



FOCUS ON

Key West

## ISLAND OF FESTIVALS

Hardly a weekend goes by in Key West without some kind of special event or festival taking place. Every aspect of the diverse Key West landscape, from its unique cultural heritage to its 1982 secession from the United States, is commemorated with colorful festivals that delight visitors and display residents' penchant for partying.

Forty years after the release of their "Yellow Submarine" album, the Beatles are embarking on another underwater adventure. Divers costumed as the iconic quartet are to star in the [25th annual Underwater Music Festival](#) set for Saturday, July 11, in the waters off the Lower Florida Keys. Staged by local radio station WWUS 104.1 FM, the fish-friendly festival features the station's selections broadcast underwater via Lubell Laboratory speakers suspended beneath boats positioned at the reef.

To participate in the Underwater Music Festival's 25th

anniversary, divers and snorkelers can reserve space aboard boats run by Lower Keys dive operators or launch their own boats from public ramps and local marinas.

For information about area dive charters and accommodations, call the [Lower Keys Chamber of Commerce](#) or visit their Website.

[800-872-3722](tel:800-872-3722) | [305-872-2411](tel:305-872-2411) | [www.fl-keys.com](http://www.fl-keys.com) | [www.lowerkeyschamber.com](http://www.lowerkeyschamber.com)

The event with the broadest appeal is [Old Island Days](#),

## KEY WEST - ISLAND OF FESTIVALS



For more than 20 years, "GOING TO SUNSET" has been a tradition for residents and visitors alike. People of all ages flock to *Mallory Square*, the historic pier overlooking Key West Harbor and the Gulf of Mexico, to enjoy the carnival-like atmosphere as the sun sinks beneath the waves in orange-red splendor.

which reflects Key West's history, heritage and traditions. Beginning in November and running through May, Old Island Days includes art and craft shows, theatrical productions, musical performances, a children's pageant, house and garden tours and a conch (pronounced "konk") shell blowing contest where participants attempt to make music through the shell of the island's favorite mollusk.

[305-294-9501](tel:305-294-9501)

January brings the [Key West Literary Seminar](#), celebrating the island's heritage as a writer's haven. During the four-day event, nationally and internationally recognized authors, as well as editors and publishers, participate in panels and discussions on the craft of writing.

[888-293-9291](tel:888-293-9291) | [www.KeyWestLiterarySeminar.org](http://www.KeyWestLiterarySeminar.org)

In late January each year, several hundred of the world's fastest racing yachts compete for class championships in the waters off Key West. The [Terra Nova Trading Key West](#) event is the largest international midwinter sailboat racing regatta and, unlike most sailing competitions, it allows amateur recreational sailors to line up against professionals and

other world-class competitors who have won Olympic gold medals, the America's Cup and world championships. [www.Premiere-Racing.com](http://www.Premiere-Racing.com)

In the spring, the [Conch Republic Independence Celebration](#) commemorates the area's "insurrection" in protest of a U.S. Border Patrol roadblock on U.S. Highway 1 in 1982. Each year, the festival celebrates the Conch Republic's April 23 secession from the Union according to the republic's motto: "We seceded where others failed." Highlights of the 10-day celebration include "the world's longest parade" down Duval Street from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, a sea battle featuring historic tall ships and a hilarious "drag race" starring the island's most noted drag queens.

[305-295-7215](tel:305-295-7215) | [www.conchrepublic.com](http://www.conchrepublic.com)

Each June brings [PrideFest Key West](#), honoring diversity, openness and freedom in the city that is consistently recognized as one of the world's top gay and lesbian vacation destinations.

[www.pridefestkeywest.com](http://www.pridefestkeywest.com)



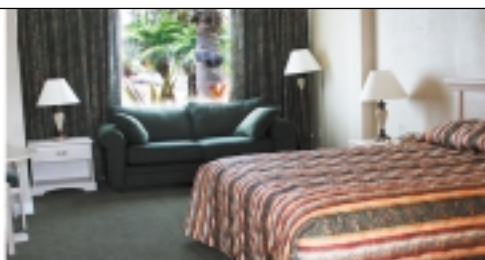
COAST.

