

Adulthood is only way of life in Key West

Legendary island opens doorways to a parallel world

Few destinations are more adult-oriented than Key West. Its existence thrives on travelers 21 or older, who are eager to have a good time in a grown-up sort of way.

Nightlife is a commonality and Duval Street is its epicenter. It's 14 blocks of rocking bars, pubs and restaurants. Music strums from all directions. Street lights illuminate a catwalk that leads into nirvana.

The southernmost region of the U.S. is 4.2-square miles of frolicking entertainment. No piece of real estate is left unturned.

Watch the sun rise over the Florida Straits or set over the Gulf of Mexico. Explore the island by golf cart, bicycle, scooter, trolley or your own two feet.

Fill your day at Harry S. Truman Little White House, The Hemingway Home & Museum or Key West Light House and Keeper's Quarters Museum. Absorb every step and bit of information. Make it a learning experience, as well.

Sidestep the roosters, but please don't hurt them. You better have bail money if you do. Rent jet skis or kayaks. Admire the yachts docked on the gulf near Mallory Square and have a toddy in between.

Beaches exist, but it takes time to find them. This isn't your average



RAISING THE BAR – Sloppy Joe's offers some of the best music and Earnest Hemingway look-alike contests on Duval Street in Key West. *Image: Fotoluminate LLC. Adobe Stock.*

island. Saltwater hugs land from all directions. It's quite a visual.

Key West welcomes guests worldwide for its annual Fantasy Week every October. The event lasts 10 days. A Mardi Gras-like atmosphere engulfs the environment. Side streets close and vendors set up shop. Visitors leave behind their daily grinds and

step into a parallel universe.

Once the sun drops beneath the gulf, the party is about to begin. Duval Street sidewalks populate in a Manhattan-type way. Smiles widen, cocktails flow and good times are about to be had.

Unsure of which establishments to visit. Not a problem. There are no

poor choices. More than 100 bars encapsulate Duval Street. The beverages, music and food equally whet your appetites. Gussy up to the bar or grab a seat outside. The bartenders are cordial and always have a story to tell. It doesn't hurt to make new friends.

Hogs Breath Saloon offers arguably the best key-lime pie shots. Sloppy Joes rocks nightly. So does Irish Kevin's and the Green Parrot. Theater-sized TVs cover the walls at Jack Flats. An important sporting event, anyone? Willie T's is covered with autographed dollar bills. And Caroline's welcomes you with open arms and a warm heart.

Strings of lights drape Duval Street like a Christmas tree. They radiate in numerous colors and add flavor to an already tasty destination. It's an atmosphere unlike any other.

Key West doesn't conform to the clichéd setting many islands share. It ignores most of the rules to create a place where up is down and down is up. Either way, you'll always come out on top.

Adulthood is a way of life down here. It's not meant to be disrespectful toward younger travelers. It's a release from reality and an opportunity to let loose.

Memories metastasize but never forget that "What happens in Key West, stays in Key West."

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