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

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 person-alized 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 cafe 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 A bride and a guest get into the music with a steel drummer. 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 balcony on the beach.”

Also trending are casual bayside seafood boils with natural island décor and rustic repurposed wooden tables, said Kelsey Pfeiderer, 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. — Laura Myers

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

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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
Florida Keys Destination Resorts Create Wedding Memories

By Laura Myers

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 its 10 secluded bungalows, three-bedroom beach house, full-service spa and 6,000-square-foot beach. playalargoresort.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 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

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. casamaradora.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 Café 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 a Tahitian-style Spa Island. Its

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 key lime pie 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 tarts and macarons. Colorful desserts include hand-rolled, ganache-filled Key lime "cupcake" tarts and "cupcake" key lime "cupcake" tarts are also popular, styled after the island chain’s famous signature Key lime pie.

Keys cuisine features fresh seafood

A showcase of Indigenous Florida Keys seafood.
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-wedding 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 africaqueenkeys.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 fascinated Pennekamp, the nation’s first underwater 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 Cafe fronts a palm-lined white beach overlooking Florida Bay. Across the highway is The Moorings Village; an 18-acre waterfront and The Beach Café fronts a two-story colonial plantation-style 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 premari- tal 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 also can 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 (Miami International (MIA), Fort Myers (RSW), Naples (APF)
Review policies for obtaining a Florida marriage license

At least one week 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, groomsman, 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, decor, 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
Create 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, groomsman, 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 wedding vendors: 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
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. Travellers 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

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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

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 visitor’s assistance line at 1-800-771-KEYS. It’s staffed 24 hours a day. To contact visitor offices in the Keys, call 1-800-FLAKEYS. 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.