



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

A fishing charter returns at sunset at Hawks Cay on Duck Key, Florida.

The coral archipelago is more than Duval Street and Ernest Hemingway. The Keys offer a bit of everything for families, friends, and, as always, fiends.

**K**EY WEST — It’s something we’re all guilty of. Yes, even travel writers.

Once we find our travel unicorn, that rare place we return to year after year because it’s familiar and we can switch our brains to cruise control upon arrival, we tend to forget that other destinations exist. There may be getaways that are even better than that glittery travel unicorn we’ve corralled, but honestly, we’re just too lazy to seek them out.

My go-to Florida Key has always been Key West. Coincidentally, it’s also the place in Florida where you’re most likely to spot someone dressed as a unicorn. I thought it had everything I wanted in a Keys vacation: a crusty old writer’s house filled with polydactyl cats, a judgment-free karaoke bar, great sunsets, and strong drinks. Easy peasy. But it turns out that there are other Keys (approximately 800) with lots of alternative activities and charms.

With a bit of exploration, I quickly learned that the Keys have more personalities than Sally Field in the 1976-made-for-TV movie “Sybil.” There’s the sporty Key Largo, the arty and fishy Islamorada, and even a tiny island off of Key West that is gaining a reputation for becoming Brooklyn to Key West’s Manhattan. I haven’t fully bought into that one yet. What I’m getting at in my usual circumlocutory manner is that whatever you’re looking for in the Keys, you can probably find it as easily as iguanas or conch fritters. Which Key is for you? Fasten your seatbelts. We’re going for a ride.

**KEY LARGO: Scuba and snorkeling**

I previously thought of Key Largo strictly as a mile marker, reminding me I had two more hours in the car until I hit Key West. Also, as the name of a 1948 movie and the title of Bertie Higgins’s milque-



CHRISTOPHER MUTHER



Descendants of Ernest Hemingway’s polydactyl cats are the star attraction at the Hemingway House and Museum in Key West.

toast 1981 easy-listening hit. But this Key refers to itself as the scuba diving capital of the world. It has the third-largest barrier reef in the world, along with John Pennnekamp Coral Reef State Park, home to the oldest underwater preserve in the United States. If you’re going to jump into the water, this is the place to do it. I long assumed Key West was the largest Key, but Key Largo holds that distinction.

I sought a different way to get onto the water in Key Largo. I took a trip on a 111-year-old steamboat that is on the National Register of Historic Places. The boat was also the title character in the 1951 Humphrey Bogart/Katharine Hepburn “The African Queen.” Through a random series of events that would require a very long explanation and an expansive attention span that I do not possess, the African Queen is now docked in the Keys and takes tourists through a canal system in Key Largo for \$59.

The affable African Queen tour guide peppered me with movie trivia questions, first about “The African Queen” and then other movies. Typically there are six people on the boat to volley back answers, but because it was freezing cold by Keys standards (68 degrees and windy), I was the only one brave enough to board. I learned a lot about Key Largo and also learned that I don’t know much about movie trivia.

If you opt to take the African Queen tour, I advise you seek sustenance for the voyage at Harriett’s Restaurant with biscuits and gravy. The biscuits are the size of a toddler’s head and flakier than Christopher Lloyd. For lunch or dinner, head to the Fish House. The conch is pricey at \$37, but worth it. The advantage to staying in Key Largo is that hotels are much less expensive. Waterside Suites and Marina has large rooms with kitchens and laundry starting at \$250 a night. You will not find a 600-square-foot suite in Key West for \$250 a night. There are plenty

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# ‘The Hampton House was the place to be from the get-go’

**By Neccee Regis**  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**M**IAMI — On my first visit to the Historic Hampton House Museum & Cultural Center last May, I drove right past the entrance and had to circle the block before spotting its sign and pulling into its semicircular driveway. Of course, once I found it, I wondered how I could have missed the 1950s Miami Modern-style motel with its lemon-yellow facade, turquoise trim, and decorative wrought-iron railings.

