

# TravelAgent CENTRAL

Key West

**We check out four hotels in the southernmost point in the continental U.S.**

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By: [Anne-Sophie Guérin](#)

Travel Agent



Pool at Casa Marina Resort & Beach Club, which just completed a makeover

**VISITORS HAVE LONG BEEN ENTICED** by the string of tropical islands extending from Miami into the sea. At the southernmost point in the continental United States—only 90 miles from Cuba—Key West is the end of the line, the last stop on U.S. Highway 1. On this island, affectionately dubbed the "Conch Republic," bougainvillea blossom in the yards of white clapboard houses and mangroves and coral reefs grace the turquoise waters.

This whimsical place boasts myriad activities to delight your clients: diving and snorkeling, deep-sea fishing, garden and architecture tours, sailing and sunning, gallery hopping, excellent dining and more bars per capita than (possibly) anywhere else in the world. No wonder Key West was a favorite haunt of Ernest Hemingway, whose legendary residence still houses the offspring of his six-toed cats.

When booking clients in Key West, keep in mind that hotels often fill up months in advance for Fantasy Fest (the last week in October), the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve and Presidents' Day weekend. High season runs from mid-January through mid-April.



Casa Marina guest rooms sport a cohesive mix of crisp whites and dark wood

To experience a piece of history, your clients will enjoy a stay at the island's oldest hotel, **Casa Marina Resort & Beach Club** (<http://www.casamarinaresort.com/>), which is fresh from a fabulous makeover. Designed by railroad and oil magnate Henry Flagler, this glorious landmark is now managed by LXR Luxury Resorts. Since Flagler brought the railroad to Florida (and built the unprecedented "Overseas Railway" linking Miami and Key West in the early 1900s), his Casa Marina Resort became the tropical rendezvous of choice for tycoons, artists and dignitaries.



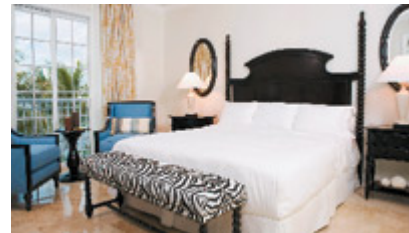
Cabanas at the Hyatt Key West, a "Green Certified" resort

The latest enhancements include a pool courtyard with luxurious private cabanas and a stunning "Water Walk" pathway that leads guests directly to the Atlantic Ocean. The redesigned lobby sports restored antique wood floors, exotic teak accents and soft seating, while guest rooms have been revitalized with a contemporary palette of crisp white contrasting with dark wood and splashes of Caribbean blues and citrus. Bathrooms feature custom toiletries by Clear.

Choose the 200 series rooms for the best views, overlooking the Water Walk and its cascading pools. The Ocean Vista Suites and the deluxe oversized balcony rooms in the historic Flagler building also provide open views of the Water Walk and beach. These are the most requested accommodations, along with the Lanai Suites in the East Pool area. The largest rooms are the two-bedroom Loft Suites in the Suite Wing, perfect for families. For VIP bookings, feel free to contact the resort manager, Kasha Nowak ([knowak@luxuryresorts.com](mailto:knowak@luxuryresorts.com), 305-296-3535).

Casa Marina's dedicated concierge, MJ Maceri, is happy to arrange activities both parents and children will enjoy. Pets are welcome too, and even given their own beds.

There is a plethora of watersports available right at the resort, including jet skiing, boat charters, snorkeling and scuba diving. The concierge also recommends such local attractions as the Eco Discovery Center, the Key West Nature Preserve and the Mallory Square Sunset Celebration. Don't miss the Mel Fisher Museum (<http://www.melfisher.org/>) for a fascinating look at the treasure discovered aboard the wrecked Spanish galleon *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*.



Guest rooms at Beachside Resort & Conference Center have marble floors

Casa Marina's oceanfront location—the island's largest private beach—has secured its popularity for weddings. With the redesign of the Grand Ballroom and unveiling of the new Flagler's Ballroom, Casa Marina boasts 26,000 square feet of state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor event space. The ballroom's design is reminiscent of the laid-back elegance of old Key West, with classic arches creating the focal point of each ballroom, paying tribute to the Overseas Railway bridges. Contact Ronnie Rupe (305-296-3535) to arrange wedding celebrations.

