



{STAYCATION} WELCOME (BACK) TO THE KEYS

Our beloved Florida Keys are on their feet again after Hurricane Irma. Plot a path through the best of what's new and old from Key Largo to Key West.

There's never been a better time to fall in love with the Florida Keys all over again. Now that the island chain is back on its feet after Hurricane Irma, plan a trip south to soak up the mellow vibes and subtropical scenery that only the Keys can produce. Be prepared for moments of awe and gratitude at the islands' resiliency as you marvel at the sunset or delight in a simple meal of fresh-caught fish. Our **INDULGE** guide to the best of the Keys, post-Irma:

KEY WEST

Ease into the beauty of Key West's idyll by checking into the new **Marquesa 4-1-4**, nestled beneath a riot of green palms on Simonton Street. The 17-room guesthouse opened in October inside three restored Victorian mansions



Three restored Victorian mansions have been converted into Marquesa 4-1-4, a new, 17-room guesthouse on Simonton Street that's situated near its sister hotel, Marquesa.

Clockwise from left: The Saint Hotel's playful, eclectic vibe fits perfectly in Key West; the dining room at Little Pearl is where locals go for seafood pot pies; Blue Heaven's Key lime pie is a show-stopper.



surrounding a courtyard swimming pool. It's an extension of the beloved **Marquesa** hotel just up the block.

Positioned in the heart of what author Judy Blume calls Key West's "cultural corridor," a stay at Marquesa 4-1-4 puts you within steps of her bookstore, the southernmost outpost of **Books & Books**, as well as **The Studios of Key West**, **Key West Theater**, **Tropic Cinema** and **Duval Street**.

Around the corner on Fleming Street, dine at **Thirsty Mermaid**, a sidewalk café and oyster bar inspired by the West Village. The raw bar is as tempting as the small plates (yellowfin tuna carpaccio, mac and cheese croquettes, sautéed conch). For a fine-dining experience, make dinner reservations at sister restaurant **Little Pearl** and ride bikes to its cozy corner on Olivia and Elizabeth streets. The lobster, shrimp and crab pot pie is an indulgence not to be missed.

The Saint Key West, which has a sister property in New Orleans, brings a playful and eclectic verve to the boutique-hotel experience.



Think moody, wood-paneled lobby with velour banquettes, bright-white guest rooms, and Buddha statues lining the courtyard pool, all situated inside a historic conch cottage with a tin roof.

It's the perfect embarkation point to rediscover some of Key West's most beloved institutions. Savor brunch at **Blue Heaven** in Bahama Village, where the banana pancakes are transcendental and lobster elevates classic eggs Benedict. Next door, **Bésame Mucho** is a beautifully curated boutique and treasure trove for everything from Diptyque candles and artisanal chocolates to handmade jewelry and luxurious bath products.

Just down the block, head to **Santiago's Bodega** for dinner. The romantic, Spanish tapas-style restaurant features outstanding dishes like seared beef tenderloin with blue-cheese butter and brandy-flambéed haloumi cheese. Finally, don't miss the sunset while strolling down **Mallory Square** or setting sail into the harbor.



STOCK ISLAND

Separated from Key West by the narrow Cow Key Channel and a 15-minute drive, Stock Island is home mostly to artist studios and shrimp boats. Last year, it also got its first two hotels, providing visitors with unprecedented access to this off-the-beaten-path, locals-only enclave.

The Perry Hotel at Stock Island Marina Village was named one of the best design hotels of 2017. Its industrial aesthetic with clean lines, raw concrete and steel is inspired by the island's boatyards. It's also home to one of the area's most sophisticated restaurants: **Matt's Stock Island Kitchen & Bar**. Fusing fresh seafood with Creole flavors, Matt's dishes are worth traveling for — especially the sumptuous grouper in thyme butter with crawfish and cornbread gnudi.

For a taste of local culture, reserve a ticket for **Lost Kitchen Supper Club**, a pop-up dinner series held on Wednesday and Saturday nights. Lost Kitchen, run by local chefs Layla Barr and Martin Liz and restaurateur Bobby Mongelli, highlights sustainable, organic food and local purveyors and fishermen with globally themed dinners.



