



**GEORGE LAKIS**  
PHOTOGRAPHY

# GEORGE LAKIS PHOTOGRAPHY

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## Florida Keys & Key West...

First-time visitors to the Florida Keys comment almost immediately on the island chain's unique laid-back atmosphere that is a world away from big cities and theme parks. It's the kind of ambiance that lured famed novelist Ernest Hemingway to reside in Key West from 1929 to 1939. Hemingway's former residence, inhabited by descendants of his six-toed cats, today is a public museum that honors his literary prowess and the affection he had for his Key West lifestyle.

A necklace of islands that begins just south of Miami, the Florida Keys are connected by the Overseas Highway's 43 bridges — one almost seven miles long — over the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. The area is divided into five regions including Key Largo, Islamorada, Marathon, Big Pine and the Lower Keys, and Key West.

Vistas of the Keys are dominated by emerald-green lagoons, deep-blue seas, nodding palms, rustling pines and olive-green mangroves. Sharing this eco-paradise are white herons, roseate spoonbills, pelicans, sea gulls, ospreys and countless underwater creatures. The coastal waters of the entire 125-mile island chain, including its shallow water flats, mangrove islets and coral reefs, have been designated the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

### **Key Largo**

The longest island of the Keys chain, Key Largo gave its name to the famous movie starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall — portions of which were filmed there. But Key Largo's star attraction is John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park — the first underwater preserve in the United States — that is incorporated within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. These protected areas feature 55 varieties of delicate corals and more than 600 different species of fish. Pennekamp Park offers a variety of water-related activities including scuba, snorkeling and glass-bottom boat excursions to the coral reef. Key Largo is also home to the Spiegel Grove, a retired U.S. Navy ship that is one of the largest vessels in the world ever purposely scuttled to create an artificial reef.

### **Islamorada**

Islamorada is the centerpiece of a group of islands called the "purple isles." Legend says Spanish explorers named the area from "morado," the Spanish word for purple — either for the violet sea snail, *janthina janthina*, found on the seashore here, or for the purple bougainvillea flowers found in the area. Known as the Sport-Fishing Capital of the World, Islamorada is heralded for its angling diversity and features the Keys' largest fleet of offshore charter boats and shallow-water "backcountry" boats. The Keys boast more sport-fishing world records than any other fishing destination in the world, according to the International Game Fish Association. Anglers can find sailfish, marlin, dolphin (the fish, not the mammal), kingfish, snapper, barracuda and grouper in the ocean. Tarpon, bonefish, redfish and other species can be found in shallow coastal waters.

### **Marathon**

Home to the Seven Mile Bridge, Marathon is the heart of the Florida Keys and is centrally located between Key Largo and Key West. Marathon also is home to Crane Point, a 63.5-acre land tract that is one of the most important historical and archaeological sites in the Keys. Crane Point contains evidence of pre-Columbian and prehistoric Bahamian artifacts, and was once the site of an entire Indian village.

Visitors shouldn't pass up the chance to explore Pigeon Key, a small island below the middle of the old Seven Mile Bridge, that is accessible from a visitor center at the west end of Marathon. Pigeon Key once housed the workers who built Henry Flagler's railroad in the early 1900s. While the rest of the Keys have evolved with the years, this tiny key has essentially remained unchanged and is now a national historic treasure complete with a museum chronicling the construction of the Seven Mile Bridge. (continued on the following page)

## ...Laid-back & Legendary

### **Big Pine Key and the Lower Keys**

The sheer sweep of the Straits of Florida and the Gulf of Mexico is readily seen from the Bahia Honda Bridge. Bahia Honda State Park, whose beach was named one of the top 10 in the United States by several travel studies, is a prime example of the Lower Keys' pristine beauty. The Lower Keys are noted for Looe Key Reef, rated by many as among the most spectacular shallow-water dive experiences to be found. Just to the west of Looe Key, the 210-foot island freighter Adolphus Busch Senior rests on the bottom of the ocean as an artificial reef, providing additional habitat for marine species as well as another site for divers. Big Pine Key also features a national refuge for miniature Key deer, tropical forest and even a few alligators. Popular nature tours, many by kayak, offer unforgettable opportunities to view the unique flora and fauna of this area of the Keys.

