

Key West, Florida

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Key West is a city in Monroe County, Florida, United States. The city encompasses the island of Key West, the part of Stock Island north of U.S. 1 (the Overseas Highway) (east), Sigsbee Park (north, originally known as *Dredgers Key*), Fleming Key (north), and Sunset Key (west, originally known as *Tank Island*). Both Fleming Key and Sigsbee Park are part of Naval Air Station Key West and are inaccessible by civilians. Key West is the county seat of Monroe County.^[3] Key West is the southernmost city in the Continental United States. It also contains the southern terminus of U.S. 1, State Road A1A, the East Coast Greenway and, before 1935, the Florida East Coast Railway.

Key West is 129 miles (208 km) southwest (229.9 degrees) of Miami, Florida,^[4] (about 160 miles (260 km) by car) and 106 miles (171 km) north-northeast (21.2 degrees) of Havana, Cuba.^[5] Cuba, at its closest point, is 94 statute miles (151 km) south.^[6] Key West is a seaport destination for many passenger cruise ships.^[7] The Key West International Airport provides airline service. Hotels and guest houses are available for lodging. Naval Air Station Key West is an important year round training site for naval aviation due to the superb weather conditions. It is also a reason the city was chosen as the Winter White House of President Harry S. Truman. The central business district primarily comprises Duval Street, and includes much of the northwest corner of the island along Whitehead, Simonton, Front, Greene, Caroline, and Eaton Streets and Truman Avenue. The official city motto is "One Human Family."

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Key West, Florida

City

City of Key West



Aerial photo of Key West, looking north, March 2001.



Seal

Nickname(s): "The Conch Republic", "Southernmost City in the Continental United States"

Motto: *One Human Family*



Location in Monroe County and the state of Florida



U.S. Census Bureau map showing city limits



Key West, Florida

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Key_West,_Florida

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History

Colonial and precolonial times

In Pre-Columbian times Key West was inhabited by the Calusa people. The first European to visit was Juan Ponce de León in 1521. As Florida became a Spanish territory, a fishing and salvage village with a small garrison was established here.

Cayo Hueso (Spanish pronunciation: [ˈkajo ˈweso]) is the original Spanish name for the island of Key West. Spanish-speaking people today also use the term when referring to Key West. It literally means "bone cay (a low island or reef)". It is said that the island was littered with the remains (bones) of prior native inhabitants, who used the isle as a communal graveyard.^[8] This island was the westernmost Key with a reliable supply of water.^[9]

In 1763, when Great Britain took control of Florida, the community of Spaniards and Native Americans were moved to Havana. Florida returned to Spanish control 20 years later, but there was no official resettlement of the island. Informally the island was used by fishermen from Cuba and from the British, who were later joined by others from the United States after the latter nation's independence. While claimed by Spain, no nation exercised *de facto* control over the community there for some time.

Coordinates: 24°33′33″N 81°47′2.51″W	
Country	United States
State	Florida
County	Monroe
Government	
 • Type	Council–manager
 • Mayor	Craig C. Cates
Area	
 • Total	7.4 sq mi (19 km ²)
 • Land	5.9 sq mi (15 km ²)
 • Water	1.5 sq mi (4 km ²)
Elevation	18 ft (5 m)
Population (2010) ^[1]	
 • Total	24,649
 • Density	4,411.8/sq mi (1,703.4/km ²)
Time zone	Eastern (EST) (UTC-5)
 • Summer (DST)	EDT (UTC-4)
ZIP code(s)	33040, 33041, 33045
Area code(s)	305
Exchanges:292,293,294,295,296.	
FIPS code	12-36550 ^[1]
GNIS feature ID	0294048 ^[2]
Website	www.keywestcity.com (http://www.keywestcity.com)



Key West, ca. 1856

Ownership claims

In 1815, the Spanish governor of Cuba in Havana deeded the island of Key West to Juan Pablo Salas, an officer of the Royal Spanish Navy Artillery posted in Saint Augustine, Florida. After Florida was transferred to the United States in 1821, Salas was so eager to sell the island that he sold it twice – first for a sloop valued at \$575 to a General John Geddes, a former governor of South Carolina, and then to a U.S. businessman John W. Simonton, during a meeting in a Havana café on January 19, 1822, for the equivalent of \$2,000 in pesos in 1821. Geddes tried in vain to secure his rights to the property before Simonton who, with the aid of some influential friends in Washington, was able to gain clear title to the island. Simonton had wide-ranging business interests in Mobile, Alabama. He bought the island because a friend, John Whitehead, had drawn his attention to the opportunities presented by the island's strategic location. John Whitehead had been stranded in Key West after a shipwreck in 1819 and he had been impressed by the potential offered by the deep harbor of the island. The island was indeed considered the "**Gibraltar of the West**" because of its strategic location on the 90-mile (140 km)–wide deep shipping lane, the Straits of Florida, between the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

On March 25, 1822, Lt. Commander, Matthew C. Perry, sailed the schooner *Shark* to Key West and planted the U.S. flag, claiming the Keys as United States property.^[10] No protests were made over the American claim on Key West, so the Florida Keys became the property of the United States.

After claiming the Florida Keys for the United States, Perry renamed Cayo Hueso (Key West) to "Thompson's Island" for Secretary of the Navy Smith Thompson, and the harbor "Port Rodgers" in honor of War of 1812 hero and President of the Navy Supervisors Board John Rodgers. In 1823, Commodore David Porter of the United States Navy West Indies Anti-Pirate Squadron took charge of Key West, which he

ruled (but, according to some, exceeding his authority) as military dictator under martial law. Porter was tasked by the American Navy to end acts of piracy in the Key West area including slave ships.

