



The beach-chic Playa Largo resort in the Florida Keys is part of the exclusive Autograph Collection. PLAYA LARGO

IF YOU GO

Key Largo is about 95 kilometres south of Miami International Airport.
 Playa Largo Resort & Spa: playalargoresort.com, 305-853-1001; Key Largo, Florida. Marriott rewards apply.
Price: Rates fluctuate. In current low season, rooms cost approximately \$205 US (weekdays), \$500 (weekends), plus resort fee of \$39. Suites, The Hammocks and the Beach House cost more. Dec.-April rates are slightly higher. Rates include beach setups, swimming pool/hot tub, tennis/lawn games and equipment, cruiser bicycles, fitness facilities, Wi-Fi, valet parking, movie night and children's Play Time.
Caribbean Water Sports: 305-852-4707, caribbeanwatersports.com.
More info: Florida Keys: 800-352-5397/800-FLA-KEYS, fla-keys.com. Visit Florida: 888-735-2872, visitflorida.com

PLAYA LARGO ADDS CACHET TO FLORIDA KEYS



ROCHELLE LASH

Playa Largo Resort & Spa in the Florida Keys is a new beach-chic getaway with an idyllic waterfront setting.

It seems like a miracle, but the beautiful year-old resort pulled through the recent hurricane season without significant structural damage, and then for a few weeks housed first-responders and volunteers.

Life is back to a renewed normal of the good life with sun and sand. An Autograph Collection Hotel, Playa Largo is the first resort built in Key Largo in 21 years and a star attraction in a town known for exceptional diving in tranquil Florida Bay and deepsea fishing in the waters beyond.

Key Largo's showbiz claim to fame was that it was the muse for a 1940s film noir, directed by the great John Huston and starring the legendary couple Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall.

The scene: Playa Largo has two defining qualities. First, it is exceptionally pretty. It is low-rise, sun-bleached white and built around a pool surrounded by palm trees, gardens and fountains.

And second, Playa Largo is quintessentially Keysian, with an island-inspired lifestyle. With the tempestuous storm season over and done, it's back to Florida's sultry temperatures and sunshine, so you can live outdoors so much of the time. You can breakfast on the terrace at La Marea, lunch at the pool-side Sand Bar and have sunset drinks and dinner at the waterfront Sol by the Sea.

Playa Largo accommodates a variety of vacationers. I saw a wedding unfold from photos on the pier to "I do's" on the lawn; a lunch bunch arriving by yacht at the 23-slip marina; couples cocooning in private cabanas at the pool; and children heading for Playa Largo's Play Time, which features such delights as a hula hoop contest, fishing, beach games, crafts, treasure hunts, yoga-stretch and movie nights.

Accommodations: The resort was built from scratch, so everything is new-new. You can choose your level of luxe and the size of accommodations, with 177 varied units suitable for couples, families or friends.

The range starts with deluxe, spacious hotel rooms and suites, decked out in Florida-fresh decor of whites and blues, and fully loaded with fancy toiletries by Bulgari and new glass showers. Moving up in privacy and posh factor, head for The Hammocks. This is a secluded



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cluster of 10 darling cottages (called bungalows) tucked into a copse of trees. With the king-sized bedroom on the second floor, a couple can kindle romance in these pastel-hued hideaways, and kids can sleep on the ground-floor living room sofa bed.

The pièce de résistance is Playa Largo's Beach House, a gorgeous three-bedroom waterfront cottage that can accommodate as many as eight.

Food & drink: Word has spread

quickly and Playa Largo is a major go-to for Key Largo's residents and visitors looking for social buzz and good food.

The cocktail lounge, Las Olas, serves conch ceviche, shrimp sushi and such drinks as pisco sours or Key lime martinis, as well as the house specialty — rum.

Sol by the Sea is a tropical-style, open-air bistro with water views and nautical decor of driftwood and colourful buoys. Sol by the Sea serves up tuna

poke, burgers, conch chowder, fish tacos and salads, plus main courses of steak, chicken, Florida fish and paella.

Spa life: Ocean Spa's signature offerings include the Tropical Body Glow, which includes a sugar scrub exfoliation and a coconut milk footbath; and a massage with salt stones, all both refreshing and relaxing.

Brides and their entourages can have makeup services and lessons, and children 12 and over can do nail care and hair braiding.

For men, there are tailored sports massages, facials, scrubs and manicures.

What to do: Generally, Largo life is chill, with options like paddle boarding or kayaking on Florida Bay. The ultimate in laid-back is a sunny sojourn on a beach lounge or perhaps a nap in a hammock strung between two banyan trees.

Too tame? You can take it up a notch at the beachside Caribbean Water Sports kiosk, which rents craft for such thrills as catamaran sailing, tandem parasailing, motorboat cruising, snorkelling or sport fishing.

The Keys also is home to remarkable marine experiences like swimming with dolphins and scuba diving. Caribbean Water Sports organizes two-hour Enviro-tours on a 17-foot Zodiac that cruise into Florida Everglades National Park.

The hotel lends cruiser bikes for use on both the car-free paths and shared-road bike lanes along Ocean Highway.

WHERE TO STAY

TO ADVERTISE PLEASE CALL
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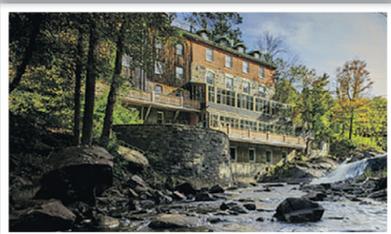
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