

21+ Sensational Things To Do in Marathon FL

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Marathon is in the Middle Keys – a **more affordable** and **less-crowded alternative** to Key West, while still offering **easy access** to the Conch Republic.

It's been called the **boating** and **family destination** of the Keys, and is our favorite Keys destination – home to **dreamy beaches** and **resorts**, exciting **animal excursions**, **fishing charters**, one of the most colorful sections of the **Florida Reef**, and divine **restaurants**.

Pack your bags! Here are 21+ ways to vacation in South Florida's beautiful Marathon!



Where to stay in Marathon

We've got the full scoop on [hotels and resorts](#) below, but if you want the short answer then this is it:

- [Isla Bella Beach Resort](#) – My favorite resort in The Keys. Tranquil, luxurious, affordable. Great for families or couples.

- Grassy Flats – This is a new boutique hotel in Marathon that is much smaller and more intimate than Isla Bella. It's right on the water, with suites for families (and 21+ only options, as well.)

The absolute must-do activities

If you can do everything on this Florida Keys list, do it. But if your time is limited, these are our Marathon faves:

- Stay at **Isla Bella**
- Feed the sharks at **Florida Keys Aquarium Encounters**
- Relax out at the beach at **Bahia Honda State Park**
- Eat and watch the sunset at **Sunset Grille and Raw Bar**
- Jump and play at **Rhum Runner Aquapark**
- Nosh at **Butterfly Cafe**

Relax and Unwind

Bahia Honda State Park

Big Pine Key (where you'll find the park) is not *officially* part of Marathon, but it is just on the other side of 7-Mile Bridge, which you'll absolutely want to experience. **White sand** and **shallow water** that extends a long way from shore make this an excellent "day trip" beach for **snorkeling** and **kids**.

There is a nominal fee for entering the park, but you can come and go all day. There is never a crowd, and there are **beaches on both the ocean side and the bay side** (though the ocean beach is very very calm (that's the ocean side that the boys are standing in, in the above video.)

Don't miss the short walk to the **Old Bahia Bridge** for a gorgeous view (that's the photo at the top of this post.) From there you can see the bay and 7-Mile Bridge, or you can turn around 180-degrees and see the ocean!

Sombrero Beach

Sombrero Beach is one of the **most favored beaches** in the Florida Keys, probably because of the lack of mangroves, wider sandy area, and how it "feels" like a **traditional Florida beach**.

You'll find clean **restrooms**, **picnic tables**, and a **playground**. You can **swim** here, **bring Fido**, and even catch a **sea turtle release** if you're lucky. Visiting at **sunset** is a great way to end the day.

Read More: [Sombrero Beach: Don't Miss This Hidden Treasure in the Florida Keys](#)

Pigeon Key

If you take the 7-Mile Bridge pedestrian walkway for quite a ways from the Marathon side, it will lead you to [Pigeon Key](#), a **small island** that is home **multiple historic buildings** that remain from the days of Henry Flagler, when it served as a work camp for the railroad construction of the original bridge.

When I say small, I mean it! There is nothing much here except those old buildings and the beach, but it's a fun stop if you have the time.

You can take **historic tours** daily by catching the **ferry** in Marathon. In addition to the tour, you are welcome to roam the island, **snorkel**, or just relax.

Sunset Grille and Raw Bar

For a different kind of relaxation, head to [Sunset Grille and Raw Bar](#) — a **restaurant/tavern/pool** just at the foot of the [Historic 7-Mile Bridge](#).

Yes, I said pool!

We visited right after Bahia Honda (the restaurant is on one side of the bridge and the park is *pretty much* on the other side of it) so the kids were wearing their swimsuits. After we noshed on **tuna nachos**, **potstickers** and **burgers** the boys took a dip while we finished our drinks.

Pro Tip: Get there about a half-hour before sunset. Order dinner and watch the sunset over the ocean. Get a table by the pool if you can.

Crane Point Hammock

Visit [Crane Point Hammock](#), and explore the **Crane Point Hammock Museum and Nature Trail** — which includes all sorts and fun, relaxing, and educational activities.

At the **Museum of Natural History**, you can learn all about the life cycle of **sea turtles**. Or make a stop at the **Florida Keys Children's Museum**, which includes a **wooden pirate ship** for climbing, touch tanks, and more.

Geocaching is also a popular activity in the Hammock! There are 11 geocaches hidden amongst the 63 acres.

Also, it's worth pointing out that a **fish pedicure** is free with your admission to Crane Point. Just dip your toes in the tidal pool near the point, and let the fish nibble your feet!

Curry Hammock State Park

Curry Hammock State Park is the **largest undeveloped parcel of land** between this area and Key Largo. It provides vital habitat for many local and migrating species and hosts record numbers of **peregrine falcons** every fall.

On calm days, **paddlers** come and go finding their own quiet slice of paradise among the **mangrove swamp, rockland hammocks** and **seagrass beds**, and on windy, wild days, the park bubbles with the activity and excitement of **kiteboarders**.