First developers

Soon after his purchase, John Simonton subdivided the island into plots and sold three undivided quarters of each plot to:

- John Mountain and U.S. Consul John Warner, who quickly resold their quarter to Pardon C. Greene, who took up residence on the island. Greene is the only one of the four "founding fathers" to establish himself permanently on the island, where he became quite prominent as head of P.C. Greene and Company. He was a member of the city council^[11] and also served briefly as mayor. He died in 1838 at the age of 57.
- John Whitehead, his friend who had advised him to buy Key West. John Whitehead lived in Key West for only eight years. He became a partner in the firm of P.C. Greene and Company from 1824 to 1827. A lifelong bachelor, he left the island for good in 1832. He came back only once, during the Civil War in 1861, and died the next year.
- John Fleeming (nowadays spelled Fleming). John W.C. Fleeming was English-born and was active in mercantile business in Mobile, Alabama, where he befriended John Simonton. Fleeming spent only a few months in Key West in 1822 and left for Massachusetts, where he married. He returned to Key West in 1832 with the intention of developing salt manufacturing on the island but died the same year at the young age of 51.

Simonton spent the winter in Key West and the summer in Washington, where he lobbied hard for the development of the island and to establish a naval base on the island, both to take advantage of the island's strategic location and to bring law and order to the town. He died in 1854.

The names of the four "founding fathers"^[12] of modern Key West were given to main arteries of the island when it was first platted in 1829 by William Adee Whitehead, John Whitehead's younger brother. That first plat and the names used remained mostly intact and are still in use today. Duval Street, the island's main street, is named after Florida's first territorial governor, who served between 1822 and 1834 as the longest serving governor in Florida's U.S. history.

William Whitehead became chief editorial writer for the "Enquirer", a local newspaper, in 1834. He had the genius of preserving copies of his newspaper as well as copies from the "Key West Gazette", its predecessor. He later sent those copies to the Monroe County clerk for preservation, which gives us a precious view of life in Key West in the early days (1820–1840).

In 1852 the first Catholic Church, St. Mary's Star-Of-The-Sea was built. The year 1864 became a landmark for the church in South Florida when five Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary arrived from Montreal, Canada, and established the first Catholic school in South Florida. The Convent of Mary Immaculate, the oldest Catholic School in Florida which is now known as Mary Immaculate Star of the Sea School.

U.S. Civil War and late 19th century

During the American Civil War, while Florida seceded and joined the Confederate States of America, Key West remained in U.S. Union hands because of the naval base. However, most locals were sympathetic to the South, and many flew Confederate flags over their homes.^[13] Fort Zachary Taylor, constructed from 1845 to 1866, was an important Key West outpost during the Civil War. Construction began in 1861 on two other forts, East and West Martello Towers, which served as side armories and batteries for the larger fort. When completed, they were connected to Fort Taylor by railroad tracks for movement of munitions.^[13] Fort Jefferson, located about 68 miles (109 km) from Key West on Garden Key in the Dry Tortugas, served after the Civil War as the prison for Dr. Samuel A. Mudd, convicted of conspiracy for setting the broken leg of John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln.

In the late 19th century, salt and salvage declined as industries, but Key West gained a thriving cigar-making industry.

During Cuba's unsuccessful war for independence in the 1860s and 1870s, many Cubans sought refuge in Key West.

By 1889, Key West was the largest and wealthiest city in Florida.^[13]

The Battleship USS Maine (ACR-1) sailed from Key West on its fateful visit to Havana, where it blew up, igniting the Spanish–American War. Crewmen from the ship are buried in Key West, and the Navy investigation into the blast occurred at the Key West Customs House.

Pan American Airlines was founded in Key West, originally to fly visitors to Havana, in 1926. The airline contracted with the United States Postal Service in 1927 to deliver mail to and from Cuba and the United States. The mail route was known as the "Key West, Florida Havana Mail Route".



Fort Zachary Taylor in Key West, active during the Civil War, contains the largest collection of Civil War cannons ever discovered at a single location.

John F. Kennedy was to use "90 miles from Cuba" extensively in his speeches against Fidel Castro. Kennedy himself visited Key West a month after the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Prior to the Cuban revolution of 1959, there were regular ferry and airplane services between Key West and Havana.

Geography

Key West is located at 24°33′33″N 81°47′03″W﻿ / ﻿24.55917°N 81.78417°W﻿ / 24.55917; -81.78417.^[14] The maximum elevation above sea level is about 18 feet (6 m), a 1-acre (4,000 m²) area known as Solares Hill.^[15]

According to the United States Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 7.4 square miles (19 km²), of which 5.9 square miles (15 km²) is land and 1.5 square miles (3.9 km²) (19.73%) is water.

Since the 1940s, the island has more than doubled in size via landfill. The new section on the eastern side is called "New Town." It contains shopping centers, retail malls, residential areas, schools, ball parks, and Key West International Airport.

According to the Key West Association of Realtors (KWAR), Key West can be divided into four distinct areas: Old Town, Casa Marina, Mid-Town and New Town, with various neighborhoods in each area.

Key West and most of the rest of the Keys are on the dividing line between the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. The two bodies have different currents, with the calmer and warmer Gulf of Mexico being characterized by great clumps of seagrass. The area where the two bodies merge between Key West and Cuba is called the Straits of Florida.

Rail and road access



The FEC yard and station on Trumbo Point in Key West circa 1930.

