



CHAIN OF ADVENTURES

by Capt. Lace Allenius

The Florida Keys is a spectacular place for almost any aquatic adventure imaginable. If you're seeking a fantastic fishing experience, a thrilling spearfishing trip, or an intense day of watersports, the Florida Keys is where it's at!

Just south of Miami, the Keys are an incredible domestic destination where you can find reefs, wrecks, and ledges to dive or fish. If you're in the mood for some kite boarding action, look no further than Keys Cable Adventure Park, a staple in the watersports community. With all the fresh seafood available, the fine dining in the Keys is absolutely superb. Overall, this destination is one of my favorite locations for underwater adventures, and is a place that I will regularly return for years to come.

During our latest adventure to the Keys, Capt. Jimmy Nel-

son of Extreme Fishing Adventures and I found ourselves unable to resist the crystal-blue water awaiting us as we arrived at Lookout Lodge on Islamorada. We readily slipped into our fins, and silently glided down the gradual incline of the seafloor directly off the seawall at the resort. We snorkeled around and dove down to take a peek at the ranks of lobsters keeping post in the crevices of the rocks. We saw mangrove snapper, hogfish, a nurse shark, and sheepshead. I gently tried to touch one of the beautiful fish, but to no avail; it kicked its tail, and avoided my attempt.

THE NEED TO KNOW

THE HOT BITE

Inshore: Bonefish, mutton snapper, yellowtail snapper, cubera snapper, tarpon, snook

Offshore: mahi, wahoo, sailfish, yellowfin tuna, blackfin tuna, king fish

Diving: lobster, black and red grouper, hog fish

GUIDES TO KNOW

Inshore: Captains Ted and Donnie Benbow with Skins and Fins Charters; ebenbow@aol.com

Offshore: Captain Larry Wren with First Choice Charters; info@florida-keys-fishing-charterboat.com

Diving: Captain James Simic with Spearcrazy Spearfishing; info@spearcrazy.com

PLACE TO LAY YOUR HEAD

Marathon: Capt. Pips Marina and Hideaway 800-707-1692

Islamorada: Lookout Lodge 305-852-9915

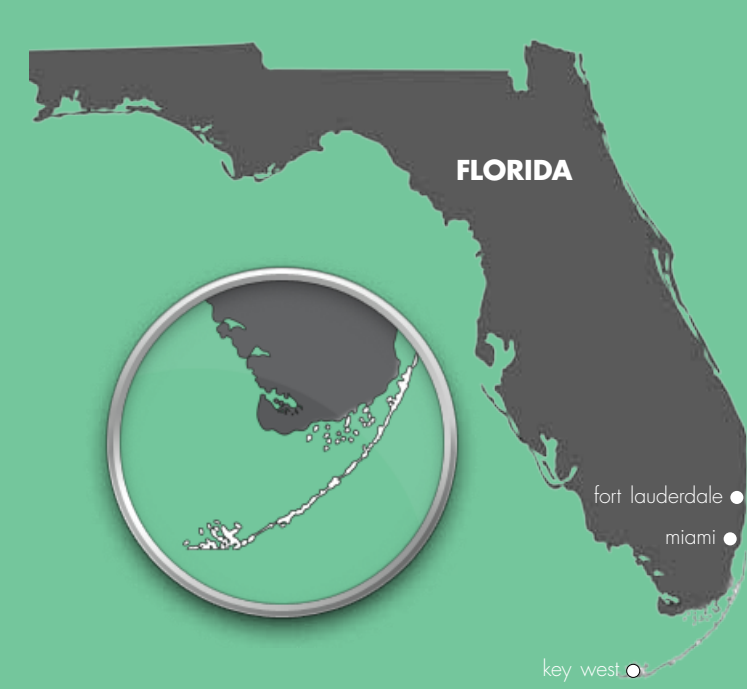
Key West: Casa Marina 305 296-3535

WHERE THE LOCALS HANG

Marathon: The Brass Monkey; 305-743-4028

Islamorada: Hog Heaven Sports Bar; 305-664-9669

Key West: The Green Parrot 305-294-6133



f top 8 things to do

Base on our past trips and feedback from our GAFF Facebook fan poll, here are the 8 things you must do while in the Florida Keys

Duval Street Pub Crawl, Key West

Sunset at Mallory Square, Key West

Spiegel Grove dive site, Key Largo

Dolphins Plus, Key Largo

Dry Tortugas Boat Tour, Key West

Southern Most Point, Key West

Looe Key Marine Sanctuary, Big Pine Key

Robbie's Marina, Islamorada



captain jimmy nelson

is the host of the popular TV show Extreme Fishing Adventures on NBC Sports Outdoors.

