

Welcome to the Florida Keys



Artwork by David Harrison Wright

Home of North America's Only Living Coral Barrier Reef

TIPS FOR ECO-FRIENDLY KEYS LIVING

The Florida Keys is home to one of the most biologically diverse marine ecosystems on earth — the living coral reef. This fragile environment hosts more visitors than any other coral reef in the world. What we do or don't do will make the difference to whether it is here for future generations to enjoy. Do your part when out on the water and on land. If we all do a little, we can do a lot!

TIPS FOR DIVERS & SNORKELERS

- ❖ Before booking a reef trip, check weather conditions; it's best not to go out in rough seas. Poor visibility, strong winds & waves reduce safe interaction at the reef.
- ❖ Remember that even the lightest touch with hands, fins or equipment can damage sensitive coral polyps.
- ❖ Snorkelers should wear float-coats to allow gear adjustment without standing on the coral.
- ❖ To avoid contact with the ocean bottom, divers should only use the weight needed & practice proper buoyancy control. Lifeless areas may support new growth, if left undisturbed.
- ❖ Avoid wearing gloves and touching or collecting marine life. Most tropical fish captured die within a year. Queen conch is a protected species.
- ❖ Please don't feed the fish; it destroys their natural feeding habits.
- ❖ Remember, it is illegal to harvest coral in Florida and buying it at local shops only depletes reefs elsewhere.
- ❖ Pictures make great souvenirs.

TIPS FOR BOATERS & FISHERMEN

- ❖ Dumping trash at sea is illegal; plastic bags & other debris can injure or kill marine animals. Try to retrieve fishing gear & equipment, especially monofilament line.
- ❖ Accidental boat groundings damage the reef. Prop damage destroys shallow seagrass beds. Consult tide and navigational charts & steer clear of shallow areas. Remember, "Brown, brown, run aground. Blue, blue, sail on through."
- ❖ Use reef mooring buoys or anchor in sandy areas away from coral & seagrasses so that anchor & chain do not damage the coral or seagrass beds.
- ❖ Use sewage pump-out facilities, biodegradable bilge cleaner and never discharge sewage or bilgewater at the reef.
- ❖ Practice good seamanship and safe boating. Maintain safe distances from fishermen. Observe size & catch limits; release all fish you can't eat.
- ❖ Avoid wildlife disturbance: stay 200 feet or more offshore; keep speed, noise & wakes to a minimum near mangroves.

TIPS ON LAND

- ❖ Conserve water by filling the washing machine & dishwasher completely before using.
- ❖ Limit shower time; showers use less water than baths. Don't overfill the bathtub. Don't let the water run while shaving, brushing your teeth or lathering your face & hands.
- ❖ Use biodegradable products which can be washed down the drain.
- ❖ Properly dispose of hazardous waste including auto batteries, gasoline, motor oil, paint, chemicals, acids & household cleaning products.
- ❖ Reduce, Reuse & Recycle. Recycle aluminum & steel cans, glass, plastic containers, newspapers & cardboard.
- ❖ Do not dispose of fish carcasses & wrung lobsters by throwing them overboard or into canals.
- ❖ Camping, campfires & collecting of any kind are prohibited on all National Wildlife Refuges. Personal watercraft and airboats are illegal in all National Parks and Wildlife Refuges in the Florida Keys.



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