Key West was relatively isolated until 1912, when it was connected to the Florida mainland via the Overseas Railway extension of Henry M. Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway (FEC). Flagler created a landfill at Trumbo Point for his railyards. The Labor Day Hurricane of 1935 destroyed much of the railroad and killed hundreds of residents, including around 400 World War I veterans who were living in camps and working on federal road and mosquito-control projects in the Middle Keys. The FEC could not afford to restore the railroad.

The U.S. government then rebuilt the rail route as an automobile highway, completed in 1938, which became an extension of United States Highway 1. The portion of U.S. 1 through the Keys is called the Overseas Highway. Franklin Roosevelt toured the road in 1939.



Key West Cemetery near Solares Hill, the highest point of land on the island.

Climate

Key West has a tropical savanna climate (Köppen *Aw*, similar to the Caribbean islands).^[16] Like most tropical climates, Key West has only a small difference in monthly mean temperatures between the coolest month (January) and the warmest month (July) – with the annual range of monthly mean temperatures around 15 °F (8.3 °C). With the exception of Miami Beach, the Florida Keys are the only location on the mainland U.S. known to never have had a frost or freeze – the lowest temperature on record is 41 °F (5 °C) on January 12, 1886 and January 13, 1981. Prevailing easterly tradewinds and sea breezes suppress the usual summertime heating, with temperatures rarely reaching 95 °F (35 °C). There are 55 days per year with 90 °F (32 °C) or greater highs,^[17] with the average window for such readings June 10 through September 22, shorter than almost the entire southeastern U.S. However, low temperatures often remain above 80 °F (27 °C). The all-time record high temperature is 97 °F (36 °C) on July 19, 1880, and August 29, 1956.^[17]

Wet and dry seasons

Like most tropical climates, Key West has a two-season wet and dry climate. The period from November through April is normally sunny and quite dry, with only 25 percent of the annual rainfall occurring. This rainfall usually occurs in advance of cold fronts in a few heavy or light showers. May through October is normally the wet season. During the wet season some rain falls on most days, often in quick tropical downpours, followed by intense sun. Early morning is the favored time for these showers, which is different from mainland Florida, where showers and thunderstorms usually occur in the afternoon. Easterly (tropical) waves during this season occasionally bring excessive rainfall, while infrequent hurricanes may be accompanied by unusually heavy amounts. At any rate, Key West is the driest city in Florida.^[18]

Climate data for Key West Int'l, Florida (1981–2010 normals, extremes 1872–present) ^[a]													
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Record high °F (°C)	90 (32)	87 (31)	89 (32)	91 (33)	93 (34)	96 (36)	97 (36)	97 (36)	95 (35)	93 (34)	91 (33)	88 (31)	97 (36)
Average high °F (°C)	74.3 (23.5)	76.0 (24.4)	78.2 (25.7)	81.3 (27.4)	85.0 (29.4)	87.8 (31)	89.3 (31.8)	89.4 (31.9)	87.9 (31.1)	84.5 (29.2)	79.9 (26.6)	76.0 (24.4)	82.5 (28.1)
Daily mean °F (°C)	69.3 (20.7)	71.0 (21.7)	73.2 (22.9)	76.4 (24.7)	80.3 (26.8)	83.3 (28.5)	84.5 (29.2)	84.5 (29.2)	83.2 (28.4)	80.2 (26.8)	75.8 (24.3)	71.4 (21.9)	77.76 (25.42)
Average low °F (°C)	64.2 (17.9)	66.0 (18.9)	68.3 (20.2)	71.6 (22)	75.7 (24.3)	78.8 (26)	79.8 (26.6)	79.6 (26.4)	78.5 (25.8)	76.0 (24.4)	71.7 (22.1)	66.9 (19.4)	73.1 (22.8)
Record low °F (°C)	41 (5)	44 (7)	47 (8)	48 (9)	63 (17)	65 (18)	68 (20)	68 (20)	64 (18)	59 (15)	49 (9)	44 (7)	41 (5)
Average rainfall inches (mm)	2.04 (51.8)	1.49 (37.8)	2.05 (52.1)	2.05 (52.1)	3.00 (76.2)	4.11 (104.4)	3.55 (90.2)	5.38 (136.7)	6.71 (170.4)	4.93 (125.2)	2.30 (58.4)	2.22 (56.4)	39.83 (1,011.7)
Avg. rainy days (≥ 0.01 in)	6.2	5.3	5.8	4.5	7.2	11.0	11.7	14.2	16.2	11.3	6.6	6.4	106.4
Avg. relative humidity (%)	76.0	74.3	73.0	70.1	71.8	74.0	72.2	73.4	75.3	75.1	76.0	76.2	74.0
Mean monthly sunshine hours	249.6	245.4	308.8	324.6	340.3	314.0	325.2	306.6	269.6	254.7	230.9	234.5	3,404.2
Percent possible sunshine	75	77	83	85	82	77	78	76	73	71	70	71	77
Source: NOAA (relative humidity and sun 1961–1990) ^{[17][20][21]} , The Weather Channel ^[22]													

Hurricanes

Hurricanes rarely impact Key West, and the island has been relatively unaffected by major storms. Some locals maintain that Hurricane Wilma on October 24, 2005, was the worst storm in memory. The entire island was told to evacuate and business owners were forced to shut their doors. After the hurricane had passed, the resulting storm surge sent eight feet of water inland completely inundating a large portion of the lower Keys. Low-lying areas of Key West and the lower Keys, including major tourist destinations, were under as much as three feet of water. Sixty percent of the homes in Key West were flooded.^[23] The higher parts of Old Town, such as the Solares Hill and cemetery areas, did not flood, because of their higher elevations of 12 to 18 feet (5.5 m).^[24] The surge destroyed tens of thousands of cars throughout the lower Keys, and many houses were flooded with one to two feet of sea water. A local newspaper referred to Key West and the lower Keys as a "car graveyard."^[25] The peak of the storm surge occurred when the eye of Wilma had already passed over the Naples area, and the sustained winds during the surge were less than 40 mph (64 km/h).^[24] The storm destroyed the piers at the clothing-optional Atlantic Shores Motel and breached the shark tank at the Key West Aquarium, freeing its sharks. Damage postponed the island's famous Halloween Fantasy Fest until the following December. MTV's *The Real World: Key West* was filming during the hurricane and deals with the storm.



