

gotta go

Key West

By Julie Botteri

At the southernmost point of the United States, you're at the end of the road: Key West, Florida, stretches from Mile Marker 0 to 4. This two-by-four-mile town's quirky ambiance attracts wild festivals, Junkanoo parades, "Duval crawl" bar-hoppers, and recently, MTV's *Real World*. Surprisingly, visitors find it is steeped in civil-war history, nature, art, and literature. The crown jewel of "the islands you can drive to," Key West has scads of fun, captivating things to see and do in port.



GOTTA HAVE IT

Eat a Conch, Meet a Conch – The word *conch* (pronounced "konk") refers to both someone born in the island chain, as well as the mollusk, which is served as a classic dish in the Keys eateries: chowder, fritter, or ceviche-style, if you please. Another sweet crustacean favorite is Key West pink shrimp, but if you time your visit right, you can nosh on other Keys delicacies like stone crabs. Only the grappels, or claws, are harvested in season, October 15 to May 15. Clawless, spiny lobster is in season from August 6 to March 31.

By Land and Sea – Key West artisans craft from nature. Famous for gigantic seascapes, marine artist Wyland's gallery houses watercolors, acrylics, oil, Japanese ink paintings, bronze and Lucite® sculptures, and fine art photography. Guild Hall Gallery's hot newcomer is Seaglass Creations by Cornelia. Sculpted copper wire and tumbled sea glass resembling native fish, birds, palm trees, sailboats, and even cocktails, make unique souvenirs along with silver jewelry, evening purses, and 3-D creations. Local orchids, frangipani, and hibiscus are staple ingredients for Key West Aloe's cool creams and soothing fragrances.

Buried Treasure – Although he died in 1998, treasure hunter Mel Fisher's legacy lives on. After 16 years of searching, Fisher recovered more than \$400 million in gold and silver from the *Nuestra Señora de*



Atocha, a 17th-century Spanish galleon that sank 45 miles off Key West. Touch and buy a piece of treasure at the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society Museum, and don't miss this year's landmark exhibition, "La Plata Del Mar: Silver from the 1622 Galleons."

A Little Key Limey – Local legend says that "Aunt Sally," who cooked for William Curry, owner of Key West's Curry Mansion Inn, made the first Key lime pie. Area fishermen disagree, claiming their predecessors created this special dessert made with condensed milk, tiny yellow Key limes, and a graham cracker crust, finished with smears of creamy "whoop." Officially Florida's state pie, the best picks are the Blond Giraffe, and Kermit's Key West Key Lime Shoppe (they even have "Key Lime Pie on a Stick").