Located a stone’s throw from FL-112, northwest of downtown, the low-slung, two-story building is quite a distance from the glitz and glam of Miami and



NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Muhammad Ali and his wife Khalilah, sitting with their 6-month old daughter Miriam near the Hampton House pool in Miami, graced the cover of Ebony magazine in 1969.**

its beaches. And that was the point in the turbulent 1960s, when Miami Beach hotels were “whites-only” establishments, and the Hampton House Hotel was the primo luxury vacation hot spot for African Americans.

Originally opened in the mid-’50s as the Booker Terrace Motel, named after Booker T. Washington, the hotel was sold and rebranded in 1961 as the Hampton House Hotel, with renovations to the hotel rooms, lobby, and pool area, and amenities such as maitre-d service, valet parking, and a 24-hour restaurant and lounge.

“The Hampton House was the place to be from the get-go,” said the preservationist Dr. Enid Curtis Pinkney, 91, a native Miami resident.

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# Fort Myers hopes spring baseball brings sunnier times

**By Rich Fahey**  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**F**ORT MYERS — There has been precious little sunshine in this corner of the Sunshine State in recent months.

Hurricane Ian stormed into Southwest Florida on Sept. 28 of last year, killing, as of Jan. 22, 71 people in Lee County and 148 people statewide. Ian also caused \$112.9 billion in damages across the state, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and was one of only four Category 4 hurricanes in history to make landfall in the United States.

Lee County residents are hopeful that when Major League spring training baseball — a Florida ritual that dates back more than a century — begins this month, it will provide a needed boost to the local economy and put smiles back on the faces of both fans and residents.

Much of Southwest Florida — and especially the barrier islands and Fort Myers Beach in Lee County, which were devastated — is still in full recovery mode.

But there will be baseball, and Lee County — the spring home of two Major League teams, the Red Sox and the Minnesota Twins — is hoping that, for the first time since 2019, it goes off without a hitch.

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PHOTOS BY NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE; RAYMOND ELMAN (SWIMMING POOL)

# A museum and so much more

## ►HAMPTON HOUSE

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amian who grew up during the time of segregation. “All the [Black] celebrities who came to Miami wanted to stay at the Hampton House because it was quite an elegant place.”

Indeed, the famous jazz musicians of the era, barred from staying at the upscale hotels in Miami Beach where they performed, would pack their instruments and head to the Hampton House in Brownsville, an African American enclave outside of Miami’s more crowded Overtown neighborhood. The roster of performers who played to integrated audiences in The Lounge reads like a Who’s Who of the era — Sammy Davis Jr., Nat King Cole, Sam Cooke, Sarah Vaughn, Cannonball Adderley, Ella Fitzgerald, Jackie Wilson, Nina Simone, Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Louis Armstrong, Nancy Wilson, and dozens more. As does the audience who went to hear them — baseball legend Jackie Robinson, football star Jim Brown, Berry Gordy of Motown Records, and boxers Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali.

Not just a celebrity jazz club, The Lounge also showcased local talent, featuring a house band named Mod Soul, and was a popular hangout for neighborhood residents on weekend evenings and after church on Sundays.

“On Sunday evenings the lounge would have live jazz, and the gentleman that played in the lounge would allow us youngsters to come in and sit in on the jazz tunes,” said native Miamian and trumpet player Winston Scott.

Though Scott eventually chose a different career path than music, the retired US Navy captain, Naval aviator, fighter pilot, and astronaut who flew two space shuttle missions still fondly remembers spending time at the Hampton House, saying he “learned how to play music by sitting in with the professionals.”

Living up to its reputation as “the social center of the South,” the Hampton House Hotel also attracted individuals and organizations connected to the Civil Rights Movement. It was here that The Congress of Racial Equality (C.O.R.E.) held weekly meetings seeking a nonviolent end to segregation.

Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X were among the hotel’s notable visitors. During the ‘60s, King made the Hampton House an unofficial headquarters, giving an early version of his “I Have a Dream” speech at a C.O.R.E. sponsored event, holding a press conference to state his opposition to the Vietnam War, and throwing his support to Operation Breadbox, a campaign to support Black-owned businesses. Visitors today can visit the modest, reconstructed room where King stayed, with its small kitchenette overlooking the pool patio, and view photos of him relaxing in The Lounge with other luminaries of the era.

