chef profile
Andrew Nguyen

KEY WEST DINING
Louie's Backyard

Upper Keys Food Tour

Keys Cuisine Issue

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# Keys Cuisine Issue

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ABOVE: Crabcake appetizer from Tempt Restaurant, Key West | Photo by Rob O’Neal |
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ABOUT THE COVER

Louie’s Backyard in Key West is a dining institution and full of history. See the full story on page 8.
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By Ellen T. White

In truth, the venerable Louie’s Backyard restaurant could serve gruel and still pack in diners night after night. They don’t, of course. You’re more likely to find items such as lobster braised in truffle butter, grilled coriander-rubbed swordfish, and sweet-and-sour duck breast, along with tantalizing specials created by Chef Doug Shook from the catch of the day.

But the true secret of the restaurant’s phenomenal success? “The view,” owner Phil Tenney says, without hesitation. Perched a stone’s throw from the Southernmost Point, Louie’s offers an unparalleled vista from its cascading decks, which spill out over cerulean Atlantic waters that gently kiss the horizon. Gentle southeastern breezes promise enchantment from far away.
No quaint marketing conceit, the name “Louie’s Backyard” is actually an origin story. It all began with Louie Signorelli, a legendary cook among his friends, who was persuaded to open his backyard as a restaurant overlooking the Atlantic Ocean in 1971. There were five tables — 12 seats in all — at which the restaurant's current owner Tenney served as one of the original waiters. “We were all hippies with long hair,” remembers Tenney, a woodworker and a Vietnam veteran who had visited Key West and stayed for the sweeter life.

“Louie’s standard meal was crudités with a bagna cauda dip, snapper cheeks and potatoes in tin foil baked in rosin,” says Tenney, though a smattering of other offerings in the “Conch spirit” were part of the menu. “A cigar box was our cash register,” Tenney says, and a Keysie laissez faire approach to life was the only code of behavior.

In those days an unknown Jimmy Buffett, a Louie’s regular, rented the house next door. Chris Robinson, Louie’s bartender back in the day, fondly remembers that his own dog, Ten Speed, and Buffett’s cat, Radar, who were fast friends, sat together at the bar drinking kalua and cream. Radar, a cat of refined sensibilities, would not touch his drink without a cocktail napkin slipped under his glass. In his 1974 song “Trying to Reason with Hurricane Season,” Buffett memorialized the restaurant in the lyrics,
“sure could use a bloody Mary, so I stumbled over to Louie’s Backyard,” which turned into “the bar next door” in some versions. In live concerts Buffett still pays tribute to Louie’s, flashing a backdrop photo of the hammock next door where he wrote the song.

Louie’s fell on hard times in the late 1970s, going through a number of owners, until Tenney, along with his then wife, Pat, bought the place in 1982. They embarked on a year-long expansion that would make the restaurant what it is today. The house — described in Louie’s cookbook as “a kind of Conch/Greek revival style with Doric columns, Bahamian shutters and a two-story porch” — was built in 1907 by James Randall Adams, a sea captain who made a fortune in wrecking. Adams boasted that nearly all his furnishings, including the dishes, were salvaged from ships that met their doom on the reefs.

With an architect’s help, “we built an extension that enlarged the house on the sea side,” says Tenney, and added three graduating decks — all the while preserving the integrity of Adams’ original structure. (In the process, Tenney found a stack of 5-by-8 cards in the basement, which listed patrons whose balances were still unpaid.) But it was the late Pat Tenney’s unfailing instinct for design that would create the legendary atmosphere that survives today. After the Tenneys divorced, they continued on as friends and partners. Their son, Jed, is Phil’s partner and the restaurant’s co-owner.

“She [Pat] combed through catalogs and was always looking for ways to keep the decor fresh,” remembers Jed. With sleek wood interior details (many built by Phil), table cloths, hurricane lamps, contemporary art and fresh flowers, Pat aimed for what she
called “casual elegance.” At twilight, the enchantment was heightened by a canopy of trees covering the deck, strung with tiny white lights, which hovered over diners like a twinkling sky. It has inspired marriage proposals too numerous to count and has been the setting for many weddings. (Phil Tenney’s first wedding and Buffett’s second took place in Louie’s original backyard.)

