution are



## MISSION: Iconic Reefs

Key Largo underwater videographer Frazier Nivens frames his camera on an elkhorn coral cluster off the Upper Florida Keys in August 2022.

developing a population management strategy for elkhorn coral using data from previous genotyping that focuses on corals that seem to do well when other corals don't — considered more resilient in the face of ocean acidification and increased water temperatures.

Restoring reefs involves more than reviving the corals themselves.

The M:IR plan includes the intentional distribution of herbivorous grazers — animals like Caribbean king crab and the long-spined sea urchin — that consume enough algae to keep the reef clean to promote coral health and growth. Over 200,000 grazers are part of planned reintroduction for each phase of the mission.

Site preparation and maintenance are as critical as the restoration process itself, much the same way gardening work requires weeding and pruning. Site preparation enables a reef to receive outplants through the initial removal of nuisance species, leading to increased coral survival over time.

To accomplish those activities at all

seven sites, the program leverages the local dive community, facilitated through such programs as Iconic Reef Guardians, a partnership enabling professional Blue Star dive operators to engage customers in M:IR-focused maintenance and stewardship dives. Soon, the program is to bring volunteer divers into sea-based coral nurseries and,

Photo by Stephen Frink

eventually, onto the restoration sites. Visionaries, it is said, are people who plant trees knowing full well they will never live to rest in their shade. A version of that proverb relative to the oceans is Mission: Iconic Reefs.

**Scott Atwell is the Communications and Outreach Manager for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.**

Boats carrying snorkelers are anchored at the Alligator Reef Sanctuary Preservation Area off Islamorada.

## What is a Sanctuary Preservation Area?

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary protects nearly 3,900 square miles of waters surrounding the Florida Keys. Five zones, including Sanctuary Preservation Areas, protect critical marine species and special habitats such as coral reefs.

SPAs encompass discrete, biologically important areas that help sustain critical marine species and habitats.

There are 18 SPAs within the sanctuary, which together cover a total of almost 5 square nautical miles.

Diving, swimming and snorkeling activities are allowed in SPAs, which are marked by 30-inch round yellow boundary buoys.

However, there are prohibitions inside these zones. They include:

- Discharging any matter except cooling water or engine exhaust.
- Taking or possessing any marine life or protected wildlife.
- Touching or standing on living or dead coral.
- Anchoring on living or dead coral or any attached organism.
- Anchoring when a mooring buoy is available.
- Removing, injuring or possessing coral or live rock.

Sanctuary-wide regulations must also be followed in SPAs.

SPAs have mooring buoys for boaters to use to prevent anchor damage to corals.

[floridakeys.noaa.gov/zones/spas](http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/zones/spas)



Download the Marine Sanctuary Explorer mobile app



Andy Newman

## Catch the Facts About Florida Keys Lobster Seasons

Many Florida Keys visitors and residents participate in the annual two-day spiny lobster sport season and the traditional lobster harvesting season.

Known as “mini-season” because of its short duration, Florida’s statewide, two-day recreational-only harvesting timeframe begins the last Wednesday

of July at 12:01 a.m. and ends the following day at midnight. Regular lobster season begins at 12:01 a.m. Aug. 6 and ends March 31.

Rules include a limit of six lobsters — each with a carapace measuring larger than 3 inches — per person, per day. Possession and use of a measuring device is required. A

lobster must be measured in the water and the lobster must remain intact until after returning to shore.

Lobster harvest regulations can be found at [KeysLobsterSeason.com](http://KeysLobsterSeason.com).



KeysLobsterSeason.com

## History of Diving Museum Spotlights Sport’s Fascinating Heritage

South Florida has played a unique role in the launch of sport and recreational diving dating back as far as the early 1900s.

World renowned as a dive destination, the Florida Keys also are the site of a museum offering intriguing insights into the sport’s centuries of history.

The Florida Keys History of Diving Museum opened in 2005. Located in Islamorada, it offers a unique showcase into mankind’s quest to explore, understand and venture beneath the sea.

