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Fri Mar 22, 2013 6:41am EDT

Travel Postcard: 48 hours in the Florida Keys

KEY WEST, FLA | BY VERNA GATES

Busker Will Soto walks a tightrope at the sunset celebration in Key West, Florida, in this file photo taken in 2007. The sunset celebration at Mallory Square is a daily ritual for visitors to this subtropical island at the bottom of the Florida Keys. The Florida Keys are the...

1 of 3

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The Florida Keys are the end of the road, where the legendary U.S. Route 1 stops for the ocean at mile zero, a classic American road trip.

For many, it did end here, a place where ships crashed and wreckers saved sailors and kept their cargos. Grand homes reflect the glory days of found treasure, while the carefree lifestyle captures the spirit of the wayfaring rogues who trolled the rich waters.

Visitors usually fly into Miami and take the traditional 162-mile scenic drive to Key West on Route 1. Reuters correspondents with local knowledge help visitors get the most out of a weekend trip in the area.

Friday

Noon - Stop for lunch at Mrs. Mac's Kitchen at Key Largo and try the grilled fish Key Lime pie. www.mrsmacskitchen.com.

1:30 p.m.- Visit the Turtle Hospital, one of the few veterinary clinics that rehabilitates the

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massive reptiles. A tour passes by the surgery suite and the ponds where non-releasable turtles live. www.theturtlehospital.org.

3 p.m. - Make a stop at Hawks Cay Resort at Duck Key to enjoy their Dolphin Connection in which four friendly swimming mammals like their flippers petted. www.hawkscay.com.

4 p.m. - Rent a kayak and paddle past your new dolphin friends, who will swim alongside. www.hawkscay.com.

5 p.m. - Ride a wakeboard at The oTHErside Boardsports in Islamorada, or if you are feeling more adventurous try a kiteboard. www.othersideboardsports.com.

6 p.m. - Stop for dinner at Tio's Cantina in Hawks Cay, or head to Key West and stay at the Hyatt Key West, which is in the city center and right on the dock (www.keywest.hyatt.com) and eat at the Hogfish Bar and Grill. Sit at a picnic table and try the smoked fish dip, local pink shrimp and hogfish, a Key West delicacy. www.hogfishbar.com.

9 p.m. - Take a Key West ghost tour, which is a popular attraction, to see the cursed doll that inspired the "Chucky" horror movies. Reservations are recommended. Ask politely before snapping his photo or you may inherit the curse. www.hauntedtours.com.

10:30 p.m. - Stop for a drink at The Schooner's Wharf, where you can sit on the dockside and watch the stars and ships. www.schoonerwharf.com.

Saturday

8 a.m. - Leave your car at the Old Town Trolley station where there is free parking. Take their history tour, and then use it as a bus to get around the city. www.trolleytours.com/key-west.

8:15 a.m. - Stop for breakfast at Blue Heaven and try the Lobster Benedict or pancakes. www.blueheavenkw.com.

9:30 a.m. - Stroll over to the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum, where the author penned some of his greatest masterpieces. Pet one or more of the six-toed cats descended from his pet, Snowball. www.hemingwayhome.com.

10:30 a.m. - Climb to the top of the old lighthouse for some great views.

11 a.m. - Take the Trolley to the Pelican Poop, a well-known Key West art shop where Hemingway completed "A Farewell to Arms."

11:30 a.m. - Head to Sloppy Joe's bar, on the corner of Greene and Duval streets, where the original sandwich of the same name was invented. It was one of Hemingway's favorite hangouts. www.sloppyjoes.com.

1 p.m. - Return to 1856 and the era of shipwrecks at the Key West Treasures Shipwreck Museum. Climb to the top of the lookout tower to walk off lunch. www.keywestshipwreck.com.

2 p.m. - Cross the street to the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum, which features exhibits and artifacts and treasures recovered from shipwrecks. www.melfisher.org.

3 p.m. - At The Audubon House and Tropical Gardens, 205 Whitehead Street, visitors can view 28 first editions by the famed ornithologist John James Audubon, who visited the Florida Keys in 1832. www.audubonhouse.com.

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3:30 p.m. - Visit the Harry S. Truman Little White House, where the former U.S. president escaped Washington's cold weather during the winter. Truman spent 175 days of his presidency in the house from 1946 through 1952. Other presidents including John F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton have also spent time at the house. www.trumanlittlewhitehouse.com.

6 p.m. - Walk to Mallory Square and stroll among jugglers, unicyclists, magicians and fortunetellers. Every evening people gather to celebrate the ultimate show: a spectacular sunset.

7 p.m. - Stop for dinner at an old cigar warehouse, which houses the El Meson de Pepe, a family owned and operated Cuban restaurant. Try the Ropa Vieja, a Cuban dish with shredded beef. www.elmesondepepe.com.

8 p.m. - For some live music walk down Duvall Street where there are plenty of bars and clubs for after dinner drinks.

10 p.m. - Make a stop at Captain Tony's Saloon on 428 Greene Street. The tree in the center was once a hanging tree, so beware of ghosts, especially the Lady in Blue child killer who reportedly haunts the lady's restroom. www.capttonyssaloon.com.

Midnight: The Green Parrot Bar at 601 Whitehead Street is just getting started. They have been serving cool drinks and hot music since 1890. www.greenparrot.com.

Sunday

9 a.m. - After breakfast, head to Fury Water Adventures which offers water sports and tours on the waters of Key West and snorkeling along the coral reef. www.furycat.com.

11 a.m. - Visit colorful creatures on land at the Key West Butterfly and Nature Conservatory. www.keywestbutterfly.com

Noon - Try the traditional Cuban roasted pork on flattened bread at Sandy's Café. www.kwsandyscafe.com. Eat your sandwich at the southernmost point of the U.S., near mile marker zero of U.S. 1.

(Editing by Patricia Reaney and Todd Eastham)

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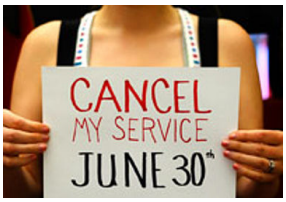

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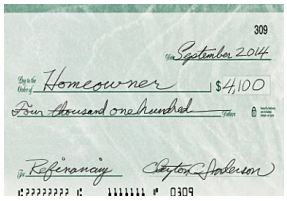

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