

Key West, Florida

Duval Street & Beyond



Randy Houser at Smokin' Tuna Saloon.



The Island

Key West sits at the very end of U.S. 1, closer to Havana than to Miami in a lot of ways that matter. Duval Street runs the length of Old Town and is the spine of the place — bars, restaurants, and live music stacked block after block, with the Gulf of Mexico on one end and the Atlantic on the other. This guide covers where we'd point you for music, drinks, happy hour, food, and the festivals worth timing a trip around.

Bars for Music

Duval Street has live music running nightly, and most of it doesn't cost a cover. A few worth building a night around:

Smokin' Tuna Saloon — One of the island's best rooms for live music — big stage, room to spread out, and a lineup that runs country to rock to blues. It's moving to a new spot at 313 Duval Street, the former Hard Rock Cafe location, so double-check the address before you go. We caught Randy Houser there. It's also an official sponsor of the Key West Songwriters Festival every May.

Green Parrot — A Key West institution a block off Duval on Whitehead Street. Open-air, a floating center bar, pool tables, and a solid live music program most nights — Friday soundcheck, where the night's band plays a free set from 5 to 7pm, is a local favorite.

Irish Kevin's — Loud, interactive, and built around house musicians who work the crowd hard. Not a quiet drink, but a good time.

Sloppy Joe's — The Hemingway-era original at Duval and Greene, open since 1937. Big stage, big bar, big dance floor — classic rock and country most nights.

Schooner Wharf Bar — On the water in the Historic Seaport, low-key by comparison, with live music daily and tall ships coming and going in the marina behind the band.

Tiki House — 203 Duval Street, live music every day with a rotating lineup of local performers and a proper tiki cocktail menu — Zombies, Mai Tais, and drinks served in whole pineapples. Less touristy than a lot of what's around it despite sitting right on Duval.

Live Music Beyond Duval



Not every show in Key West happens in a bar. We caught Old Dominion at the Coffee Butler Amphitheater at Truman Waterfront Park — an 11am Sunday show, which is not a typo. It's a proper outdoor venue, waterfront, with real touring acts passing through. Worth checking the schedule for whoever's playing while you're in town.

Musicians to Follow

Key West's live music scene runs on the same handful of local names showing up night after night, venue after venue. A few worth knowing before you go, so you can catch a set instead of stumbling into one:

Cliff Cody — A Texas-born country singer-songwriter who's made Key West home since 2021, with a regular spot at Smokin' Tuna and a long-running monthly residency at Hog's Breath Saloon. He's played the Key West Songwriters Festival every year since 2005 and has written songs cut by other Nashville artists. Multiple-time Key West Entertainer of the Year.

Joe the Show — A high-energy staple of the Duval Street circuit, known for interactive sets that keep a room singing and dancing from the first song to the last. Catch him at rotating spots around town — check the local music listings for that day's venue and time.

Tony Baltimore — A Baltimore, Maryland transplant playing full-time in Key West since 2011, blending roots-rock with New Orleans, Brit-pop, and gospel influences. Known for a distinctive rapid-fire guitar style and a schedule that often means two shows a night, solo or with his five-piece band.

Nick Norman — A South Carolina-born country singer-songwriter and past winner of the Bubba Award for Best Local Musician. A Key West regular since the mid-2000s, with a soulful, story-driven style and close songwriting ties to Nashville, including collaborations with childhood friend Lee Brice.

Oren Polak — A Washington, D.C.-area musician who came to play Sloppy Joe's in 2013 and stayed. Plays hundreds of shows a year around town, leaning rock over country, and streams many of his sets live online for anyone who can't catch him in person.

Green Parrot also brings in touring national and regional acts on top of its local lineup — Saturday nights especially draw visiting bands, and it's worth checking their calendar before you go in case someone's passing through.

Bars for Great Drinks

Beyond the live music rooms, a few spots stand out for the drinks themselves:

The Rum Bar at the Speakeasy Inn — A former Prohibition-era speakeasy at the southernmost end of Duval, with knowledgeable bartenders and one of the best rum selections in the Keys.

Grand Vin Wine Bar — A quieter wine bar at the calmer end of Duval Street — a good reset if you need a break from the crowds, with a real wine list instead of frozen drinks.

The Saint Hotel — Two bars worth knowing on Eaton Street. Halo, the rooftop lounge, has craft cocktails, live music nightly starting at 8pm, and views over Old Town. Downstairs, the Burgundy Bar at Tempt Restaurant is the craft cocktail spot — warm wood, low light, a serious drink menu, and a daily happy hour from 4:17 to 7:14pm. It's an adults-only hotel, but both bars welcome non-guests.

Little Room Jazz Club — Wednesday through Sunday, inventive cocktails and small bites alongside some of the best jazz musicians on the island. A good choice when you want a real drink

menu instead of a frozen one.

Great Bars

Happy hour is close to a daily ritual in Key West, and the Historic Seaport is the best concentration of it. Times and deals shift, so treat these as a starting point:

Schooner Wharf Bar — Two happy hours daily — 8 to noon and 5 to 7pm — with half-price drinks (special events excluded).

Conch Republic Seafood Company — Daily 4 to 7pm: two-for-one beer, well drinks, and house wine, with a waterfront patio to enjoy it on.

Half Shell Raw Bar — Daily 4:30 to 6:30pm: half off well liquor, beer, and wine, plus discounted seafood off the happy hour menu.

Green Parrot — 4 to 7pm Monday through Thursday, 4 to 5:30pm Friday, with discounted drinks and beer — and free popcorn all day, every day.

Dante's — Weekdays 4:30 to 7:30pm: buy-one-get-one on drinks, plus a poolside setting if you want to swim before or after.

