

LOCAL

A Keys landmark resort has just reopened. It's also hiring.



Koral, the mermaid, takes a swim in the pool during the reopening of Hawks Cay Resort, an important milestone in the recovery of the Florida Keys. The reopening of the landmark oceanside resort on Thursday, Aug. 30, 2018, is expected to further attract tourists back to the Keys, as the island chain continues to rebound post-Hurricane Irma. Pedro Portal - pportal@miamiherald.com

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Nearly a year after Hurricane Irma tore through the Middle Keys as a Category 4 storm, a landmark oceanside resort fully [reopened](#) Thursday after a \$50 million renovation.

“It feels like a decade, not just a year ago,” said Sheldon Suga, vice president and managing director of Hawks Cay Resort, at mile marker 61 on Duck Key.

Thursday’s reopening event, which drew politicians and state tourism leaders, marked the resort’s return as a symbol that the Florida Keys’ tourism industry is [returning](#) to pre-storm force.

“The Florida Keys is alive. It never went away,” Suga said. “We’ve got to get the word out to the world that we are here and are back in business.”

Guests were checking into Hawks Cay’s main hotel Thursday for the first time since it [closed for Irma](#). The 60-acre resort, which has a marina and a lagoon in addition to pools and a confined area for dolphins, reinvented itself with new interiors and redesigned rooms.

And of course, repairs from the storm damage.

With 177 rooms and 250 two- and three-bedroom villas for rent, Hawks Cay prices on Thursday started at \$238 a night for a king-sized bed. The price rises to \$340 a night for Jan. 1, according to the resort’s online [booking schedule](#).

The resort is hiring and plans to have a 300-member staff by the height of the tourism season.

Monroe County Mayor David Rice thanked Hawks Cay’s operators for their commitment to the Keys.

“If there was ever an example of turning adversity into an opportunity, the owners and Sheldon have done that after this storm,” Rice said. “It was terrible after the storm.”

“It’s a glorious day,” said state Rep. Holly Raschein, R-Key Largo. “You truly are a beacon for not only the Middle Keys, the entire Keys, Southeast Florida and Florida. ... Tourism is the backbone of the Keys and the backbone of Florida.”

Hawks Cay management was concerned with the needs of its workers as well as other local people in the immediate days after Irma, said U.S. Rep. Brian Mast, R-Palm City.

“The No. 1 thing on Sheldon’s mind and everyone at Hawks Cay was how can they keep everybody working,” Mast said. “That was the No. 1 thing Sheldon was worried about. The second thing on his mind was how to take any food, any snacks here and get it out into the community. “



State Rep. Holly Raschein and Ken Lawson, president and CEO, Visit Florida, pose with Koral, the mermaid. They were among a group of guests, executives and elected officials that joined together during the reopening of Hawks Cay Resort on Aug. 30, 2018. It was an important milestone in the recovery of the Florida Keys nearly a year after Hurricane Irma. The reopening of the large oceanside resort is expected to further attract tourists back to the Keys as the island chain continues to rebound. **Pedro Portal** - pportal@miamiherald.com



Executives and elected officials joined together during the reopening of Hawks Cay Resort, an important milestone in the recovery of the Florida Keys. As the largest property in the destination, the reopening on Thursday, Aug. 30, 2018, is expected to further attract tourists back to the island chain as it continues to rebound post-Hurricane Irma. From left are Carol Dover, president of the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association; Monroe County Mayor David Rice; Derrick Yee, VP, Watermark Capital Partners; Sheldon Suga, VP Managing Director of Hawks Cay Resort; U.S. Rep. Brian Mast; state Rep. Holly Raschein; and Ken Lawson, president and CEO, Visit Florida. **Pedro Portal** - pportal@miamiherald.com



View of the pool area during the reopening of Hawks Cay Resort on Thursday, Aug. 30, 2018, an important milestone in the recovery of the Florida Keys. As the largest property in the destination, the reopening is expected to further attract tourists back to the island chain as it continues to rebound post-Hurricane Irma.
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