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Key West moves to a Latin beat in June as the island celebrates Cuban American history and culture. Key West's Cuban immigrants made it the cigar-making capital of the world in the 19th century, and this cultural connection is honored each year with the [Cuban American Heritage Festival](#). 305-295-9665 | [www.cubanfest.com](http://www.cubanfest.com)

The anniversary of Ernest Hemingway's July 21 birthday is marked by the [Hemingway Days festival](#) commemorating the Pulitzer Prize-winning author's decade-long residence in Key West. Scheduled events include a look-alike contest for stocky white-bearded men resembling Hemingway, readings and book signings by nationally acclaimed authors, an awards ceremony for the renowned literary competition directed by author and Hemingway granddaughter Lorian Hemingway, a commemoration of the 110th anniversary of Ernest's July 21 birth, a one-man play exploring the literary legend's life and motivations, a museum exhibit of rare Hemingway memorabilia, a zany "Running of the Bulls" and a three-day marlin tournament recalling Hemingway's devotion to the deep-sea sport. [www.hemingwaydays.com](http://www.hemingwaydays.com)

Thousands of women flock to Key West in early September each year for [WomenFest](#), a weeklong gathering for lesbians and their friends that features women's snorkeling and dolphin-watching trips, champagne sunset sails, art openings, nights of comedy, cocktail galas, an infamous wet T-shirt contest and more. 305-296-2491 | [www.womenfest.net](http://www.womenfest.net)

In late October, [Fantasy Fest](#) brings revelry and excitement

to the island. The outrageous 10-day masking and costuming festival incorporates lavish costume balls, a Masquerade March through Old Town, a street fair, the Pretenders in Paradise costume contest, a Caribbean-flavored Goombay celebration, a wacky Pet Masquerade and other activities. The madness is capped by the Saturday night Fantasy Fest Parade. 305-296-1817 | [www.fantasyfest.net](http://www.fantasyfest.net)

Powerboat racers roar into town in November for the [Key West Offshore World Championships](#). The weeklong challenge features three days of breathtaking racing in a variety of classes. [www.keywestworlds.com](http://www.keywestworlds.com)

Key West's rich seafaring history is recognized in late November and early December each year when [Pirates in Paradise](#) attracts a scurvy crew of pirates and wenches. Festival highlights include a sea battle fought by historic tall ships, pirate sailing excursions, living history encampments featuring arts and crafts and entertainment by pirate re-enactors. 305-296-9694 | [www.piratesinparadise.com](http://www.piratesinparadise.com)

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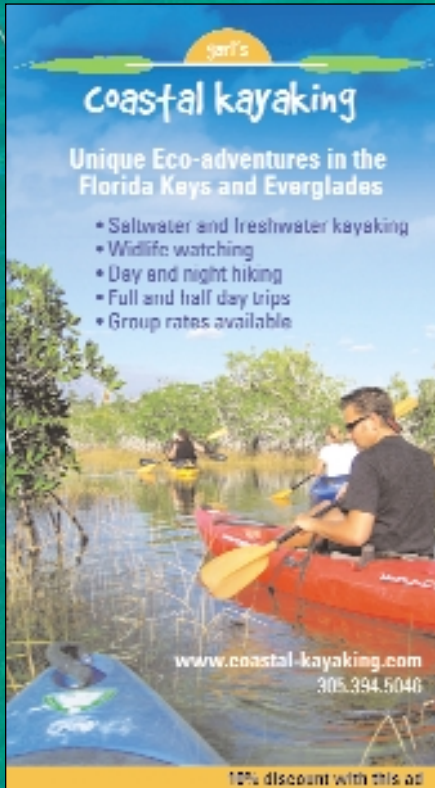