Casa Marina's sister resort, **The Reach** (<http://www.reachresort.com/>), reopened this winter after \$37 million in refurbishments. Nestled in the sugary-white sand at the end of Simonton Street on the southwest side of the island, the 150-room resort features private balconies on all rooms, a heated outdoor swimming pool, a natural beach, massage studio and the Strip House restaurant.

The **Hyatt Key West Resort & Spa** (<http://www.keywest.hyatt.com/>) has also recently undergone a multimillion-dollar renovation and unveiled a striking new lobby, spa and Blue Mojito Pool Bar & Grill, which overlooks the Gulf of Mexico.

The hotel is managed by Susan Santiago ([ssantiago@hyatt.com](mailto:ssantiago@hyatt.com), 305-809-1234), who has a distinguished 14-year history with the Hyatt Corp. Directly on the beach and just a stroll away from busy Duval Street, this secluded oasis was designated the first "Green Certified" resort in Key West by the Florida Green Lodging

Program for its eco-conscious priorities. This is a plus for your clients who appreciate guilt-free indulgence.

Each of the Hyatt's 118 guest rooms has been elegantly redesigned in a tropical, modern style. We especially liked the custom-built furnishings and plush Hyatt Grand Beds fitted with soft linens over pillowtop mattresses. The extra-large bathrooms are designed with marble and porcelain, and feature rain showers and toiletries by Key West Aloe, a beloved local company. The hotel's largest rooms are the King Salons (in buildings 1 and 2), each with two balconies with Gulf of Mexico views.

Reserve a Keys Essential Massage treatment at the Hyatt's new Jala Spa, showcasing the Payot Paris all-natural product line. The 90-minute experience is based on Thai massage and incorporates semi-precious gemstone extracts. Or choose the Jala Blue treatment, a full-body exfoliation and facial, and the hotel will make a contribution to the Reef Relief Organization (<http://www.reefrelief.org/>). Insiders tell us Erin McKenna is the most popular masseuse. Alfresco massages are available in the poolside cabanas. The spa director, Paulette Scarpine ([pscarpine@hyatt.com](mailto:pscarpine@hyatt.com)), 305-809-4020, is happy to assist with reservations.

Key West's newest lodging addition is **Beachside Resort & Conference Center** (<http://www.beachsidekeywest.com/>), situated next to the Key West Golf Club on the eastern edge of the island. **Travel Agent** went behind the scenes to check out the hotel before its grand opening this spring. A rooftop helicopter landing pad is evidence of its caliber of luxury. The 222-room property was developed by Spottswood Companies, a family-owned real estate business with a legacy in Key West dating back to the 1880s. Designed by award-winning architect Thomas E. Pope, the gulf-facing resort features a private beach and waterfront pool with Jacuzzi. A 20-slip marina will open sometime this year.

Deluxe touches in the generously sized guest rooms include marble flooring, LCD flat-screen TVs with impressive sound systems, L'Occitane bath products and Frette linens. One-, two- and three-bedroom suites contain kitchens, dining areas and Jacuzzi tubs. The best rooms to book are the Gulfview suites in buildings 1 and 5 (rooms 131-137 or 531-536).

The lead concierge, Key West native Toni Tarracino ([beachsideconcierge@spottswood.com](mailto:beachsideconcierge@spottswood.com)), 305-296-8100, ext. 7102, established a reputation for superb service through her work for her father, "Captain Tony," at his charter boat business and Duval Street Saloon. She's handled all sorts of "over-the-top" requests, from customized marriage proposals to charter flights above the Everglades.

Don't miss a meal at Tavern N Town, the resort's two adjoining restaurants by celebrity chef Norman Van Aken. Tapas-style dishes are served at Tavern (which opened in October), while Town (slated to debut later this year) promises a dazzling five-course tasting menu that rotates daily. Take a stool at the bar to gape at the gorgeous theater-style kitchen.