

## Unlocking The Magic of The Florida Keys: Marathon and Big Pine (Part 2 of 3)

by Maureen Austin, PassPorter Guest Contributor

(Note: The first installment of this series appeared in the [May 3, 2006](#) edition of this newsletter.)

Let's get back on the road as we continue to make our way and discover more of the natural beauty found in the Florida Keys!

Head about 50 miles south of Key Largo and you'll find yourself in Marathon. The name has rich Florida history in its three syllables. Henry Flagler, an industrialist whose influence is found all over the state, built a railroad with a passageway through the Keys. The task was daunting and he often called it a marathon - thus the name for this area was born.

Diving, snorkeling, fishing, and other water sports are a big claim to fame for this little island. Popular beaches include Sombrero Beach as well as Coco Plum Beach, which is frequented by visitors and locals alike.

Animal enthusiasts and eco tourists will find special pleasure in a visit to Crane Point Hammock. Here you can check out the Marathon Wild Bird Center, where injured or ill birds of the Keys find time and treatment so they may be returned to the wild. Don't depart Crane Point before visiting the Museum of Natural History. In addition, an adjacent children's museum provides wonderful exhibits to teach your little ones (and you too!) about the many animals that call the Keys and Florida home.

Marathon certainly welcomes golfers, with a host of private courses. Some of the private clubs boast reciprocity agreements with other clubs across the country - so if you've got the links on your mind and your agenda, phone ahead to inquire.

Smaller is better in Marathon and this holds true for accommodations in the area. Live Florida-style by checking out some of the traditional conch-style cottages available for rent. You can also choose among smaller, family run inns for unbeatable Florida hospitality.

Time to island hop on over to Big Pine Key. Travelers who enjoy a leisurely pace to touring and taking it all in will especially feel at home

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here.

One of this area's best attributes is an obvious stop, but stunning just the same. Bahia Honda State Park has beaches of pristine sand and gorgeous waters that are so incredible, it's frequently named one of our country's best beaches. You'll find all sorts of delightful shore and water activities to please every member of your family.

Amidst the natural beauty of the beaches and pines for which the island is named for, you'll find an enchanting species of deer for which the area has also become famous. Key deer abound here and there are opportunities to view them in their natural habitats.

Kayakers will find an absolute haven here, with many tour operators and rentals available for kayaking and other water sports, too.

Looe Key is known for its amazing panorama under the water with some of the best snorkeling and diving south of Miami. In addition, get your groove on while under the water every July - dive down and attend the Underwater Music Festival! Elvis has left the building folks, and is playing among the fish!

Accommodations range from conch-style cottages to fish and dive camps to inns and motels. You'll note the absence of large high rise hotels and resorts in the area, and as many locals will tell you, that's all part of the charm.

Ready to plan your adventure? More information and resources for good travel planning are a click away.

<http://www.thefloridakeys.com/bigpine/index.html>  
<http://www.thefloridakeys.com/marathon/index.html>  
<http://www.visitflorida.com/destinations/area.php/ca=54>  
<http://www.bahiahondapark.com>

*About The Author: Maureen Austin is co-owner of Ears to You Travel and a proud Florida native. Born in South Florida and having lived all over the state, she enjoys writing about the Sunshine State's many attractions and natural beauty.*

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