Co-founded by Dr. Sally Bauer, a

Women’s Diving Hall of Fame inductee, and her late husband Dr. Joe Bauer, the museum holds 3,000 square feet of interactive exhibits. Displays include the world’s most comprehensive collection of diving artifacts from more than 30 countries, fascinating photographs and other antiquities along with two featured exhibits every year.

Museum visitors come within inches of the earliest diving machines, including a full-scale replica of an all-wood diving bell, and can stroll past the Parade of Nations, a

closeup display of historic hard-hat dive helmets from 24 nations.

A separate gallery is dedicated to Art McKee, widely acclaimed as a pioneer of recreational diving and the father of modern treasure diving. He is best known for his salvage work on the wreck of the La Capitana, a Spanish



Ira Hugh Hudson

The History of Diving Museum features the world’s most comprehensive collection of diving artifacts.

galleon that sank off the Upper Keys in 1733, from which McKee reaped a rich harvest in gold, silver and artifacts. McKee also was appointed the state’s first acting underwater archaeologist. He later uncovered the sites of the Infante, Herrera, Chaves, San Pedro and

San José.

The museum’s Bauer Diving History Research Library houses an unparalleled collection of rare research materials related to diving history.

Visitors also can participate in the museum’s valuable yearlong educational resources through free “Immerse Yourself!” lectures held the third Wednesday of every month.

[DivingMuseum.org](http://DivingMuseum.org)

## Florida Keys are Featured on New Dive Television Show



The Florida Keys are featured on the new recreational diving show, “Destination Dive,” with the pilot episode already broadcast on Discovery and five new shows originating from the Keys to air on Discovery in July 2023.

With an emphasis on conservation, protection and activism, “Destination Dive” takes viewers on exciting adventures as unique as the Florida Keys island chain it covers.

“The Keys are teeming with amaz-

ing diving, marine life and people who are passionate about protecting oceans,” said Mike Zimmer, the show’s executive producer. “‘Destination Dive’ shares their stories in unique and compelling ways.

“This is the next generation of dive shows and it’s all about protecting our oceans,” added Zimmer.

Among other topics, first-episode segments cover coral restoration, family diving and the Florida Keys Wreck Trek.

“Our audience is captivated by these stories, people and

the visual beauty we transport them to,” said Captain Eric Billips, the show’s host and a Florida Keys dive operator. “Spending time with these extraordinary individuals is not only fun, but also truly inspiring.”

To watch the pilot and to learn air dates for July 2023, visit the show’s website, [destinationdive.tv](http://destinationdive.tv).

Additionally, all five new episodes are also to be available for viewing on the show’s website following their airings on Discovery.

# Traveling Tips to the Florida Keys



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FloridaKeysTV



keysvoices.com

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](http://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 will be 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) south to the Miami exit, and south to the Turnpike Extension.

## Driving Data to Keys/Key Largo

FROM	MILES	KM	HOURS
Miami	58	93	1
Fort Myers	200	320	4
Tampa	300	480	6
Orlando	280	450	5.75
Jacksonville	490	780	10

## Distance from Miami

REGION	MILES	KM	MILE MARKER
Key Largo	58	93	108-90
Islamorada	76	122	90-63
Marathon	111	178	63-40
Lower Keys	135	217	40-4
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](http://fla-keys.com/how-to-get-here)

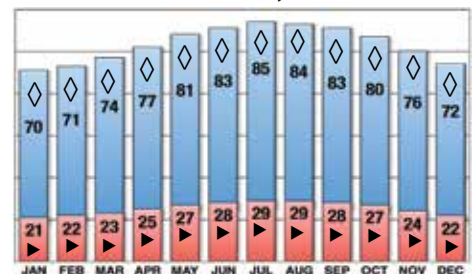
## Weather/Climate

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 summer's peak, 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 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 past 30-year monthly air temperatures from the Key West weather office. Temperatures in blue shades are Fahrenheit and those in red are Celsius.



## Help and More Information

If you're traveling in the Keys and need any help, call the toll-free visitor assistance line at 800-771-KEYS. It's staffed 24 hours a day. To contact visitor offices throughout the Florida Keys, call 800-FLA-KEYS, weekdays during normal business hours. The Florida Keys fact-filled website is at [fla-keys.com](http://fla-keys.com).



**Keys Info**