

back of every issue listing hotels, bed and breakfasts, etc. I also did some double-checking on the Internet, now absolutely necessary when booking almost any kind of travel. I particularly found [www.gaaykeywestfl.com](http://www.gaaykeywestfl.com) useful.

E-mailing house photos to everyone made coming to a consensus much easier. Once we had all agreed the proper house had been located, I cemented our reservation.

I highly recommend a short-term, separate checking account. It made the bookkeeping easier than running it through my personal account and prevented any embarrassing confusion.

We all made our own air reservations. Different frequent flyer plans put us in two groups, and we rendezvoused in Miami.

After the requisite hassle of handling too much luggage and getting a van big enough to handle all the accouterments of seven stylish dressers, we were off. Our intention was to spend Friday night in South Beach, but thanks to the hotel from hell that didn't hold our guaranteed reservation, we drove much of the way through southern Florida, staying at a Holiday Inn in Key Largo.

By morning, we had coffee, warm sunny skies and a fresh perspective. Our vacation had begun. The Overseas Highway through the Florida Keys is breathtaking, composed of 40 bridges linking 100 islands for 109 miles.

Our rental house was exactly what we had hoped for with a large, well-stocked kitchen, excellent sleeping arrangements and a perfect



Living it up with a house—and pool—of their own

little pool right off the living room. We settled in and started exploring.

The core area of Key West—Old Town and the main drag, Duval Street—were all within easy walking distance, for us about 20 minutes.

Gay bars and gay-friendly restaurants are abundant. Be sure to visit 801 Bourbon for great music and video and the omnipresent male dancers during weekends. Diva's of Key West had an excellent drag show, which was

hilarious at times. Dudes, also on Duval Street, offers dancing—and dancers—nightly.

The style is easygoing and the dress code casual. Shorts and shirts were fine for the day. Dinners out were just a bit more formal, although a nice shirt and a pair of khakis were more than sufficient.

We found reservations helpful and necessary. We celebrated our arrival by dining at Café des Artistes. The food, although a bit pricey, was

virtually perfect and set the tone for a week of great dining.

Key West is the southernmost point in the continental United States, marked by a huge buoy, the perfect place for a picture. Also nearby is Ernest Hemingway's grand Spanish Colonial house, where he created about 70 percent of his work. It exudes literary history. Being a former bookstore owner, I found this visit well worth the time.

Although slightly touristy, one of Key West's most entrenched traditions is watching the sunset down at the pier. This is an excellent people-watching scene, filled with mimes, jugglers and comedy acts all vying for your dollar in the hat. Frankly, beers are a must, and all comes to a stop as the sun winks below the horizon and everyone pretends to watch for the mythic green flash.

We were surprised by Key West's lack of good beaches and were glad to have our cozy and private pool as a backup. Our own martinis were as good as any we found at the bars, so cocktail hour generally was taken there. Besides, we all had stories to tell from that day's exploration.

Key West was pretty much all that we hoped it would be. The weather was predictably perfect, the people casual and friendly, and we found traveling that far south in January good for the soul and the midwinter blues. It's not too early to start planning. Enjoy! ☑

Veteran traveler RICHARD BRAY just returned from a trip down the Amazon River. He can be reached at [richbray2000@hotmail.com](mailto:richbray2000@hotmail.com).

## Best Coast Inns Oregon

### Nehalem River Inn and Restaurant

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The River Inn offers in-room jetted spas and fireplaces, luxurious comfortable wood framed beds, private decks overlooking the river with scenic mountain views, private dock, kayaks, daily River Inn label wine tasting and many other amenities. Guests can relax and lodge at the main inn, or stay in Riverside Cottage next to the dock.



Wildlife watch nearby as guests dine amongst tangled rainforest greenery and to the naturally tranquil music of croaking frogs. Fresh wild and organic delicacies from the forest, river, sea and River Inn gardens compliment your gourmet dining adventure. A riverside soad in the hot tub, on a moonlit night, may be the perfect ending to a day on the river or exploring the coast.

Kayaks are available not only for hotel guests, but for those simply wishing to explore the natural splendor of the Nehalem River. The River Inn is centrally located, yet semi-secluded in a naturally romantic setting away from the crowds.



### The Inn on Manhattan Beach,

the little white inn on the seashore, sits on spacious private ocean-front acreage bordering Manhattan Beach State Park, an unspoiled, untamed sand beach sanctuary. Studio, one or two bedroom suites feature fireplaces, in-room jetted spas, comfortable plush beds and nautical decor. French doors open onto private decks for whale watching and spectacular views of the Pacific, Manhattan Beach, mountains and wildlife. Kayaks are available and Lake Crescent is only steps from the inn. It's a short distance along the beach for crabbing and clamming, or relax in the beachside hot tub. Semi-secluded but close to all amenities and activities, enjoy privacy away from the crowds. Breakfast is available fireside.

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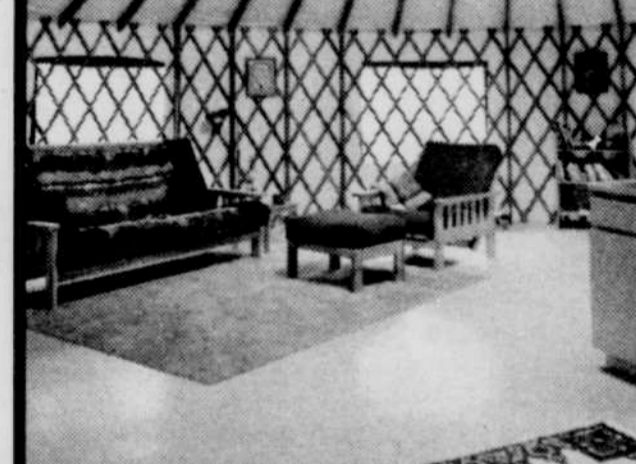
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