Flooding caused by Wilma on Key Haven, island suburb of Key West, Florida. (October 24, 2005)

In September 2005, NOAA opened its National Weather Forecasting building on White Street. The building is designed to withstand a Category 5 hurricane and its storm surge. Tours of the office are available, weather permitting, Monday-Friday from 10am to 12pm.

The most intense previous hurricane was Hurricane Georges, a Category 2, in September 1998. The storm damaged many of the houseboats along "Houseboat Row" on South Roosevelt Boulevard near Cow Key channel on the east side of the island.

Port of Key West

The first cruise ship was the *Sunward* in 1969, which docked at the Navy's pier in the Truman Annex or the privately owned Pier B. The Navy's pier is called the Navy Mole.

In 1984 the city opened a pier right on Mallory Square. The decision was met with considerable opposition from people who felt it would disrupt the tradition of watching the sunset at Mallory Square. Cruise ships now dock at all three piers.

In present times, several cruise ships dock on a regular basis at Key West, including the Royal Caribbean ship Majesty of the Seas and the Carnival Fascination, both of which visit weekly. However, as of December, 2012 due to a narrow channel, larger cruise ships increasingly bypass Key West. A referendum will be held in Key West in the fall of 2013 regarding whether to request a feasibility study from the Army Corps of Engineers for a \$36 million project to dredge a wider channel. Economic benefits from visiting cruise ship passengers are substantial but not attractive to all Key West citizens as the daily presence of thousands of tourists from cruise ships affects the character of the city resulting in operation of facilities that cater to mass tourism rather than to a potentially more profitable and pleasant upscale clientele. There are also environmental issues as Key West is surrounded by coral habitat.^[7]

As of 2009, there were 859,409 passengers annually.^[26]

Demographics

As of the census^[1] of 2000, there were 25,478 people, 11,016 households, and 5,463 families residing in the city. The population density was 4,285.0 inhabitants per square mile (1,653.3/km²). There were 13,306 housing units at an average density of 2,237.9 per square mile (863.4/km²). The racial makeup of the city was 84.94% White, 9.28% African American, 0.39% Native American, 1.29% Asian, 0.05% Pacific Islander, 1.86% from other races, and 2.18% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino persons of any race were 16.54% of the population.

There were 11,016 households, out of which 19.9% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 37.7% were married couples living together, 8.2% had a female householder with no husband present, and 50.4% were classified as non-families. Of all households, 31.4% were made up of individuals, and 8.1% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.23 and the average family size was 2.84.

In the city the population was spread out, with 16.0% under the age of 18, 8.4% from 18 to 24, 37.1% from 25 to 44, 26.7% from 45 to 64, and 11.7% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 39 years. For every 100 females there were 122.3 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there were 126.0 males.

The median income for a household in the city was \$43,021, and the median income for those classified as families was \$50,895. Males had a median income of \$30,967 versus \$25,407 for females. The per capita income for the city was \$26,316. About 5.8% of families and 10.2% of the population were below the poverty line, including 11.5% of those under age 18 and 11.3% of those age 65 or over.

The ancestries most reported in 2000 were English (12.4%), German (12.2%), Irish (11.3%), Italian (6.8%), American (6.0%) and French (3.6%).

The number of families (as defined by the Census Bureau) declined dramatically in the last four decades of the 20th century. In 1960 there were 13,340 families in Key West, with 42.1% of households having children living in them. By 2000 the population had dwindled to 5,463 families, with only 19.9% of households having children living in them.^[29]

As of 2000, 76.66% spoke English as a first language, while Spanish was spoken by 17.32%, 1.06% spoke Italian, 1.02% spoke French, and German spoken as a mother tongue was at 0.94% of the population. In total, other languages spoken besides English made up 25.33% of residents.^[30]

"Conchs"



Many of the residents of Key West were immigrants from the Bahamas, known as Conchs (pronounced 'conks'), who arrived in increasing numbers after 1830. Many were sons and daughters of Loyalists who fled to the nearest Crown soil during the American Revolution.^[31] In the 20th century many residents of Key West started referring to themselves as "Conchs", and the term is now generally applied to all residents of Key West. Some residents use the term "Conch" (or, alternatively, "Saltwater Conch") to refer to a person born in Key West, while the term "Freshwater Conch" refers to a resident not born in Key West but who has lived in Key West for seven years or more.^[32] However, the true original meaning of *Conch* applies only to someone with European ancestry who immigrated from the Bahamas.^[33] It is said that when a baby was born, the family would put a conch shell on a pole in front of their home.

Many of the black Bahamian immigrants that arrived later live in an area of Old Town next to the Truman Annex called "Bahama Village".

Major industries in Key West in the early 19th century included fishing, salt production, and salvage. In 1860 wrecking made Key West the largest and richest city in Florida and the wealthiest town per capita in the U.S. A number of the inhabitants worked salvaging shipwrecks from nearby Florida reefs, and the town was noted for the unusually high concentration of fine furniture and chandeliers that the locals used in their own homes after salvaging them from wrecks.