From its very beginning, Louie’s was prime ground for celebrity sightings. Buffett would draw other members of his “rat pack” to Louie’s, among them writers Hunter S. Thompson, Thomas McGuane and Jim Harrison. Musician Eric Clapton showed up apparently for the express purpose of meeting Buffett, rumored to be a regular. “When Jimmy walks in,” he said, “bring him right over to my table,” remembers Tenney, who made the introduction that very night. Goldie Hawn stopped in, as have funny men Bill Murray, P.J. O’Rourke, Johnny Carson and David Letterman. “We had the Prince of Monaco,” recalls Tenney, “along with his entourage,” including a vast security detail.

From the original 12, the “new” Louie’s accommodated upward of 150 patrons. Chefs revolved in and out in the first couple of years — that is, until the five-year tenure of Norman Van Aken, promoter of “fusion” style cuisine and author of cookbooks touting global flavors. Van Aken not only introduced what he called “Nuevo Cubano” food to Louie’s, but also brought in Doug Shook to handle the luncheon shift.
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Enjoy poolside cocktail service, explore Stock Island on our complimentary bicycles or take advantage of our hourly shuttle service downtown. Oceans Edge provides the perfect formula for an authentic Key West experience.
“I was hired over the phone and arrived in Key West,” remembers Shook. “Seeing the decks stepping down over the Atlantic, I said to myself, ‘Oh, I could stay a while’”—a thought that turned out to be prescient. When Van Aken left to open his own Key West restaurant, Shook was promoted to executive chef. Thirty-three years later Shook’s overseeing up to 450 meals a day in season, including the upstairs Cafe, where Shook’s longtime collaborator, Darrin Swartz, wows customers with a small plate menu.

“We try as much as possible to source food locally and draw our flavors from hot zones all around the world — Asia, the Caribbean, Africa and Mexico,” says Shook. “I’d love to do a Coq au Vin or some braised ribs, but customers expect something on the lighter side.”

In his kitchen, Shook encourages a laid-back creativity. Still, his staff know not to disturb the chef when he’s standing in the doorway holding the day’s catch right off the boat with a faraway look in his eyes; he’s channeling inspiration for that night’s special.

The best compliment he gets? “That would be a clean plate,” says Shook.

Louie’s offers an unparalleled vista from its cascading decks, which spill out over cerulean Atlantic waters that gently kiss the horizon.

ABOVE: The vistas are incredibly impressive any time of day but particularly as sunset approaches.
Waterfront dining and "Glass Bottom Tiki Bar". Featured on Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives on the Food Network and in the Netflix Series "Bloodlines". Pilot House is located on the water in Downtown Key Largo. Enjoy Air Conditioned dining or relax at our Glass Bottom Tiki Bar while feeding the fish. It's fun for the entire family. Featuring live entertainment most nights and 18 Large TVs. Fresh Local Seafood, Cold Beer and the best cocktails in the Keys! "Home Port for Locals".

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South Vietnamese Chef Andrew Nguyen is living the American dream.
With much national debate today about immigration, it’s refreshing to learn about a refugee family who emigrated to the United States and found a way to make a positive mark in the country.

Andrew Nguyen, who describes himself as South Vietnamese by way of New Jersey, is the owner and chef of Tempt Restaurant at the Saint Hotel in Old Town, Key West.

His father experienced the Vietnam War and was an Allied Attaché and Naval Architect with U.S. Navy. When the war ended in 1975, he arrived in the U.S. and was able to bring his family here to join him.

As the youngest son in his family and just 3 years old when he arrived, Nguyen was influenced early on by his mother’s cooking and admits he didn’t realize that those influences would so indelibly shape his future. He had a love for food that started in high school, as well as a love for art, the latter of which played a role in his ultimate career path.

“At one point in high school, I realized I wasn’t good enough to earn a living painting or drawing,” he said. “So even though painting was a passion, I had to shift to something that was more realistic, and food became that choice.”

One of his first stints as a chef was in Philadelphia, under Chef Albert Harris, well-renowned in that region in the late 1990s. Nguyen was introduced to American regional cooking and began to inject his Asian influences into traditional dishes. And while Nguyen does not take enough credit for it, his early efforts in combining flavors contributed in part to the evolution and acceptance of “fusion” cuisine.