One of the more acclaimed moments at the hotel occurred on Feb. 25, 1964. After Muham-



Visitors to Miami’s Historic Hampton House can view the rooms where Muhammad Ali (top left) and Martin Luther King Jr. (top right) stayed. Photos of jazz legends who performed in The Lounge surround the swimming pool (center). Above: The lobby of the Hampton House, which functions as both a museum and a community and educational center.

mad Ali (then still called Cassius Clay) shocked the boxing world by defeating defending world heavyweight champion Sonny Liston at the Miami Beach Convention Center, he celebrated his win at the Hampton House with friends Malcolm X, Sam Cooke, and Jim Brown, an evening that inspired the play and subsequent movie “One Night in Miami.” The evening was also captured in an iconic image, on display in the museum, of Malcolm X snapping a photo of Ali sitting at The Lounge’s counter surrounded by friends and fans. (It is reported that Ali celebrated his win with a bowl of ice cream.)

Ali and his wife Khalilah visited at the hotel on multiple occasions, and one can tour the historically-styled room where they stayed. A photo of the couple, sitting with their 6-month old daughter Miriam near the Hampton House pool, graced the cover of Ebony magazine in 1969.

“The Hampton House was considered like the Waldorf Astoria for artists because anybody

who was anybody stayed there,” said Khalilah Ali.

“I met Frank Sinatra, who came over to the Hampton House with Milton Berle and Henny Youngman when they were performing on the beach,” said Ali. “[Sinatra] would get on the bus and go over to the beach with the Black artists. It was something that Frank Sinatra and Milton Berle fought for, to give the rights for the Black artists to live on the beach, in the hotels, as performers. It was an honor to meet Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr.”

The hotel eventually closed its doors in 1976.

“With integration, the Hampton House became a derelict building for about 30 years,” said Pinkney, the preservationist. Using her persuasive networking skills, Pinckney rallied a coalition of politicians, preservationists, historians, and business people to convince the Miami-Dade Historic Preservation Board to declare the property a historical landmark, which they did in 2002, thus saving it from demolition.

In 2015, the Historic Hampton House started its renovations, and today functions as both a museum and a community and educational center. Visitors can tour historic rooms, public spaces, and see various permanent and changing exhibitions that explore the rich history of the hotel and Miami’s Black community. The Hampton House also celebrates its inclusion in the Green Book, a reference used by Black travelers to



find accepting hotels, restaurants, and gas stations during the Jim Crow era.

One project on exhibition features seven 40-by-60-inch mixed media portraits of people, some now in their 70s and 80s, who patronized the hotel in its heyday. The work was the brainchild of Miami artist (and former Bostonian) Raymond Elman who, after learning of the Hampton House’s storied history, received an Ellies Award from Oolite Arts to create and record video interviews with each subject. On completion, Elman donated them all to the Historic Hampton House. The exhibited portraits include wall texts with QR codes that link to each subject’s interview, available via Inspicio Arts, an online arts publication platform sponsored by FIU’s College of Communication, Architecture + the Arts, where Elman is the founding editor in chief. Videos are also directly available online: <https://inspicio.fiu.edu/interviews-hampton-house-portraits/>

inspicio.fiu.edu/interviews-hampton-house-portraits/

Not simply an homage to the past, the Historic Hampton House is continually evolving. Future plans for the property include a new jazz club, onsite café, photo and artifact archives, and a virtual reality film short by filmmaker Qasim Basir that will enable visitors to experience the challenges of traveling as a person of color in the United States.

*Historic Hampton House, 4240 NW 27th Ave., Miami. Closed Monday and Tuesday. Three tours available Wednesday through Sunday. Tickets \$25 per tour for up to four guests. \$15 for students and those over age 55. 305-638-5800, <https://historichamptonhouse.org/history>.*

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