

Mile Marker Zero

Text and Photography By Kristin Perez



That's the goal when you are heading south on US-1 towards Key West, the southernmost point of the continental United States (or 90 miles to Cuba, as they say.) And when you get there it will be the last goal that you set for yourself due to the simple fact that you are in the Keys. Laid back is in the air. It starts with the drive down, ethereal, especially for a drive that's anywhere through Florida, most of which is the same flat swampness for miles and miles. Then the land suddenly seems to end and you break free, flanked by turquoise water on either side and the sense of freedom that flying can bring. Turquoise, greens and blues as far as the eye can see as you traverse the mostly two-lane road south, imagining the minds at work that decided to build a bridge connecting all of these drops of foliage with steel and cement. A one-way trip to paradise, old-Florida style.

There is something about the architecture, the mood of the streets, that muffled whisper and glow embodied by time and spirits which mark Key West. The sighs of the heat-filled afternoons, the gentle hum-and-whir of window units in every house on the street. The unmistakable sound of swaying palm trees, the bring-bring of a bicycle bell, that sense of peace. Slow down, you are already here.



Opposite page: (L) Living landmark, (R) Entrance to the Bahama Village the Afro-Caribbean neighborhood.

Clockwise from Top: Shucker art; Key West street sign; a kiss at sunset; A sword swallower gathers a crowd; street performer at the sunset festival.