He later traveled the Garden State Parkway north to New York City, where he learned alongside Executive Chef Patricia Yeo, a Eugene, Oregon native who has won acclaim as a Top Chef and has worked closely with celebrity chef Bobby Flay. Incorporating elements of her worldly upbringing with biochemistry to create innovative, elegant and intricate menus earned her a three-star review from The New York Times’ William Grimes.

This experience, more than any other, opened Nguyen’s eyes to the respect for cooking that he believes young chefs today bypass. “It’s not all about speed, it’s about sourcing out your
product, understanding where it comes from,” Nguyen explained. He gave an example of knowing what a cow ate as a part of its diet to understand how that would affect the cut and flavor of the beef. “That’s what true cooking is all about,” he says.

After nine productive and exciting years in the Big Apple, Nguyen brought that experience to Key West around late 2004. He leased a restaurant at 1500 Bertha St., where Lupita’s Mexican Restaurant sits today, and opened the Pompano Tasting Room and Wine Bar. There he created a new style of food that contrasted nicely with the standard seafood on most area restaurant menus at the time. He said many locals still recall that restaurant fondly.

After the very busy 2005 hurricane season that culminated with hurricanes Katrina and Wilma, Nguyen was forced to shutter the restaurant. He moved on to Square One Restaurant in Key West, where Michael Stewart was the owner and Nguyen’s mentor for ten years. Later, in his first corporate position, he became Executive Chef at the newly remodeled La Concha Hotel, which was his first experience as a restaurateur operating on hotel grounds. While there, he learned about the hotel environment and how it interacted with an on-site restaurant.

Finally, it was time to venture out on his own again. In doing so, Nguyen shaped his current ownership of Tempt Restaurant, with locations in Key West and New Orleans, as well as a third restaurant under consideration.

The Tempt Restaurant has been in Key West for four years, and many patrons have followed Nguyen and his cooking around the island. Nguyen estimates that most of his business today is locally driven, which was surprising considering the restaurant sits within the Saint Hotel. The restaurant offers a quirky Happy Hour from 4:17 pm to 7:14 pm daily, signifying the numerical address of the property, forward and backward.

Having Tempt Restaurant situated across from the Tropic Cinema is a bonus. “We see a lot of locals come in before a movie and a different crowd arrives after that crowd departs,” says Nguyen. Their high-end tapas are the perfect fit for the entertainment-seeking Key West crowd. Dishes such as Moroccan Spice Lamb Chops and Italian-style Caponata, a flatbread that combines North African with Mediterranean flavors, are also big hits.

“I am living the American Dream,” Nguyen proclaims. “This is the best country in the world because here I’ve had a chance to follow my passion and provide diners in many areas with a unique culinary experience. I’ve had to earn everything. Nothing was passed down to me on my culinary path, and I am very grateful for this opportunity.”

LEFT: Chef Nguyen carefully prepares a plate, where every precise touch contributes to the complete dining experience.

OPPOSITE PAGE (Clockwise from top left): A succulent Wild Scottish Salmon and Gulf Shrimp dish is one of Tempt Restaurant’s signature dishes. The outdoor patio area fits in perfectly with the laid-back Key West lifestyle. This Vietnamese Rice Paper Wrapped Crab Cake will make your mouth water. This irresistible dish of Moroccan-spiced lamb shanks, garnished with herbs and greens is emblematic of the savory menu at Tempt.
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FEEDING FRENZY

BY RICHARD TAMBORRINO

IN THE FLORIDA KEYS
Most diners who descend on the Florida Keys instantly gravitate to seafood when creating any kind of feasting bucket-list upon their arrival. And rightfully so. Our region has an amazing array of locally caught and harvested seafood to enjoy.

While not indigenous to the Keys, but certainly abundant, yellowtail snapper, hogfish, mutton snapper, grouper and mahi-mahi are just a few of the Keys’ scale fish preferred by chefs. Combine that array with a variety of cooking approaches and you get an almost infinite amount of seafood dining possibilities.

