



# Famous Florida getaway

Am südlichsten Punkt der USA genießt man so richtig das Leben – mit der perfekten Mischung aus Natur und Kultur. Nicht nur Prominente fühlen sich hier wohl, auch **INEZ SHARP** wollte am liebsten bleiben.  

This is the stuff of dreams. We are driving down the Overseas Highway from mainland Florida to the island of Key West — on a road that runs directly across the sea. To the left is the Atlantic Ocean and to the right is the Gulf of Mexico, both glit-



Quite a sight:  
a place that  
inspired great art



tering deep blue in the hot sun. Every few miles we are actually on land, driving across small islands of tropical green. Pelicans watch us from salt-caked posts, and occasionally, segments of Henry Flagler's old, defunct railway line rise up from the water like sea monsters.

Together with a friend, I am off to explore the island of Key West, which lies at the southwestern end of the Florida Keys. I am excited to discover the archipelago and this island in particular. For 300 years, starting in 1520, it was owned variously by Spain and Britain. It was famous for pirates and "wreckers," who took treasure from ships that sank on the coral reefs.

In 1821, after becoming part of the US, the island was "sold" twice by confidence men. On the sunnier side, it is associated with famous Americans like John James Audubon (1785–1851), who documented America's rich bird life; President Harry Truman (1884–1972); writer Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961); and "tropical rock" musician Jimmy Buffett (born 1946), who, years ago, wrote "Margaritaville," a song that is still synonymous with the Sunshine State.

After a two-hour drive of 127 miles (204 km) past places like Summerland Key and Sugarloaf Shores, we arrive in Key West. Our first stop is the Ambrosia guesthouse in the old part of town. The streets are lined with pastel-colored houses, and everywhere purple bougainvillea and white frangipani brighten balconies and verandas.

Tired from the drive and the tropical heat, we leave our bags in our rooms and settle at the side of the pool. I am determined not to waste a moment, so I begin to read *Key West: History of an Island of Dreams* by Maureen Ogle. Within minutes, I am asleep in the sun.

**The Overseas Highway's  
"Seven-Mile Bridge"**

## Day one



8 a.m.

I begin my day with 50 lengths of the Ambrosia's pool. I am sure I will become known over the next couple of days as "the crazy swimmer." But I use my swimming time to think and make plans for the day. There are so many things to see in Key West. I decide on a historical approach: I'll visit the oldest sights first.



A landmark of old Key West: the Audubon House (above) with its famous gardens



Portrait of the artist (top right): John James Audubon



Fine interiors: the historic residence captures the atmosphere of the 19th century

10 a.m.

My first destination, a museum, is close to the hotel. To get there, though, I have to walk along Duval Street, the tourist center of Key West. It is full of shops selling every type of souvenir: from shell jewelry to watercolor paintings of Key West sunsets. It is all terribly attractive. Still, I march determinedly past the colorful displays until I reach Audubon House.

Captain John H. Geiger, Key West's first harbor pilot, built this house in the early 19th century, when Key West had a population of around 300. Back then, the settlement was a rough place, where sailors came to make their money during the day and to drink it away at night. Compared to other buildings, Geiger's home was considered quite the civilized residence. Today, the elegant furniture and polished wooden floors provide a setting in which to enjoy the works of the famous American ornithologist

John James Audubon, who visited Key West in 1832.

Although Audubon did not stay here, the gardens surrounding the house are where he found inspiration for his paint-

ings. Many of these became part of his important work, *Birds of America*. Visitors can enjoy his works in the house and then walk around the lovely tropical garden, which is filled with orchids and bromeliads.



On beaches, in shops: the popular conch shell

<b>approach</b> [ə'proutʃ]	Ansatz (→ p. 8)
<b>archipelago</b> [ˌɑːrkə'peləɡoʊ]	Inselgruppe
<b>be off</b> [bi 'ɔːf]	unterwegs sein (→ p. 8)
<b>confidence man</b> [ˈkɒnfɪdəns ,mæn]	Schwindler
<b>coral reef</b> ['kɔːrəl ,riːf]	Korallenriff
<b>defunct</b> [di'fʌŋkt]	stillgelegt (→ p. 8)
<b>salt-caked</b> ['sɔːlt keɪkt]	salzverkrustet
<b>shell jewelry</b> ['ʃel ,dʒuːələri]	Muschelschmuck
<b>Sunshine State</b> ['sʌnʃaɪn steɪt]	Spitzname für Florida
<b>treasure</b> ['treʒə]	Schatz
<b>wrecker</b> ['rekə]	Strandräuber