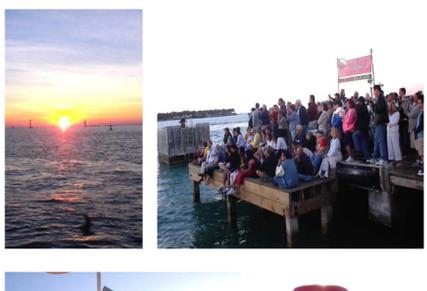


Well, the four of us finally got on the road to Key West on February 1st. It was Russ who found our overnight stay at the Miccosukee Casino outside Miami. Boy was that place busy! The parking lot was full and there must have been 40 RV's in the back where we were. The reason was Super Bowl! Moving South, our next stop was Key West itself. We are talking about the Southern most point in the Continental US, as well as the home of Conch Chowder, Key Lime Pie, a free roaming resident chicken population, and the most spectacular sunsets I have ever seen! We knew we would be dry camping at Trumbo Point Annex, on the Key West Naval Air Station. This Island Key is probably about 4 miles long and a couple of miles wide. The ride South on US 1 was outstanding, as usual.

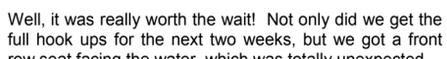
When we registered we went onto a three week waiting list for a full hook up site at Sigsbee RV Campground. We really didn't mind the dry camping and actually did much better conserving resources than we thought. We were able to walk downtown to Mallory Square from Trumbo, which was great. Having a car on Key West is more of a nuisance than a benefit. Parking is expensive, and negotiating the bikes, scooters, little electric cars, pedestrians, trolleys and other traffic on narrow streets can be exhausting.

It's easy to fall in love with Key West. We have heard so many locals talk about how they came down here on a vacation and decided to stay. Life down here is so laid back. We had mail sent twice while here and both times, the local routing got messed up. They figure it will get to it's destination eventually, not to worry. It seems every little square inch is spoken for. Duval St. has the smallest bar probably in the world. It is set up in an alley and can hold maybe 5 people including the bar tender. Tons of little shops selling T-shirts and all the tourist stuff. Restaurants are all over the place, most with some sort of open air room or patio. You can wear your shorts, and flip flops in the most expensive dinner places, so I have heard. Boats, boats everywhere, privately owned and for hire and every size imaginable. We went out on a Glass Bottom Boat to see the coral and marine life. Very enjoyable even though the water was still a bit cloudy from windy weather and rough waters. A brand new Eco Center opened in January next to Fort Zachary Taylor which was very educational, teaching about the coral reefs and marine life. Civil War days are celebrated each February, which includes an enactment at the Fort and a period dress parade down to Duval St and back. Back at Trumbo, I kept watch on a pair of Osprey with young, up on a utility pole in the campground. The baby would poke it's head up periodically. Everyone watches for the cruise ships to dock. Most have to be gone before sunset, though! Every evening, Malory Square sets up for the daily Sunset Party, with performers, vendors, and visitors walking around with their favorite drinks in hand waiting for the Sun to say good night! As it sinks below the horizon, the crowd claps and cheers. See pictures to



Well, it was really worth the wait! Not only did we get the full hook ups for the next two weeks, but we got a front row seat facing the water, which was totally unexpected. This really made the wait worth while. By this time we were alone again, as Russ & Kathy were on their way to Daytona and the motorcycle rally. It was so pretty here we were content to sit in front of our RV, and watch the water traffic go by. As if that was not enough, we had the option to stroll over to the base restaurant/bar for happy hour while watching the pelicans fish off shore. Back at our camp site, there were several Vultures attacking a sea turtle carcass that washed ashore. Unfortunately sea turtles are all too often seriously injured by passing boats. The weather in Key West was perfect. It generally was in the 70's or low 80's during the day and 60's at night. When a cold front pushed down, it might go into the 60's during the day. On the warmest days, we would only have to relocate into the shade to cool off. We certainly picked the right year to winter in Florida! Once we got over being mesmerized by our new picture window view, we started exploring again. We took a trip back up North on Route 1 to Marathon Key. This is the location of an RV park frequented by some of our 400 chapter friends for Thanksgiving. While in the area, we followed up on some recommendations for the *Cracked Conch Café* in the area. Key West was known as the Conch Capital years ago but eventually were fished to near extinction. It is now the official symbol of Key West. Today conch is farm raised. This fish is another first for me!! Never had it before and I just love Conch Chowder. In Key West, we both have really enjoyed the chowder at one of our favorite restaurants, *The Raw Bar*, down on the wharf. It is a great place to enjoy a great dinner, while watching the boats coming and going. Sunday morning we went to the Ocean side of the Island and had breakfast at a beach café. We then stopped and strolled on some of the beaches for a while. This being an island, there is water, water every where! Even walking down some of the side streets is entertaining, with the lush tropical gardens, the mixed cultural environment of peoples and interesting Island architecture. Once in a while we find a hidden treasure, like an old fashion Ice Cream Parlor with my new favorite flavor of Cuban Coffee. I always liked coffee ice cream, but this is the best! We made a couple of more trips to the VFW for happy hour, before saying good bye to Key West. Russ is a member of the VFW and invited us to join them for a happy hour back in Venice, FL and again in Key West. The Key West VFW was so very friendly, Bob decided to become a member which of course he is eligible to do. I am not so sure I was ready to leave Key West? It really grows on you! I have to say though, if it were not for the military family campgrounds we would never had this experience. Camping one night costs as much as a room.





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