One cooking approach that has a firm hold in the Keys is aptly named Floribbean cuisine. It finds its way into almost every type of seafood, including conch, shrimp and many other Keys originals. It embodies flavors and cooking styles from Cuba and the Caribbean, among other locales, which has infused itself into our cooking over hundreds of years. Combined with our local cooking techniques, a type of unique food blending not found elsewhere has evolved.

While fish preference is personal, most consider Hogfish to be the most delicious fish caught in our waters. Some might say it even qualifies as a “death row meal.” It’s a delicate white fish that is thin, cooks quickly and adapts to virtually any flavor it’s introduced to.
We even have a Keys restaurant named as such: Hogfish Bar and Grill on Stock Island (hogfishbar.com). Julia Santiago at the restaurant estimates they prepare hogfish more than a dozen ways, from fried, grilled or blackened to stuffed, in a sandwich or prepared to order. They even offer fried hogfish sliders. “It’s definitely one of our most requested fish,” she said.

Whether it’s salad, chowder or fritters, almost everything goes better with conch. **CONCH** is essentially a mollusk with a pretty shell and is just as synonymous with the Florida Keys as Key limes. Sadly, conch served in Florida and the Keys is likely sourced from the Bahamas since it’s been so heavily fished here in the Keys for years.

Bubba Gump told us 25 years ago “You can barbecue it, boil it, broil it, bake it, sauté it. There’s shrimp kabobs, shrimp creole, shrimp gumbo, pan fried, deep fried, stir fried...” but regardless, Key West is all about **PINK SHRIMP**. Nearly 85 percent of the pink shrimp harvested in the United States comes from the west coast of Florida, including from the crystal-clear waters of the Dry Tortugas. Prized for its sweet, tender meat, pink shrimp are caught fresh year-round, but are more abundant during winter months. Florida shrimp season is from November to June, and there are several Key West seafood restaurants that do a particularly good job with pinks:

- **Eaton Street Seafood Market**: Order pinks pre-steamed from the counter or prepared from the menu.
- **The Stoned Crab**: They serve your local pinks Southern style.
- **Blue Heaven**: Encourages you to try pink shrimp eggs benedict, or in a pink omelet.
- **Half Shell Raw Bar**: They prefer simplicity and suggest peel and eat shrimp. No better way to enjoy the island’s favorite decapod.

TOP: No matter if you enjoy conch as a fritter or any of a dozen other ways, it’s a tasty morsel.

BOTTOM: Known for their sweet succulent meat, stone crabs are a Keys favorite.

OPPOSITE PAGE (Top to bottom): Mangoes find their way into many Keys-prepared dish.

There’s no better way to cap an amazing meal than with a hearty slice of Key lime pie.
STONE CRABS, renowned for their sweet and succulent meat, are a Keys staple. Just ask Keys Fisheries in Marathon, which essentially started the stone crab business in the Keys more than 50 years ago and still supplies Whole Foods and the world-famous Joe’s Stone Crab in Miami Beach with these tasty morsels.

Since stone crab claws regenerate, it’s considered a renewable resource, and thanks to a strict harvesting season (roughly Oct. 15-May 15), the Florida Keys are responsible for about 40 percent of the state’s overall harvest.

So, while we generally agree that seafood is the food most consumed locally, diners generally make room for fruit and dessert too.

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MANGOES, a fruit that originated in South Asia, but which has been widely adopted here in the Keys, finds its way into many appetizers, sauces and toppings. Mango salsa is likely the most recognizable. See the recipe on the right.

No Keys meal is complete without a slice of KEY LIME PIE. Sure, you can try Key lime cheesecake, Key lime cookies or even Key lime cupcakes, but it’s the pie you seek. Local Keys historian David Sloan wrote an entire book on Key lime pie, called “The Ultimate Key Lime Pie Cookbook.” Sloan determined that Pepe’s Café in Key West makes his favorite.

The only thing left to say is bon appetit!

**RECIPE FOR Mango Salsa**

**Ingredients:** 2 ripe mangoes, ½ red onion, ½ each yellow, red and green pepper, 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice, 8 fresh mint leaves.