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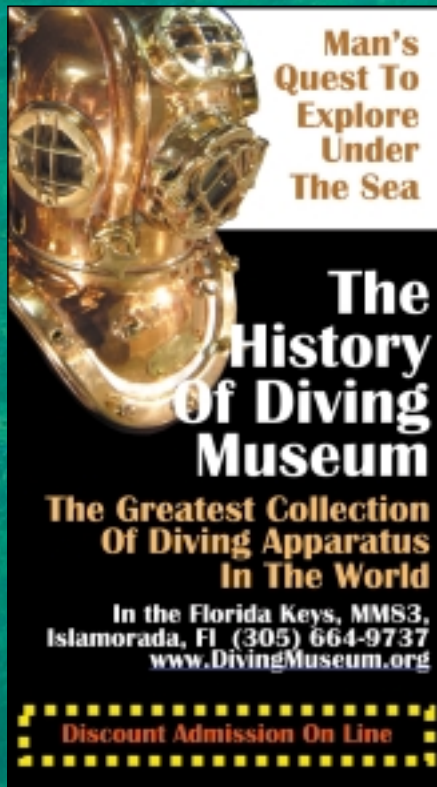
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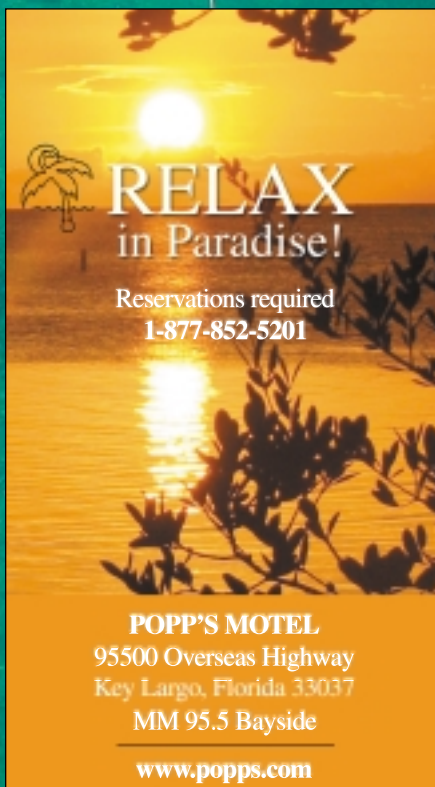


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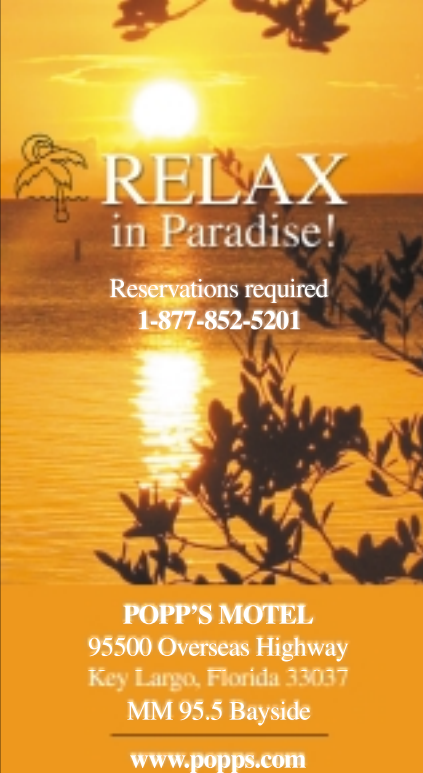
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**305-296-3500 | [www.keyambassador.com](http://www.keyambassador.com)**

In **Key Largo**, the **Dove Creek Lodge** encourages their guests to savor the feel of the tropics from the comfort and luxury of a boutique hotel. Visitors to the Dove Creek Lodge are treated to a sophisticated atmosphere amid a casual and relaxed oasis. Each fully equipped guest suite is tropically decorated and features an array of convenient in room amenities. Outdoors, lodge visitors can enjoy some of the area's best swimming, fishing, diving and snorkeling.  
**800-401-0057 | [www.dovecreeklodge.com](http://www.dovecreeklodge.com)**

Although Key West is known for raucous festivals and memorable holidays, visitors to this tropical paradise will be delighted to discover that Key West is also a place where they can relax beneath towering palms and enjoy a luxurious stay in paradise. The **Simonton Court Historic Inn and Cottages** epitomizes comfortable luxury and provides its guests with a historic, yet updated, vacation experience. Aside from the main property, individual cottage rentals are available.  
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