Cuban presence



Historical population		
Census	Pop.	%±
1840	688	—
1850	2,367	244.0%
1860	2,832	19.6%
1870	5,016	77.1%
1880	9,890	97.2%
1890	18,080	82.8%
1900	17,114	−5.3%
1910	19,945	16.5%
1920	18,749	−6.0%
1930	12,831	−31.6%
1940	12,927	0.7%
1950	26,433	104.5%
1960	33,956	28.5%
1970	29,312	−13.7%
1980	24,382	−16.8%
1990	24,832	1.8%
2000	25,478	2.6%
2010	24,649	−3.3%
Est. 2014	25,704 ^[27]	4.3%

U.S. Decennial Census^[28]

Key West is closer to Havana (106 mi.) than it is to Miami (129 mi.). In 1890, Key West had a population of nearly 18,800 and was the biggest and richest city in Florida. Half the residents were said to be of Cuban origin, and Key West regularly had Cuban mayors, including the son of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, father of the Cuban Republic, who was elected mayor in 1876.^[34] Cubans were actively involved in reportedly 200 factories in town, producing 100 million cigars annually. José Martí made several visits to seek recruits for Cuban independence starting in 1891 and founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party during his visits to Key West.^[34]

Key West was flooded with refugees during the Mariel Boatlift. Refugees continue to come ashore and, on at least one occasion, most notably in April 2003, flew hijacked Cuban Airlines planes into the city's airport.^[35]



A typical Cuban sandwich that can be found in many cafés and restaurants in and around the city

Government

Key West is governed via the mayor-council system. The city council is known as the city commission. It consists of six members each elected from individual districts. The mayor is elected in a citywide vote.

Mayors

Mayors of Key West have reflected the city's cultural and ethnic heritage. Among its mayors are the first Cuban mayor and one of the first openly gay mayors. One mayor is also famous for having water-skied to Cuba.^[36]

Conch Republic

In 1982 the city of Key West briefly declared its "independence" as the **Conch Republic** in a protest over a United States Border Patrol blockade. This blockade was set up on U.S. 1, where the northern end of the Overseas Highway meets the mainland at Florida City. The blockade was in response to the Mariel Boatlift. A traffic jam of 17 miles (27 km) ensued while the Border Patrol stopped every car leaving the Keys, supposedly searching for illegal immigrants attempting to enter the mainland United States. This paralyzed the Florida Keys, which rely heavily on the tourism industry. Flags, T-shirts and other merchandise representing the Conch Republic are still popular souvenirs for visitors to Key West, and the Conch Republic Independence Celebration—including parades and parties—is celebrated every April 23.

Education

Monroe County School District operates public schools in Key West.

District-operated primary schools serving Key West Island include Glynn R. Archer Elementary School and Poinciana Elementary School. Gerald Adams Elementary School in the City of Key West serves Stock Island. Sigsbee Charter School is a K–7 school of choice, sanctioned by the District and serving predominantly military dependent children as well as children from the community at large. Admission to Sigsbee Charter School is limited and the waiting list is managed by a lottery system. Key West Montessori Charter School is a district-sanctioned charter school on Key West Island.

All of Key West is zoned to Horace O'Bryant Middle School and Key West High School, located on Key West Island.

The main campus of Florida Keys Community College is located in Key West.

Points of interest

Southernmost city

One of the biggest attractions on the island is a concrete replica of a buoy at the corner of South and Whitehead Streets that claims to be the southernmost point in the contiguous United States (*see Extreme Points*). Erected in 1983, the famous brightly painted and labeled "SOUTHERNMOST POINT CONTINENTAL U.S.A.", it is one of the most visited and photographed attractions in Key West.^[37]

However, the marker is *not* located at the southernmost point in the continental United States, as discussed below:

- Whitehead Spit, on the Truman Annex property just west of the buoy, is the true southernmost point, but it has no marker since it is U.S. Navy land and cannot be entered by civilian tourists.

- The private yards directly to the east of the buoy and the beach areas of Truman Annex and Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park also lie farther south than the buoy.
- The farthest-south location that the public can visit is the seaward end of the White Street Pier.
- Florida's, and by extension the continental United States', true physically southernmost point is Ballast Key, a private island owned by David W. Wolkowsky, a wealthy developer, about 10 miles (16 km) west of Key West. Although Ballast Key is located within both the Key West National Wildlife Refuge and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, signs on the island strictly prohibit unauthorized visitors.

The claim "90 Miles to Cuba" on the monument is close to correct, Cuba at its closest point has been measured at 94 statute miles (151 km) from Key West.^[38]

Old Town



Key West Museum of Art & History, formerly known as the Old Post Office and Customhouse

The original Key West settlement on the western part of the island is called "Old Town" and comprises the Key West Historic District. It includes the major tourist destinations of the island, including Mallory Square, Duval Street, the Truman Annex and Fort Zachary Taylor. It is where are found the classic bungalows and guest mansions.

Generally, the structures date from 1886 to 1912. The basic features that distinguish the local architecture include wood-frame construction of one- to two-and-a-half-story structures set on foundation piers about three feet above the ground. Exterior characteristics of the buildings are peaked "metal" roofs, horizontal wood

siding, gingerbread trim, pastel shades of paint, side-hinged louvered shutters, covered porches (or balconies, galleries, or verandas) along the fronts of the structures, and wood lattice screens covering the area elevated by the piers.