**Preparation:** Remember, adding any number of additional ingredients allows you to experiment and make it your own.

1- Dice the mango, onion and peppers into small cubes.  
2- Add the lime juice.  
3- Start with eight mint leaves, chop them finely and add to the mix, adjusting for taste.  
4- Consider adding Jalapeno peppers or Habenero for a little heat.  
5- Refrigerate for at least two hours so the flavors have a chance to blend. The longer the better.
The large iconic sign of a mermaid that sits beside the highway near Mile Marker 82 reflects the German legend of the Lorelei siren, and lures visitors to a longstanding eatery. The sign is reputed to have been placed there around 1980, according to a former dining room manager, Edith Grenfell. When Frank Kulisky and Richard Jacob took over the Lorelei in 1986, along with other owners, they had the mermaid repainted several times without changing the shape. One of the “repaints” looked a bit like model Cheryl Tiegs, according to many viewers. Kulisky’s group owned the restaurant property for 20 years, enjoying great times, he said. “In the 1990s, I had a big-time architect and developer from Miami come down and make recommendations for the Lorelei property. His first statement was, ‘Never change the mermaid.’ That’s the suggestion we followed — maybe the only one.”

The property sprawled through the years from a ramp with docks to a mangrove-lined rear of the property, to a calm channel for liveaboards, to the restaurant and cabana bar that serve great food and drinks at reasonable prices. The Lorelei has had various owners through the years but always offered live entertainment, generally from mid-day to after sundown. The current owners are the Lindback family of Islamorada.

Families are comfortable bringing multiple generations to the venue as children can dig in the sand and make sand castles while older family members dine and drink. The kids also can look for marine creatures flitting among the docks or...
TOP: Sunset-viewing with friends and family is always special at Lorelei Restaurant and Cabana Bar in Islamorada.

CENTER: Lorelei visitors can arrive by land or by sea, and often do, considering the convenient dockage.

BOTTOM: Lorelei is at its best on nights when the water is gin-clear and there’s hardly a ripple in sight.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Lorelei has been serving thankful diners for almost 40 years.

swimming in the gin-clear water. Visitors may see manatees, especially in the winter months, and colorful fish, stingrays or upside-down jellyfish.

“John and Rhonda Maloughney were the general managers who brought The Lorelei out of bankruptcy and made it the success you see today. They retired earlier this year after a total of 27 years [at the helm],” said Rob LeBrun, Lorelei’s current manager.

According to the Maloughneys, who retired in February after a second stint as managers, the Lorelei began to develop in 1989. The indoor restaurant accommodated 75 guests then, while the outdoor Cabana Bar seated 60. “Now, it seats 600,” John Maloughney was quoted as saying in a newspaper article in the early 2000s.

Like the Florida Keys themselves, the Lorelei always had allure. Bandleader Arthur Godfrey, who led 1950s-era bands, broadcast his first television show from the Lorelei docks, Maloughney said. Later, former major-leaguer Davey Johnson had a financial interest in the restaurant for quite a few years and recorded several radio commercials for the Lorelei. Additionally, the property owners had a “Davey’s got a job party” when he signed a contract to manage the Baltimore Orioles in 1996.

Photographs of Baseball Hall of Famer Ted Williams and former president George H.W. Bush graced the restaurant’s walls as they frequented the popular watering hole and fishing docks. Musician Clarence Clemons, who owned a home on Stirrup Cay in Marathon, would play his saxophone occasionally on stage at the Lorelei when participating in the Redbone Celebrity Tournament Series. Known as the “Big Man” in Bruce Springsteen’s E-Street Band, surprised guests were delighted when Clemons wailed on his sax.

Calling itself ‘the pulse of Islamorada,” the Lorelei has successfully combined various business ventures at its site, from fishing guides who depart from its ramp and docks to great nightly entertainment, including the lively Michael Trixx magic show complete with disappearing and reappearing objects and animals, accompanied by hypnotic rock ’n’ roll music. Even a floating pink Cadillac — on a North Carolina skiff chassis — and a pirate ship created by resident Joe Fox of Islamorada is available to depart the basin and take guests on backcountry eco-tours, history tours or sunset viewing.

According to LeBrun, 32 world-class fishing guides operate out of the Lorelei offering half- and full-day charters for Islamorada’s legendary sportfish. The boats tend to return to the docks conveniently around happy hour, which is from 4 to 6 p.m. daily and the Lorelei chefs will cook edible fish catches for $8.95 per person.
Live music begins at 6 this time of year, with a weekend matinee between noon and 3 p.m. “The Lorelei is proud to be a place where locals and visitors alike can sit by the bar and trade fishing stories,” said LeBrun.