### **Key West**

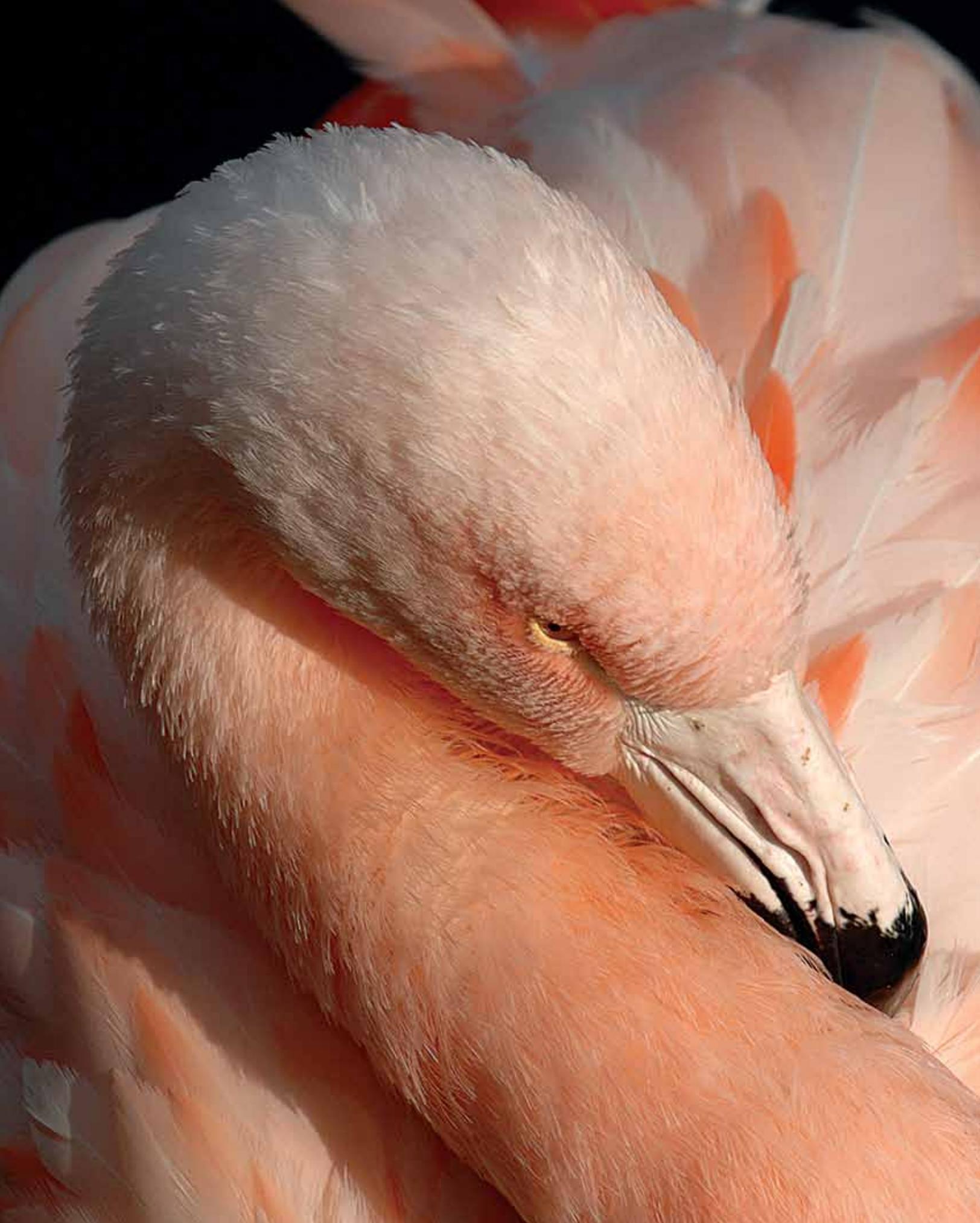
Key West is the final stop on the Overseas Highway, where the land ends and meets the sea amid 19th-century charm and contemporary attractions. The ambiance of continental America's southernmost city — which is situated closer to Cuba than Miami — is embedded in its quaint, palm-studded streets, historic hundred-year-old gingerbread mansions and a relaxed citizenry of self-styled "conchs". It has been said that the idiosyncratic architecture and the laid-back atmosphere of this small, 2-by-4-mile island probably have nurtured the talents of more writers per capita than any other city in the country. Literally scores of published authors reside in Key West either full- or part-time, and the island is noted for its artistic community with a number of galleries exhibiting artwork in varying styles and mediums.

Key West is home to other treasures as well. Longtime resident Mel Fisher, a legendary treasure hunter who died in 1998, recovered more than \$400 million in gold and silver from the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, a 17th-century Spanish galleon that sank 45 miles west of Key West.

At day's end in Key West, visitors gather at Mallory Square to experience the nightly "sunset celebration" — a tradition that Key Westers share with visitors. While musicians, jugglers, mimes and other performers provide entertainment, the sun sinks slowly below the horizon as sunset cruise boats sail by in Key West Harbor.

Source:

Reprinted Courtesy of Florida Keys News Bureau.



# Florida Keys

Animals



# Florida Keys

Animals





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# Florida Keys

Architecture



# Florida Keys

Architecture





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