Old Town is comparable to the "New Town" section of the island, which was created when the island of Key West was more than doubled in size via landfill. New Town, on the eastern part of the island, contains shopping centers, retail malls, residential areas, schools, ball parks, and Key West International Airport.

Key West Naval Air Station



Key West from space, October 2002

Key West was always an important military post, since it sits at the northern edge of the deepwater channel connecting the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico (the southern edge 90 miles (140 km) away is Cuba) via the Florida Straits. Because of this, Key West since the 1820s had been dubbed the "Gibraltar of the West." Fort Taylor was initially built on the island. The Navy added a small base from which the USS *Maine* sailed to its demise in Havana at the beginning of the Spanish–American War.

At the beginning of World War II the Navy increased its presence from 50 acres (200,000 m²) to 3,000 acres (12 km²), including all of Boca Chica Key's

1,700 acres (7 km²) and the construction of Fleming Key from landfill. The Navy built the first water pipeline extending the length of the keys, bringing fresh water from the mainland to supply its bases.^[39] At its peak 15,000 military personnel and 3,400 civilians were at the base. Included in the base are:

- **NAS Key West** – This is the main facility on Boca Chica, where the Navy trains its pilots. Staff are housed at Sigsbee Park. In 2006 there were 1,650 active-duty personnel; 2,507 family members; 35 Reserve members; and 1,312 civilians listed at the base. In the 1990s the Navy worked out an agreement with the National Park Service to stop sonic booms near Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas. Many of the training missions are directed at the *Marquesas "Patricia" Target* 29 nautical miles (54 km) due west of the base. The target is a grounded ship hulk 306 feet (93 m) in length that is visible only at low tide. Bombs are not actually dropped on the target.
- **Truman Annex** – The area next to Fort Taylor became a submarine pen and was used for the Fleet Sonar School. President Harry S. Truman was to make the commandant's house his winter White House. The Fort Taylor Annex was later renamed the Truman Annex.



Monument marking the southernmost point in the continental United States accessible by civilians, located at the corner of South Street and Whitehead Street.



USS *Stephen W. Groves* (FFG-29) as seen at sunset in Key West on July 22, 2007. This ship is typical of the frigates, destroyers, and smaller military vessels that call at the port. Larger ships, such as aircraft carriers, are prohibited because of their deep draft and the shallowness of the harbor.

This portion has largely been decommissioned and turned over to private developers and the city of Key West. However, there are still a few government offices there, including the new NOAA Hurricane Forecasting Center. The Navy still owns its piers.

- **Trumbo Annex** – The docking area on what had been the railroad yard for Flagler's Overseas Railroad is now used by the Coast Guard.

Notable residences

Winter White House

Several U.S. presidents have visited Key West. Harry Truman visited for 175 days on 11 visits during his presidency and visited several times after he left office (see Truman Annex).

Key West was in a down cycle when Franklin D. Roosevelt visited in 1939. The buildup of military bases on the island occurred shortly thereafter.

In addition to Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower stayed in Key West following a heart attack. In November 1962, John F. Kennedy visited Key West a month after the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Jimmy Carter held a family reunion in Key West after leaving office.

Ernest Hemingway house

Legend has it that Ernest Hemingway wrote part of *A Farewell to Arms* while living above the showroom of a Key West Ford dealership at 314 Simonton Street^[40] while awaiting delivery of a Ford Model A roadster purchased by the uncle of his wife Pauline in 1928.^[41]

Hardware store owner Charles Thompson introduced him to deep-sea fishing. Among the group who went fishing was Joe Russell (also known as Sloppy Joe). Russell was reportedly the model for Freddy in *To Have and Have Not*. Portions of the original manuscript were found at Sloppy Joe's Bar after his death. The group had nicknames for each other, and Hemingway wound up with "Papa".

Pauline's rich uncle Gus Pfeiffer bought the 907 Whitehead Street house^[42] in 1931 as a wedding present. Legend says the Hemingways installed a swimming pool for \$20,000 in the late 1930s (equivalent in 2013 to \$330,000). It was such a high price that Hemingway is said to have put a penny in the concrete, saying, "Here, take the last penny I've got!" The penny is still there.

During his stay he wrote or worked on *Death in the Afternoon*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, and *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*. He used Depression-era Key West as one of the locations in *To Have and Have Not*—his only novel with scenes that occur in the United States.

Pauline and Hemingway divorced in 1939; Hemingway only occasionally visited when returning from Havana until his suicide in 1961.

The six- or seven-toed polydactyl cats descended from Hemingway's original pet "Snowball" still live on the grounds and are cared for at the Hemingway House, despite complaints by the U.S. Department of Agriculture that they are not kept free from visitor contact. The Key West City Commission has exempted the house from a law prohibiting more than four domestic animals per household.



The Ernest Hemingway House, a popular tourist attraction in Key West.



Famous Sloppy Joe's Bar at night



The Silver Slipper dance hall adjacent to Sloppy Joe's, painted in the 1930s by Waldo Peirce.



One of the more than 50 polydactyl cats that live at the Hemingway house. This particular cat has seven (two extra) toes on each paw.

Tennessee Williams house

Tennessee Williams first became a regular visitor to Key West in 1941 and is said to have written the first draft of *A Streetcar Named Desire* while staying in 1947 at the La Concha Hotel. He bought a permanent house in 1949 and listed Key West as his primary residence until his death in 1983. In contrast to Hemingway's grand house in Old Town, the Williams home at 1431 Duncan Street^[43] in the "unfashionable" New Town neighborhood is a very modest bungalow. The house is privately owned and not open to the public. The Academy Award–winning film version of his play *The Rose Tattoo* was shot on the island in 1956. The Tennessee Williams Theatre is located on the campus of Florida Keys Community College on Stock Island.^[44]

Williams had a series of rented homes all over the United States, but the only home he owned was in Key West.