What’s next at the ever-evolving hotspot is refurbishment of the parking lot this year to create more spaces and a better, “neater” layout, as well as expansion to its one-story retail space. Adding a floor above its current shop location will enable banquet and catering facilities and ought to be operational in 2020, said LeBrun.

Casual and delicious fare such as fresh fish made a few different ways, cracked conch sandwiches and three kinds of chowder — Keys conch, stone crab and New England clam chowder — are Lorelei’s menu staples. Diced tuna nachos, Conch salad and smoked fish dip are among the hits on the appetizer menu. A diner also can’t go wrong with the coconut shrimp or bacon-wrapped shrimp skewers, and the unique frozen Key lime pie topped with mango sauce is often the go-to dessert.

What’s special about the Lorelei in addition to its incomparable setting and nightly sunsets is its staff. Many have been with the Lorelei for 10 years or more. “We are lucky to have such an awesome and devoted staff,” said LeBrun. “If you treat them well, they’ll stay.”

And the same can be said of Lorelei’s visitors and locals who come time after time for a stunning sunset by the bay, serenaded by live music while enjoying delicious libations. ©
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This is coastal island décor at its finest, with great ocean views, craft beers and a wide assortment of cocktails. Locally-sourced fresh seafood is available daily. Resort Chef William Ryan hand crafted the menu, including whole fried snapper and Florida Keys Lobster Roll. They also offer a great separate area for large groups.

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Stop by and see why Lazy Days has repeatedly been voted “Best Restaurant Overall,” “Best Waterfront Dining,” “Best Seafood Restaurant,” “Best Lunch” and “Best Wait Staff” in the annual Upper Keys People’s Choice awards, while being featured on The Cooking Channel’s Man’s Greatest Food in “The 15 Best Seafood Dishes In The Country.”
In 1972, Jack and Dottie Hill, along with their two sons, Tom and Rick (and a pickup) began the fledgling business “Jack Hill Bait and Seafood.” By 1976, it had grown into a solvent corporation renamed “Key Largo Fisheries, Inc.”

Key Largo Fisheries is in the middle of Key Largo, surrounded by the emerald green waters of the Florida Keys. The fisheries sit on 5 acres of land and water forming a marina, retail store and seafood processing facility.

Proud to sponsor “fresh from the Florida Keys,” Key Largo Fisheries offers a wide variety of products, and ships business and personal orders worldwide. Most seafood items are locally caught and processed. They feature Florida spiny lobster, Florida stone crab claws, Key West pink shrimp, smoked fish, and fresh fish such as mahi mahi, grouper, yellowtail snapper, and swordfish. Other freshly imported items include salmon, Bahamian conch, and scallops from Boston.
HIDEAWAY CAFÉ
MILE MARKER 58, GRASSY KEY

After a long rebuilding process post-Hurricane Irma, “Gracious dining under windswept palms at this cozy gem of a restaurant” is back.

Tucked away on the sleepy island of Grassy Key is a gourmand’s treasure. In operation for more than 10 years at Rainbow Bend Resort, the Hideaway Cafe has always maintained a reputation for excellence in serving top-notch cuisine and is one of the few places where locals can feel truly comfortable.

With an ocean view to match its delicious food, it is indeed a rare treat and a unique dining experience, whether it’s for morning breakfast or a Continental dinner. This is one of the Keys’ best-kept secrets, as well as one of the most sought-after places for a romantic dinner with that special someone because of its intimate atmosphere.

So, whether your preference is Escargot a la Edison, lobster, seafood of all types or even Roasted Whole Duck, there is a selection here to please everyone. Look for the big rainbow-style sign on the oceanside.

Reservations are recommended. Remember, the only thing they “overlook” is the ocean.
Mrs. Mac's Kitchen II
99336 Overseas Highway,
Key Largo

Mrs. Mac's Kitchen was founded in 1976 by Jeff MacFarland, who named it in honor of his mother and her recipes. Built in 1947, the building originally housed Grainger's Gulf Side Inn, which was one of the few places in the Keys where you could get a bite to eat at a good price. In 1988 Mrs. Mac's was purchased, and today sisters Paula and Angie continue to work together.

