

Flee to the Keys and Hawks Cay Resort

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Photo courtesy of Hawks Cay Resort, by Jason Stemple.

March Break is one week away and if you are looking for a last-minute destination, escape to the place that inspired Ernest Hemingway's classic novels, that has the best ceviche and key lime pie you may ever taste and has breathtaking beauty. With a chill, Caribbean-esque attitude and island time, the Florida Keys will give you that perfect feeling of getting away from it all.

The Keys are a combination of some 1,700 islands that start where the Florida Turnpike intersects with Highway 1. You will find the locals refer to locations based on mile markers on the one highway/road in and out of the Keys. The Keys start at Mile 120 and run south to Mile 0 in Key West.

As you drive down Highway 1, you may notice it looks like a protected area. That's because it is. The **Everglades National Park**, protecting more than 1.5 million acres, is the 3rd largest national park in the lower 48 states, behind Yellowstone National Park (2nd) and Death Valley National Park (1st). It provides habitat for numerous rare and endangered species like the manatee, American crocodile and the Florida panther. It is a World Heritage Site, and even just driving by en route south provides incredible scenery. If you do want to stop and check it out, it is open for visits and has programming and trails.



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Continue driving and you will hit Key Largo (miles 108-90). Be sure to stop at mile 102.4 at The **Fish House restaurant**. The décor is completely kitsch, but don't let that scare you off. The fresh fish dishes are spectacular. It would be a lost opportunity not to stop. Locals rave about it for good reason. The Matecumbe dish (fresh fish done light with tomatoes, shallots, basil, capers, olive oil) has been featured on the Food Network and is an unparalleled fish experience. The ceviche is incredible as well. The yellowtail snapper, mahi-mahi, grouper, Florida lobster and stone crab (it is in season until May) are impeccably prepared in a variety of ways to please every palate. Their key lime pie is the perfect way to top off the meal.

Not that you will be spending too much time indoors, but you do need somewhere to grab some sleep. There are countless motels, trailer parks, small inns, motels with calming-sounding names and big chain hotels along the 120 miles. However, the best place by far from which to explore the Keys is from a home base at the **Hawks Cay Resort**. This paradise, large resort is located right in the middle of Mile 61 in Duck Key. It is the perfect oasis. Not only is it the ideal place to stay, it is a destination unto itself. It has everything you want or need with helpful staff to make sure you get it. The luxurious, spacious rooms and cozy beds will keep you rested and have you feeling like Sleeping Beauty. There are various accommodation options (villas, suites,

rooms that open up onto the 21-over pool area) that are there to make you feel as relaxed and comfortable as possible with spacious areas and cozy beds, leaving you fresh and ready to take on the adventures of the day.

As a resort, it has an enormous list of outdoor activities. A Smart Board in the lobby lists the daily events. For starters, you can book an offshore or backcountry fishing **charter** leaving from the Hawks Cay Marina, paddle your way around the island on a **stand-up paddleboard** (lessons and rentals are available) or swim with dolphins. **Dolphin Connection**, onsite at the hotel will delight kids of all ages (big ones included).

Children can attend Camp Hawk Environmental Education Academy while you relax by the pool, by the salt-water lagoon, get a massage at the spa or just wander and stroll around the enormous property. If walking is not part of the plan, there is a trolley to take you around the site.



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There are six phenomenal and massive pools, and if you are so inclined, each is perfect for swimming or for exercise. Of course you could also just hang out in the hot tub with a drink of the day (which you can sample for free early in the day by the 21-over pool.).

There are tennis courts, a fully-equipped gym and in the waters of the Keys, there are more than 1,200 colourful creatures waiting to be discovered during a dive. The Florida Keys are home to the only living coral reef system in the continental United States.

The lush surroundings and the beautiful vantage point to watch sunsets on one side (and sunrises on the other) are another bonus of the Hawks Cay. Take a sunset boat cruise (it is short, only 1.5 hours tops) and sip wine, beer and bubbly as you watch the sun set in the beautiful blue sky. There is a party atmosphere on the boat so enjoy it. You are strongly encouraged to enjoy the beverages in the quantity of your choice.

There are superb restaurants on site, Alma has fine dining, then there's Ocean (comfort food), Beach Grill (fantastic ceviche, calamari and burgers), to name just a few and the Tiki poolside bar offers up incredible mojitos, margaritas and local beers to quench your thirst.

If you decide to venture away from Hawks Cay, Key West is 60 miles away. Visit the [Hemingway House](#) to see where Ernest Hemingway lived and soak up his creativity in his writing studio. Hit Sloppy Joe's Bar and Captain Tony's Saloon to see



Photo by Jennifer Hartley.

where else he got his inspiration. Both sites were Hemingway haunts. Captain Tony's was the original site of Sloppy Joe's until the bar owner (a friend of Hemingway's) got into a fight with the landlord and moved to its current location. Both are worthy of a pint.

But you won't want to stay away from Hawks Cay long, because there is so much to do and experience there. Most of all, it is the perfect place to relax and unwind.

Written by: [Jennifer Hartley](#) on March 9, 2016.

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