Even though Hemingway and Williams lived in Key West at the same time, they reportedly met only once—at Hemingway's home in Cuba, Finca Vigia.

Attractions, events, recreation, and culture

- Many visitors rent a bicycle and explore the history and architecture of Old Town Key West. Walking tours, including a tour of the unusual Key West Cemetery, are available. The Sunset Celebration at Mallory Square is a daily spectacle for visitors and residents. Boat excursions and tours provide a great way to view Key West from the water.
- The Duval Street bar and restaurant district includes many different entertainment options, all within walking distance of each other.
- The Audubon House and Tropical Gardens is a museum dedicated to the art work of John James Audubon and history of Key West. This was founded by the Wolfson Family as they purchased the home of ship wrecking captain Geiger. John James Audubon painted many of the birds of Key West in this garden.
- The Studios of Key West, founded in 2006 and based at the island's historic Armory building, was established as a new model for an artist community. It comprises a dozen working studio spaces, a main exhibition hall, a sculpture garden, and several adjoining residences and cottages. Its programming continues to grow and includes an extensive series of creative workshops, free humanities lectures, cultural partnerships, and innovative ideas for artists and audiences.
- The Florida Keys Council of the Arts serves as the primary cultural umbrella for Monroe County, from Key Largo to Key West. A non-profit local arts agency, it makes grants, operates the Monroe County Art in Public Places program, sponsors seminars, and manages the on-line cultural calendar for the region. It also manages the County's Tourism Development Council arts marketing grants and serves as a leading advocate for cultural tourism in lower Florida.
- Key West Contemporary Dance Company is a 501c3 nonprofit organization based out of Key West, Florida. Composed of local and visiting professional dancers, it performs at various venues throughout Key West and rehearse at The CoffeeMill Dance Studio in Old Town.
- The Tennessee Williams Theatre is a performing arts center, a civic center, and a community center. It is based at the Florida Keys Community College.
- The Key West Literary Seminar, a celebration of writers and writing held each January, attracts an international audience to hear such writers as Ian McEwan, Margaret Atwood, Billy Collins, and Joyce Carol Oates.
- The Key West Botanical Forest and Garden is a frost-free arboretum and botanical garden containing a number of "champion tree" specimens.
- Nancy Forrester's Secret Garden is a one-acre (4,000 m²) garden resembling a lush, predominantly green rainforest. It is an exhibit of nature's artistry in a woodland garden.
- The Key West Butterfly and Nature Conservatory features a 5,000-square-foot (460 m²) glass-domed tropical butterfly habitat.
- A permanent AIDS Memorial is at the White Street Pier.
- The Mel Fisher Maritime Museum showcases gold, silver, and treasure recovered from shipwrecks around the world.
- One can shop, and dine at the Key West Historic Seaport at the Key West Bight.
- The Key West Lighthouse and Keeper's Quarters Museum preserves the history of the Key West Lighthouse, built in 1847.
- Nobel Prize–winning author Ernest Hemingway's former home is now open to the public as the Ernest Hemingway House, and is populated by as many as 60 descendants of his famous polydactyl cats.^[45]
- Many visitors like to spend the day out on the water seeing the more nature oriented side of Key West. People have many different types of fishing favorites including backcountry fishing, reef and wreck fishing, as well as offshore deep sea fishing trips. There are many companies to choose from like All Water Charters out of Hurricane Hole marina who can take you out to do many of these Mother Nature infused journeys. Fishing guides on the island are typically very knowledgeable about the area and can give you insights on other fun things to do while you are in town.



Sunset seen from Key West;
September 2005



One of the many private beaches on the island, the Casa Marina, Flagler's grand hotel resort.



Free-roaming chicken family as typically seen on the streets of Key West.

- PrideFest is seven days of events, presented by the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Key West during the first week in June. The schedule includes the Pride Follies talent extravaganza; contests to select a Mr., Ms. and Miss PrideFest; parties; a tea dance; and the PrideFest Parade down Duval Street.
- In 1979, the Key West Tourist Development Association, Inc., started Fantasy Fest to attract tourists at the traditionally slow time of Halloween, which is at the end of the hurricane season. Fantasy Fest regularly attracts approximately 80,000 people to the island and has become a huge success.
- In June 2006, the Key West Gay & Lesbian Museum & Archive opened at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center at 513 Truman Avenue. Featured exhibits include a Tennessee Williams typewriter as well as an extensive collection of memorabilia and papers of Richard A. Heyman, who was one of the nation's first openly gay mayors before dying in 1994 of AIDS.

Popular annual events

- Key West Half Marathon & 5K Run, January 19, 2014, 7 AM (<http://www.keywesthalfmarathon.com/>)
- Key West Race Week – international sailing event (<http://www.premiere-racing.com/>) – January
- Key West Literary Seminar (<http://www.kwls.org/>) – January
- Kelly McGillis Classic – Flag Football Tournament (<http://www.iwffa.com/>) – February
- Key West Fishing (<https://fishingtripkeywest.com/>) Tarpon Season- April–June
- Conch Republic Independence Celebration – April 23
- Taste of Key West – April
- Red Ribbon Bed Race – April
- Key West Songwriters Festival – April / May
- Mystery Writers Key West Fest — August 14–16
- Survivors Party – May
- Queen Mother Pageant – May
- PrideFest – June
- Cuban-American Heritage Festival – June
- Hemingway Days Festival – July
- Key West Lobsterfest - August (<http://www.keywestlobsterfest.com/>)
- WomenFest – September
- **Bike Week** – September
- Fantasy Fest – October
- Goombay Celebration – October
- Robert the Enchanted Doll Day – October 24
- Parrot Heads in Paradise Convention (aka Meeting of the Minds) – Oct. 30 to Nov. 3 (2013)
- Boat and Holiday Parade – December

Media

The television stations received in Key West are the stations in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale Designated Market Area with rebroadcast transmitters in Key West and Marathon. Comcast provides cable television service. DirecTV and Dish Network provide Miami-Fort Lauderdale local stations and national channels.