Maintaining many original recipes, they have continuously been voted the best in numerous local People’s Choice Award competitions. They have been a local’s favorite and famous worldwide for years. Their goal is to continue to serve award-winning food with fantastic service in a classic Florida Keys atmosphere.

They hope to see you again real soon at the longest running restaurant in Key Largo!
ENRICO’S PIZZA
MILE MARKER 104, BAYSIDE, KEY LARGO

Enrico’s continues a family pizza-making tradition to serve the best authentic pizza in the Florida Keys.

This amazing place is tucked inside Jimmy Johnson’s Big Chill, located at Mile Marker 104, bayside in Key Largo. Third generation pizzaiolo, owner and operator, Larry Calvano brings to Key Largo over 100 years of combined experience making pizza the way it should be. Couple that with the exquisite cuisine of Executive Chef Dominic Congemi and you have specialty pizza creations like White Pizza, Fresh Mozzarella, Arugula, Italian Fisherman, and last but not least ...The Boss.

“Our pizzas are all made completely from scratch every day,” said Congemi. Chef Dom continues the Calvano family tradition of making the dough and the sauce from scratch, just like Larry’s father and grandfather did in Italy and then later in the early 1900’s in New York. In 1972 Larry’s father, Enrico, moved his family from New York to Ft. Lauderdale, which is where Larry’s father started Enrico’s New York Style Pizza. In 2010, in memory of his father, Larry introduced Enrico’s New York Style Pizza to Jimmy Johnson’s Big Chill in Key Largo.

Chef Dom explained about the name Enrico’s. “Enrico brought our sauce to America 100 years ago; now we serve five gallons a day,” he added. “No one uses the cheese we do, Grande Cheese — they say it’s too expensive, too hard to get.” Chef Dom also might get some points for having a famous first-cousin of his — boxing star Ray “Boom Boom” Mancini (“The Good Son” himself). “Ray would come to Grandma Josephine’s to eat sometimes; she’d feed him three or four pounds of pasta. Grandma taught me how to cook. We never ate fast-food, not with an Italian mother — no way.”

The proof is in the crust. After pulling the pizza out of the oven and putting a knife to it, a loud snap emerges as the knife cuts down. “That snap you hear when I cut the pizza crust? That’s my secret. You won’t hear that snap anywhere but here,” he says with a proud smile.

Good news: They also make pizza to go; just call 305-453-9066.

TIDES RESTAURANT
AT THE ISLANDER RESORT
82100 OVERSEAS HIGHWAY, ISLAMORADA

The beachfront location of the Tides Restaurant at the Islander Resort invites guests to sample Conch Castles, a local twist on the classic White Castle burger. The truffle hamburger is a huge hit and the shrimp and mango tacos are also a crowd favorite. Another popular dish, which Executive Chef Andy Niedenthal considers unique to Tides Restaurant, is the Jumbo Lump Crabmeat Rarebit, a coastal take on the traditional Welsh Rarebit.

The classic old Florida architecture at the Tides calls to mind the bygone days of the old Keys, while the post- Irma renovations and landscaping have brought the resort to the peak of modern perfection. Combining that atmosphere with a true reverence for quality ingredients and a passionate approach to their preparation makes the Tides a great place to visit.

KEY LARGO CONCH HOUSE
100211 OVERSEAS HIGHWAY, KEY LARGO

The Key Largo Conch House is a wonderfully original, family-owned and operated Upper Keys staple. An environmentally friendly restaurant that serves sustainable seafood, the Conch House was featured on Emeril’s Florida in March 2015, Travel Channel’s “Man vs. Food” in 2012, Discovery Channel in 2013, and The Food Network in 2007. Ted, Laura, and Stephaniee welcome you to enjoy a unique dining experience.
Join Snooks for their Sunset Horn sounding celebration. If you are celebrating a special occasion, let the staff know and you might be the one to sound the horn and receive a complimentary chilled coconut drink.

The “New” Snook’s is proud to offer a new design allowing every seat in the house an unobstructed waterfront view. The New Grand Tiki is illuminated by chandeliers and the 5,000-square-foot paver patio is surrounded by a bar ledge that allows you to sit right on the water’s edge under a new state of the art misting system while enjoying the daily sunset celebration! The entire property is set within tropical lush plantings accented by tiki torches.