Mary Ellen's — A locals' dive bar off Appelrouth Lane. Happy hour runs 3:30 to 5:30pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday, and 3:30 to 5pm Thursday — discounted drinks alongside grilled cheese sandwiches and the occasional Thursday-night vibrator races for charity.

Bearded Lady — A craft beer bar on Southard Street, across from Green Parrot, with one of the best beer selections on the island and a pet-friendly, less-touristy feel. Happy hour is \$2 off all drinks and 16oz drafts.

Rams Head Southernmost — At the entrance to Bahama Village, a block off Duval. Happy hour runs Monday through Friday 4 to 6pm with half-price appetizers, a build-your-own Bloody Mary bar, and live music daily.

Bars Off the Beaten Path

Step a block or two off Duval and the crowd thins out fast. These are less about the scene and more about finding a stool next to someone who actually lives here:

Bobby's Monkey Bar — A no-frills local dive on Simonton Street, decorated floor to ceiling with stuffed monkeys. Nightly karaoke from 9:30 till late, happy hour noon to 8pm, and a crowd that's mostly locals and regulars.

Dive Bar Shirt Club — Vintage beer paraphernalia fills one of Old Town's most recognizable buildings. Draft beer, wine, and Tex-Mex, plus a genuinely odd bonus: a monthly subscription that mails you t-shirts from dive bars around the world.

Sunset Tiki Bar — The poolside bar at the Galleon Resort, off Front Street. Live music every evening and two happy hours daily — 2-for-1 Bloody Marys 10am to noon, and 2-for-1 margaritas and well drinks 4 to 7pm.

Salty Frog's — Steps from Mallory Square, with a Nashville-by-way-of-Tennessee menu (Nashville hot chicken alongside conch fritters) and live music every night after sunset.

Shots and Giggles — A converted house on Ann Street, a block off Duval, serving shots and cocktails since 2011. Small, a little quirky, and about as local as it gets this close to the main strip.

Restaurants



Seafood is the backbone of the menu island-wide, and it's easy to eat well without a reservation. Fishing runs deep in the local culture too — charters go out daily, and a good mutton snapper like this one is a common sight back at the dock.

Blue Heaven — The island's most photographed restaurant — open-air courtyard, roaming chickens, and a Key lime pie that gets mentioned in the same breath as the food. Good for breakfast, brunch, or dinner.

El Siboney — Authentic Cuban food, generous portions, fair prices. A few blocks off Duval and worth the walk — this is where locals go.

Half Shell Raw Bar — On the Historic Seaport, oysters and stone crab in a low-key, no-frills setting. Good happy hour, good people-watching.

Louie's Backyard — The best view in town, on a deck overlooking the water. Reservations recommended downstairs; the upstairs cafe is first-come, first-served if you just want wine and small plates.

Conch Republic Seafood Company — Touristy but reliably good, dock-to-dish seafood on the Historic Seaport with live music most nights.

Nine One Five — Upscale New American in a restored 1850s Victorian at 915 Duval Street — house-made pasta, fresh seafood, and a global wine list, with indoor dining, a street-level porch, and reservations recommended. Open daily 5 to 11pm.

Point 5 — The upstairs lounge above Nine One Five, and much more of a locals' spot — balcony seating over Duval and a rear porch under the stars, good for cocktails and a more casual night than the dining room below.

Yearly Festivals



Key West's calendar is built around its festivals, and timing a trip around one changes the whole visit. The Key West World Championship Offshore Powerboat Races, held in early November, are a good example — boats over 100 mph racing just off the harbor, a boat parade down Duval Street, and a Race Village that takes over the waterfront for the week.

Mile 0 Fest (late January) — A winter kickoff to the island's festival calendar, with live music spread across multiple Duval Street venues over several days. It's also when touring artists sometimes turn up for surprise pop-up sets at the local bars — Randy Houser played one such pop-up show at Smokin' Tuna one year, which is the show on this guide's cover.

Key West Songwriters Festival (late April/early May) — The largest songwriter festival in the world — over 100 performers across 30-plus venues in five days.

Hemingway Days (late July) — A five-day tribute to Ernest Hemingway, capped by the Look-Alike Contest at Sloppy Joe's.

Key West Lobsterfest (early August) — Street fairs, live concerts, and open-air lobster boils marking the start of lobster season.

Fantasy Fest (mid-October) — The island's biggest event: ten days of costumes, parades, and parties leading up to the Fantasy Fest Parade. Book lodging months out.

Offshore World Championship Week (early November) — The powerboat races described above, plus concerts and a full week of waterfront events.

New Year's Eve — Three simultaneous "drops" — the Red Shoe Drop, the Conch Shell Drop, and the Pirate Wench Lowering — make this one of the more original NYE scenes anywhere.

Planning Your Visit

Old Town is walkable end to end, and most of what's in this guide sits within a few blocks of Duval Street. A golf cart or bike rental covers anything farther out, and you likely won't need a car once you're parked. **When to go.** Winter and spring bring the best weather and the biggest festival crowds — book lodging early for the Songwriters Festival, Fantasy Fest, and New Year's. Summer is hot and humid but quieter and cheaper outside of Hemingway Days. **Happy hour math.** Specials and hours shift often. Treat the list in this guide as a starting point and ask when you sit down — most bars are happy to tell you what's running that day.

We build guides like this because we've spent real time in these places ourselves. If you're planning a Key West trip, or anywhere else, we're happy to help think it through. It costs you nothing to work with us — we're paid by our travel partners, not by you. No pressure, just happy to help if you want a second set of eyes on your trip.