From top to bottom: The industrial-chic lobby of The Perry Hotel, which opened in 2017; a table full of fresh flavors at Matt's Stock Island Kitchen & Bar; a serene porch vista at The Moorings in Islamorada.



HOW TO HELP

Visiting the Keys is a great way to help the local economy, but there are still residents who are rebuilding their lives after Hurricane Irma. Local nonprofit **Nourishing the Lower Keys** prepares and delivers homemade meals to people in need. Consider donating: gofundme.com/nourishFLkeys.

ISLAMORADA

Once you've settled into the utter tranquility of your private oceanfront cottage at **The Moorings Village** in Islamorada, you'll wonder if Mile Marker 81 isn't somehow positioned a little closer to heaven. This particular section of the Keys took quite a thrashing from Irma's storm surge, and the resort, composed of 18 private cottages across 18 acres, officially reopened in mid-January. But you'd never know a hurricane swept through as you meander the lush landscaping on your way to a hammock on the beach — without another soul in sight.

While there's no restaurant at The Moorings, the property's sister restaurants **Pierre's** and **Morada Bay** are just across the Overseas Highway. The former is ideal for a romantic moonlit dinner on the balcony, while the latter is a laid-back spot for lunch and picture-perfect sunsets overlooking Florida Bay. Stock up your cottage's fridge at the **Trading Post**, just up the road, and stop by the adjacent **Village Square**. There you'll find a lovely al fresco compound with shops and Islamorada's outpost of Key West's **Bad Boy Burrito**, specializing in organic, made-from-scratch Mexican fare and fresh-pressed juices.

A wide and meandering pool awaits at Playa Largo in Key Largo. When it opened in 2016, it was the first newly built hotel on the island in more than 20 years.



KEY LARGO

Playa Largo resort opened in 2016, making it the first newly built hotel on the island in more than 20 years. The resort's tin roofs and white balconies are anchored in Key West vernacular architecture, while the lobby's nautical décor draws inspiration from the area's seafaring

history and lighthouses. There's also a touch of Miami mid-century glamor in the lobby's terrazzo marble floors, cheese-hole decorative wall and dramatic spiral staircase leading to the poolscape and beach.

It's a gastronome's playground, boasting three stellar restaurants. **La Marea** steakhouse spotlights choice

cuts of meat from local purveyor Larry Kline in Deerfield Beach. Perched inside a restored boathouse on the water, **Sol by the Sea** pairs stylish outdoor dining with a creative menu — octopus a la plancha and coconut curry black grouper are both guest favorites. Just off the lobby, **Las Olas** serves excellent ceviche, sushi and

sashimi alongside inventive cocktails. While it's tempting to settle into the resort and never leave, don't skip a visit to **John Pennekamp State Park** for snorkeling, kayaking or hiking and reserve one evening for sunset cocktails at **Snooks** overlooking Florida Bay.

WORDS BY SHAYNE BENOWITZ



Duval Street

Santiago's Bodega

WHERE TO GO

Marquesa 4-1-4, marquesa.com.
Books & Books, booksandbookskw.com.
The Studios of Key West, tskw.org.
Key West Theater, thekeywesttheater.com.
Tropic Cinema, tropiccinema.com.
Duval Street, duvalstreet.net.
Thirsty Mermaid, thirstymermaidkeywest.com.
Little Pearl, littlepearlkeywest.com.
The Saint Hotel, thesainthotelkeywest.com.
Blue Heaven, blueheavenkw.com.
Bésame Mucho, besamemucho.net.
Santiago's Bodega, santiagosbodega.com.
Mallory Square, mallorysquare.com.
The Perry, perrykeywest.com.
Matt's Stock Island Kitchen & Bar, perrykeywest.com.
Lost Kitchen Supper Club, lostkitchenkeywest.com.
The Moorings Village, themooringsvillage.com.
Pierre's, moradabay.com/pierres.
Morada Bay, moradabay.com.
Trading Post, tradingpostfloridakeys.com.
Village Square, villagesquareislamorada.com.
Bad Boy Burrito, badboyburrito.com/islamorada.
Playa Largo Resort, playalargoresort.com.
John Pennekamp State Park, pennekamppark.com.
Snooks, snooks.com.

Pierre's



Bésame Mucho