Serving lunch, dinner and daily Happy Hour specials with live entertainment, Snook’s is known for their Yellowtail Bayside, Onion Encrusted Hog Fish, Hazelnut Chicken, and Beef Tenderloin with Au Poivre. Their menu boasts only the freshest ingredients and everything is cooked to order, along with tropical libations, tasty 'tinis and an exceptional wine list. Snooks also offers a monthly luau and pig roast, which has taken place for the past 25 years.
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ZIGGIE AND MAD DOG’S
83000 OVERSEAS HIGHWAY, ISLAMORADA

The building where Ziggie and Mad Dog’s Restaurant sits today dates back to the 1930s. The structure was originally built as an outbuilding on a pineapple plantation and later served as the sales office for the Pen Key Club. In the 1950s, it would transform into a small restaurant, and in 1962 Ziggie Stocki purchased the property. The legendary Ziggie’s Conch was born.

The property has a rich and wonderful history. Dating back to 1948, there were reports of police shootouts with gamblers and shady characters referred to as “the new Capone gang;” it’s said Al Capone was a part of the high-stakes card games and casino action held in the back building. Ziggie himself was a notorious gambler and drifter. In the 30 years of operation, Ziggie’s Conch was world renowned as one of the finest dining experiences in the entire Florida Keys.

While Ziggie was making a name for himself in Islamorada, Jim Mandich turned his All-American career at The University of Michigan into joining the Miami Dolphins in 1970. Mandich’s maniacal playing style earned him the “Mad Dog” nickname. In September 2005, “Mad Dog” Mandich, along with his longtime business partner Randy Kassewitz, purchased the legendary Ziggie’s. On April 15, 2006, Ziggie & Mad Dog’s was launched. Jim Mandich passed away in April 2011.

The restoration of this iconic Florida Keys landmark was one of Mandich’s proudest achievements. The original bar, the slate wainscot and terrazzo have all been refurbished with great care. The pictures throughout the restaurant celebrate the history and characters of the Florida Keys and the Miami Dolphins.

Today, Ziggie and Mad Dog’s has become a destination steak house, one of the finest in South Florida. Ziggie and Mandich’s culinary influence are on display even today with some of their favorite dishes still on the menu.

ROBBIE’S MARINA
77522 OVERSEAS HIGHWAY, MILE MARKER 77.5, ISLAMORADA

Welcome to Robbie’s Marina of Islamorada, home of the world-famous tarpon feeding. Not only can you handfeed massive tarpon, but also you can experience a wide array of dining options.

Sip one of our signature cocktails, local draft beer, or our famous loaded Trailer Trash Bloody Mary on our waterfront deck overlooking the tarpon feeding frenzy.

Robbie’s has been in business for 43 years and boasts how close you can dine to the active sea life. You can get lobster breakfast items starting at 6:30 a.m., and fresh fish such as Thai Style Mahi fish fingers, fish tacos and Islamorada fish sandwiches prepared by Chef Ben Loftus. Truly a family-fun restaurant.

FISH HOUSE
102401 OVERSEAS HIGHWAY, KEY LARGO

Since 1982, the Fish House motto has been: Relax … lay back … and dig in. The restaurant’s commitment is preparing scrumptious Conch-style cooking where fresh fish is brought daily from dock to table.

The Fish House features fresh, local seafood dishes, served in a fun, friendly and casual “Keys style” atmosphere staffed by some of the Keys’ friendliest servers.

Start with one of their signature homemade chowders, or choose from a robust menu of Conch Republic favorites: yellowtail snapper, mahi-mahi, grouper, Florida lobster, stone crab and more — smoked, seared or sautéed in a number of ways, including their specialty blackened, Jamaican Jerk or Matecumbe styles.

The Fish House remains one of the only existing establishments that purchases from local commercial fishermen and fillets all fish on premises — that’s its guarantee. Because the fish is locally caught, availability is based upon weather, supply and seasonal changes. Smoked fish is one of the restaurant’s specialties and smoked fish dip is prepared from fish smoked right on premises.
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