Deciding to take a trip to Robbie's marina, we hopped in the truck and drove the short distance from our resort. The breeze felt wonderful as we stepped onto the dock, and gazed into the water. Wild tarpon were thickly stacked, flanking the perimeter of the marina and waiting for the chance to snap up a meal. Lying down on the warm wood beneath me, I dangled a baitfish over the side of the dock. Sure enough, the tarpon began hungrily eyeing my offering, calculating the distance they would have to jump out of the water to snatch their prize. Before I had the chance to think, a huge silver king lunged its scaly body out of the water, snapping the baitfish from my hand, claiming its dinner.

With the excitement of the tarpon still on our minds, we headed to the Island Grill where we enjoyed the waterfront ambiance and their famous tuna nachos. The name is an understatement for what this dish entails; fresh, succulent sashimi tuna sits atop a bed of seaweed salad with a myriad of spices, sauces, and vegetable garnishes. Three light and crunchy wontons are underneath, which makes it a perfect appetizer for three people. Our dinner was delicious, and we enjoyed everything from the appetizer to our desert. We went to sleep satisfied that night and rested up for our big offshore trip the following morning.

Rising from a deep sleep at Lookout Lodge, we enthusiastically gathered our fishing essentials and headed toward the boat. The gravel was crunching under my new Salt Life sandals, and I felt the warm humid air rush by me as we raced down to the dock. We didn't want to miss a minute aboard the *First Choice* with Capt. Larry Wren. The seas were expected to be 4 to 6 feet. Regardless of the windy, rough weather, our happiness clearly outweighed the risk of a bumpy ride. In the Keys, the dolphin fishing is incredible, and this was the species we were targeting. Heading out from shore, Jimmy smiled, and I felt myself glowing with excitement to catch our first fish.

Coming up on our first school of dolphin, Capt. Larry excitedly yelled, "Dolphin!" I could feel a surge of joy rushing through my veins as I leaped up from my seat, grabbed my Tsunami rod, and sprayed my lure with a fresh mist of Fish Bomb while keeping an eye on the birds that were diving in the distance. Once in range, I slung my Yo-Zuri 3D popper and began feverishly ripping it across the surface. Within seconds, Jimmy and I were hooked up! Throughout the day, we chased the fish and I could almost taste the delicious dolphin dinner we would be enjoying that night. With the bright emerald and turquoise dolphin jumping and thrashing through the air behind the boat, we fought to our heart's content and brought in a huge bull, a massive cow, and dozens of large schoolies.

Back at the marina, we unloaded the boat and recounted the events of the day. Capt. Jimmy and I hung out at the filet table with Capt. Larry and Capt. Dave of First Choice Charters. Packing our Grizzly cooler with tasty filets was a nice reward for all of our hard work. I could feel the sun gently baking my tanned shoulders, and I felt happy to be covered in a layer of salt and sweat.



If there happens to be a windy day in the Keys and fishing isn't possible, or if you just want to enjoy some watersports, the Keys Cable Adventure Park is a great place to spend the day. This awesome location has a diverse array of activities including wakeboarding, paddleboarding, and kiteboarding. Keys Cable is the one stop shop for the whole family in between fishing and dive trips while in the Conch Republic. Located at Mile Marker 59 in Grassy Key, Marathon, it's just a quick drive on the Overseas Highway no matter where you are in the Keys. Be sure to check it out on your next trip down!

The Florida Keys has everything onshore and offshore, plus all the other watersports an aquatic adventurer could desire. For a great inshore fishing trip, Capt. Matt Bellinger is the go-to guy for tarpon, sharks, barracuda, snook, or anything else you can imagine when the bite is hot. When we feel a bit more aggressive and want to suit up

and splash down for some dynamite spearfishing, we call Capt. James Simcic. He owns Spearcrazy spearfishing and always puts us on the craziest spots with tons of keepers to pack our stringers. While in Marathon on our latest adventure, Capt. Jimmy and I went on a mind-blowing trip with James, and he took us to shoot monstrous cubera snapper, gag grouper, yellow jacks, and a variety of other snapper on the reef.

When it comes to searching for the Perfect Latitude, the Florida Keys has it all. There is something about the area that has a tantalizing appeal to nearly anyone and everyone. There is excellent food, and almost anything in the water is possible there. This aquatic kingdom can be right at your fingertips without needing to bring your passport. Beautiful reefs and wrecks fringe both coastlines of these gorgeous islands. The fishing, diving, spearfishing, and watersports reign as the utmost in adventure when in the Florida Keys. 🇺🇸



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