Read More: [Florida Keys State Parks \(+ a Dreamy NPS\) That You Can't Miss](#)

Animal Awesomeness

Florida Keys Aquarium Encounters

The [Florida Keys Aquarium Encounters](#) gives you the opportunity to interact with all sorts of **marine life**. Our boys **fed giant tarpon, touched sting rays, saw baby alligators and turtles**, and had an absolute blast!

In the video above, Cooper is **feeding and petting a nurse shark**. This cost a little extra, but not much, and was super special since he wants to become a marine biologist.

There are tickets for additional animal encounters too, including **snorkeling** in a tank with **large sharks** (separated by a clear wall) and feeding them through a small opening, snorkeling in a colorful **coral reef tank** with a rainbow of fish, and more.

It's not a large facility, and you can visit everything relatively quickly, but it was super for the kids, and very hands on.

Dolphin Research Center

The [Dolphin Research Center](#) is home to a number of **dolphins** and **sea lions** who were either born here, or were rescued and rehabilitated elsewhere but could not be released back into the wild.

While you can be a **dolphin trainer for a day** for almost \$700 — if you have the dough, it's totally worth it — there are also fun, affordable ways for the family to interact with the dolphins here too. You can spend time meeting a dolphin and **shaking hands, paint a picture** with a dolphin friend, or experience a **family dolphin splash!**

Dolphin Connection

Visit [Dolphin Connection](#), where you'll find more opportunities to **interact with dolphin** friends inside **Hawks Cay Resort**.

Enjoy **private or group encounters** in the water, or stay on the dock while you **feed, play** and **interact** with your new best friend.

Florida Keys Turtle Hospital

The [Marathon Turtle Hospital](#) treats injured sea turtles and returns them to the wild when they are able. Our tour here allowed us to **meet the resident sea turtles** and learn more about the hospital's curative programs. The hospital is believed to be the world's only **state-licensed veterinary hospital** dedicated solely to the treatment of sea turtles.

Insider Tip: The tours here fill up quickly. We arrived for the first tour of the morning (with a reservation) and noted that there were dozens of people already trying to get tickets for later in the day. **Reserve your tour early.**

Also, during the tour, try to stay to the **front of the line**, by the speaker. At the end of the tour you will get to feed the turtles, but if you're at the back of the line — like we were — then they already have their bellies full by the time you come by.

Water Adventures

Rhum Runner Aquapark

This **50-acre action park** is exactly what you need to exhaust the kiddos! The cable park here specializes in wakeboarding... but if that's too much for you then you can play on the aquapark like we did.

The **Aquapark inflatables** sit in super salty water, protected with mangroves so you feel like you're in your own little paradise.

The park supplies life jackets, and there is someone on duty watching the kids (though we were there, also, having some fun.) Your ticket includes an hour of playtime, which is PLENTY!

Pro Tip: The owner of this park also owns **Grassy Flats**, the boutique hotel I mentioned at the top. They have great **lunch offerings** there, and it's just down the road.

Spirit Snorkeling

A wonderful way to explore the reef is with a **snorkeling excursion** with a [private snorkeling experience](#). This is a great company with adventures from **3-6 hours**, a US Coast Guard **licensed captain and crew**, and morning or afternoon departures.

The Florida Reef is the **3rd largest barrier reef in the world**, and the Sombrero Reef sector is located off the coast of Marathon. While it has been under strict regulations as a Sanctuary Preservation Area in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, it is one of the more **popular SCUBA diving and snorkeling destinations** in the area.

If you'd rather go out on your own, try one of the **boat rentals** from [Captain Pips](#). 18- to 26-foot powerboats can be rented for the day, or by the week.

SeaSquared Charters

Deep sea fishing is a must if you're in Marathon, and [SeaSquared Charters](#) really caters to **families**. The crew here is all about helping kids learn the joys of deep sea fishing, and teach them a lot about the fish they're catching, and the coral reef.

The **Family Fun Day Adventure** is super for kids, because it mixes a little **fishing** with some **snorkeling** in the shallows off of Molasses Key (BYO gear).

Wheels-2-Go

[Wheels 2 Go!](#) is a great place to **rent kayaks, bikes, paddleboards** and **Zayak sea sleds**, for exploring Marathon on your own.

Did you know? A Zayak sea sled is for snorkeling without a mask. It's like a float, with a glass bottom so you can see the sea life without actually snorkeling.

We also love that Wheels-2-Go! will show you where and how to take your own **“self-guided” kayak eco tour** through the **mangroves** from Sombrero Beach. The maze of **tidal channels** they guide you down are the perfect size for a kayak, and covered in shade so you won't look like a touring lobster after your adventure.

Eat Your Heart Out



Angler & Ale at Hawks Cay Resort

In addition to a great menu, Angler & Ale offers **panoramic views, indoor and outdoor seating, and lounge areas with two fire pits**. We also love that guests can leverage their “**Hook N Cook**” option: bring in your fresh catch and have a chef cook it up.