The Key West area has 11 FM radio stations, 4 FM translators, and 2 AM stations. WEOV 92.7 is the home of The Rude Girl & Molly Blue, a popular morning zoo duo; Bill Bravo is the afternoon host. SUN 99.5 has Hoebee and Miss Loretta in the p.m. drive. Island 107.1 FM is the only locally owned, independent FM station in Key West, featuring alternative rock music and community programs.

The Florida Keys Keynoter and the Key West Citizen are published locally and serve Key West and Monroe County. The *Southernmost Flyer*, a weekly publication printed in conjunction with the *Citizen*, is produced by the Public Affairs Department of Naval Air Station Key West and serves the local military community. Key West the Newspaper (known locally as The Blue Paper due to its colorful header) is a local weekly investigative newspaper, established in 1994 by Dennis Cooper, taken over in 2013 as a fully digital publication by Arnaud and Naja Girard.^[46]

Notable people

- Dick Vermeil, Former Super Bowl Champion NFL Coach



Key West Lighthouse, built in 1847.



A float during the 2007 Fantasy Fest parade, the culminating event of the week-long event. In the background is the La Concha Hotel.



Sunset at Fort Zachary Taylor

- Dick Vermeil, former Super Bowl Champion NFL Coach
- Vic Albury, MLB pitcher
- Judy Blume, author
- Bronson Arroyo, baseball player^[47]
- Jimmy Buffett, musician^[48]
- David Allan Coe, musician^[49]
- Stepin Fetchit, comedian (deceased)^[50]
- Mel Fisher, treasure hunter (deceased)^[51]
- Robert Fuller, actor
- Khalil Greene, Major League Baseball Player
- Ernest Hemingway, author (deceased)^{[52][53][54]}
- Calvin Klein, fashion designer^{[54][55]}
- Mike Leach, college football coach ^[56]
- Stephen Mallory, U.S. senator (deceased)^[57]
- Amber McDonald, actress
- George Mira, football player^[58]
- John Patterson, MLB second baseman
- Boog Powell, baseball player^{[59][60]}
- David Robinson, basketball player^[61]
- Shel Silverstein, author, cartoonist and musician (deceased)^[62]
- Shane Spencer, MLB outfielder
- Randy Sterling, MLB pitcher
- Harry S. Truman, U.S. president (deceased)^[52]
- Tennessee Williams, author (deceased)^[53]
- John James Audubon (deceased)^[52]
- Kelly McGillis, actress^[52]
- John Dewey, philosopher and psychologist (deceased)^[63]
- Stuart Woods, author^[64]
- Paul Cotton, musician

In popular culture

- Several scenes were filmed in Key West in the 1986 hit movie *Running Scared*, starring Billy Crystal and Gregory Hines, a film about two Chicago undercover police officers who decide to retire and contemplate opening a bar in Key West.
- Key West served as the location for a number of scenes in the 1989 James Bond movie *Licence to Kill*.
- The island was the setting for a 1993 TV series titled *Key West*.
- Key West is featured in the FOX TV series *Drive*.
- A level based on Key West is featured in the Sega arcade game *Out Run*.
- Key West is used as a destination city in the first stage of *18 Wheeler: American Pro Trucker*, also by Sega.
- A number of songs have been written about Key West (Cayo Hueso). The song most associated with Key West is Margaritaville by Jimmy Buffett; however, "Margaritaville" was written in Fort Myers, Florida, but came to be synonymous with Key West due to the ties that Jimmy Buffett had to the city. The city never employed the use of the song for any marketing purposes, and there is no statistical data that exist measuring the impact of the song on the city. Two events that seemed to bring the two together was the implementation of bed tax that allowed for a larger marketing budget for the tourist development council along with the popularity of Jimmy Buffett himself and his fans knowing of his ties to Key West. The only direct link to the economic effect the Buffett's persona or songs has had on the city is that once a year since 1991 his fans flock to Key West for the Parrott Heads in Paradise convention usually held the first weekend in November.
- John Cougar Mellencamp released a song in 1996 titled "Key West Intermezzo" that charted at #14 on Billboard charts.
- Elizabeth Bishop spent time in Key West, basing some of her poetry on her experience of it. See, for example, "A Norther – Key West" (1962).
- The city was the setting for Carl Hiaasen's novel *Flush*.

See also

- Neighborhoods in Key West, Florida

Notes

- Official records for Key West were kept at the Weather Bureau in downtown from January 1871 to February 1958, and at Key West Int'l since March 1958.^[19]

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External links

- Official website (<http://www.keywestcity.com>)
- Chamber of Commerce Website (<http://www.keywestchamber.com/>)
- Monroe County School District (<http://www.keysschools.com/>) Key West Public Schools
- Sanborn Insurance Historical Maps of Key West (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/sanborn>)
- Key West Citizen (<http://keysnews.com>)
- Official Things to do in Key West (<http://www.keywestvacation.com/>)

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