You can pick from sandwiches, ribs, burgers, salads and more. Hubs and I both went with the catch of the day with zero regrets. The chef takes the **freshest fish** available and adds his own spin!

Finally, don't leave without dessert. We were going to skip it, but the waiter brought us the Chocolate Overload Cheesecake and wow! A must!

Butterfly Cafe

Butterfly Cafe is inside **Tranquility Bay Resort**, but you can visit even if you're not a resort guest. I know, sometimes resort restaurants are hit-or-miss, but trust me on this one – **you want to dine here!**

I had the **Yellowtail Snapper** with a tropical coulis and roasted red pepper cream sauce that I am still dreaming about. Dan had blackened **Mahi Mahi** with Key Lime butter which he said was delicious, but I was too busy indulging in my snapper to take a bite.

There are also pasta dishes, chicken and steak. The boys opted for burgers from the **kids menu**.

The upscale restaurant has a bit of a **Caribbean vibe** to match the menu, and I recommend getting a table out on the porch if it's available. We loved feeling the soft breeze and hearing the crickets while we ate.

Our server also told us about the resort's **tiki bar** that sits on the beach. It's a more formal option, with tables right on the water's edge. There is live music nightly, and she told us it's the perfect secret place to watch the sunset. If the food is anything like Butterfly Cafe, then this is a must-visit!

Lighthouse Grill at Faro Blanco Resort

Locals love the Lighthouse Grill at **Faro Blanco Resort** because of its unique **waterfront atmosphere** — and the food, of course! We sat on the **covered patio** and took in the **lighthouse**, then took a walk right at **sunset** for the perfect view from the Marina.

We opted for steak and scallops – sharing between us – and it was great! The boys loved the kids' menu as well.

Brutus Seafood Market

If you're staying at an AirBnB with a kitchen, you can grab **fresh fish to go** from Brutus Seafood Market and cook it at home like the locals.

We also recommend dining at the **Tiki bar** here with a beer, peel and eat shrimp, and some **conch fritters**. They also offer a range of signature sandwiches, salads and dinners with unique daily specials.

No Name Pub

No Name Pub is one of the **best casual dining experiences** you'll find in the Keys!

No Name Pub is located on Big Pine Key, and as we mentioned earlier, that means it's not exactly in Marathon, but it's close enough, and the perfect place to stop after a visit at Bahia Honda State Park.

Grab a pizza and a beer, and sit on the **colorful tables outside**. If you're lucky, you might spot a Key Deer while you're there.

Wooden Spoon

They're only open from 5:30am – 1pm, and there will likely be a wait for your table, but make **breakfast** happen at the Wooden Spoon at least once while you're in town.

The omelets were great, and the kiddo options are very affordable.

Where To Stay In Marathon, FL

Isla Bella Beach Resort

With 24-acres of **remote beauty**, a **4,000-square-foot spa**, **five pools**, **four restaurants**, a **marina** and more, is it any wonder this resort is what my dreams are made of? Did I mention **bocce**, **croquet**, **oversized chess**, **complimentary bicycles**, **on-site water sports**, and **guided fishing expeditions**? They've got it all.

Marathon's newest resort, **Isla Bella Beach Resort**, is the queen of the Keys in my opinion. Select from 1- to 5-bedroom spacious suites, all facing the water, with no detail overlooked.

I can't emphasize more how much I love this resort. It alone is enough to draw me back to Marathon again and again.

Book It: [Isla Bella Beach Resort](#) | Read More: [5 Reasons To Stay at Isla Bella Beach Resort in the Florida Keys \[Video\]](#)

Hawks Cay Resort

If you are looking for rest, relaxation, luxury and remote beauty (with or without kids), go with Isla Bella. But if you are looking for a **full-service resort** that caters to **young families** and packs your day with opportunities for **adventure**, **family excursions** and the like — head to Hawks Cay Resort!

They've got **on-site restaurants**, a **spa**, a **marina**, **five pools**, a **lagoon the kids can snorkel in**, and **kayak**, **paddle board**, and **bike rentals** too.

Book It: [Hawks Cay Resort](#) | Read More: [Hawks Cay: A Truly Amazing Resort in the Florida Keys](#)

Sun Outdoors Marathon Campground

Enjoy exclusive access to **300 feet of secluded waterfront** nestled along the **blue waters** and **sandy beaches** of the Gulf of Mexico at [Sun Outdoors Marathon](#). This stunning **Florida Keys resort** is a **fisherman's paradise** and features a **private marina** with 16 boat slips, a fishing area, a fish cleaning station, and access to their boat ramp.

Their amenity package also includes a **heated swimming pool**, recreation hall for planned **activities and events**, plus a **waterfront Tiki Hut picnic pavilion** with a large **community grill** to enjoy amazing Gulf Coast views.

[Find more Marathon RV Parks & Campgrounds here.](#)

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