

Miami to Key West

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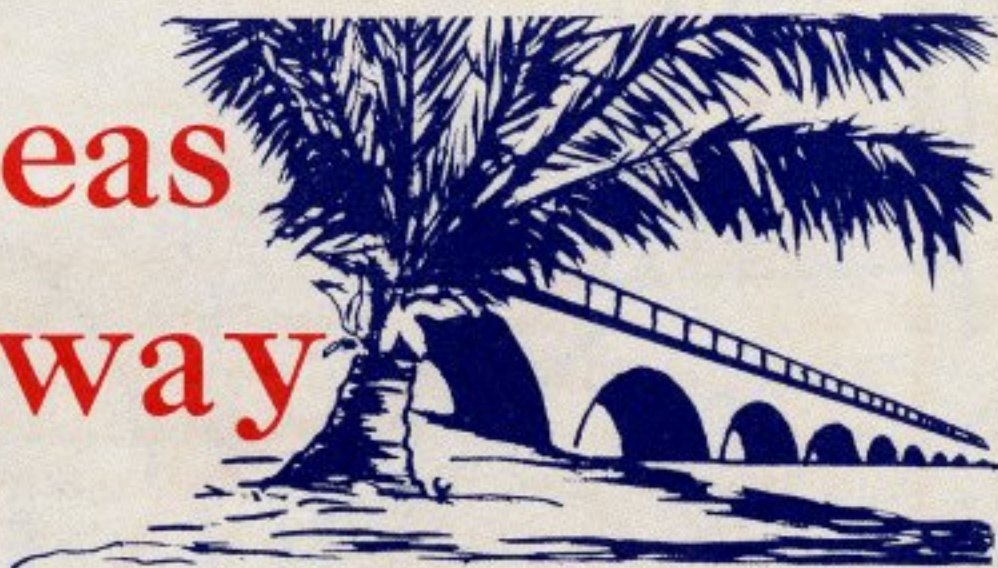
Overseas Highway

OVERSEAS ROAD
and TOLL BRIDGE DISTRICT
Marathon, Florida



Bahia Honda Parkway—Famous for its Fishing Ground

Overseas Highway



THIS unique highway, stretching a distance of 122 miles across the Florida Keys to Key West, is an outstanding triumph of modern engineering skill and ingenuity. Completed at a cost of \$5,000,000, it connects the southernmost city in the United States with the Florida mainland.

Motor traffic literally "goes to sea" along this modern highway which crosses great expanses of water on long causeways and bridges—flanked on one side by the Atlantic Ocean, on the other by the Gulf of Mexico. Panoramas of endless miles of open sea change only slightly to seascapes dotted with some of the 700-odd dark green mangrove keys. Miles of isolated waterfront invite fishing, sunning or just strolling.

Fishing facilities are available along the entire keys, the waters of which comprise one of the world's most famous fishing grounds. Among the more than 600 varieties of fish found in these waters are tarpon, bonefish, sailfish, mackerel, king, pompano and snapper.

There are 18 roadside parking areas between toll gates. Week-end or overnight camping is permitted at the roadside camps, and trailers also are permitted for the same length of time.

THE HISTORY of the Overseas Highway is closely allied with that of the railroad which first operated to Key West in 1912. The opening of this sea-going railroad marked the realization of Henry M. Flagler's ambition to extend the Florida East Coast railroad to the tip of the Florida Keys. Actual construction of the road presented a tremendous undertaking—calling for the transportation of men, materials, food supplies and even drinking water from distant bases.

Demand for the construction of a highway paralleling the railroad was stimulated by the real estate boom of the 1920's. Between 1922 and 1928 Monroe County, which comprises the Florida Keys and Key West, issued bonds for the construction of a highway from Key West to the mainland. By 1928, a highway extended from Florida City to Key West, with the



Key West Lighthouse—More Than 100 Years Old

exception of two water gaps of 14 miles each, over which ferry service was maintained. This service proved far from satisfactory, as only two trips daily were scheduled and accommodations for cars were inadequate.

In 1933, the state legislature created the Overseas Road and Toll Bridge District whose purpose it was to raise money, through bond issues, for the construction of toll bridges across the unspanned gaps. This body acquired the Florida East Coast railroad's right-of-way and bridges from Florida City to Key West for the sum of \$640,000. This action followed the abandonment of the sea-going railroad after the hurricane of 1935 had wrought severe damage to approximately 40 miles of tracks and fills.

The actual work of converting 41 miles of right-of-way into a motor road between Lower Matecumbe and Big Pine began in January 1937, and the road was opened for traffic in March 1938. Railroad bridges and viaducts, too narrow for two-way traffic, had to be widened. One of the great problems was to find an economical design for placing a roadway deck on the bridge structures—one that would suffer the least possible damage from hurricanes. In the case of the towering Bahia Honda Bridge, a two-lane deck was placed over the top of the superstructure to avoid the possible spreading of trusses—a resulting probability had the base been widened for two-lane traffic.

In reworking the railroad embankments for the highway, existing grades were lowered to give a 34-foot width of roadway. In some places, the cost of roadway on embankments was approximately \$12,000 per mile. The cost of roadway over bridges was \$24 to \$31 per foot. The most costly portion of the highway lies in the 13 miles between Knight's Key and Big Pine Key, including Knight's Key Bridge, almost 7 miles in length.

The fact that eight hurricanes in the past 30 years have failed to damage any of the bridges is proof of their outstanding construction. The 29 bridges outside the toll area span a distance of 4.7 miles. In the 41-mile toll area between Lower Matecumbe Key and Big Pine Key, there are 11 bridges spanning a distance of 13 miles, and 7 miles of embankment in shallow water. The deepest water is found under Bahia Honda Bridge, approximately 42 feet to bedrock.

Prior to 1943 wooden bridges had been used south of Big Pine Key to Key West. However these hazards were eliminated during 1943-44 when the State Road Department converted the railroad right-of-way into the present standard modern motor highway. All bridges are of concrete arch or girder span type with 20-foot clear roadway.

For additional information concerning the Overseas Highway, contact Mr. Brooks Bateman, General Manager, Pigeon Key, Marathon, Fla.



Palm-framed View of Spanish Harbor Bridge

KEY WEST, a city of 26,433 inhabitants, plus 12,000 Naval personnel, occupies a coral island approximately 4 miles long and 2 miles wide at the western end of the Florida Keys. Said to be the only frost-free city in the United States, it is a delightful winter and health resort with a subtropical climate and a semblance of the leisurely Latin approach to everyday living.

For three centuries, its natural deep-water harbor was a mecca for Indian canoes, Spanish galleons, pirate craft and sailing vessels of many nations. In 1882, Commodore David Porter established a naval station here as a base for operations against pirates in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. The final rout of the pirates opened the Keys to settlers, most of whom came from Virginia, New England and the West Indies. Since the time of the war with Mexico, Key West has had a military post and naval station, and in every war has served as an important naval base.

Older Key West dwellings are predominantly one-and-a-half story frame structures anchored deep in the native coral rock. Some of these houses were built by ship carpenters who used pegs instead of nails. Most houses have slatted shutters which permit a free circulation of air and at the same time eliminate the glare of the tropical sun.

Tropical trees, plants, fruits and flowers grow in variety and profusion in Key West. Coconut and date palms are plentiful and among the fruits that grow in abundance are Spanish limes, avocado pears and sugar apples. There are also a few pomegranate and several bearing breadfruit trees on the island.

Restaurants feature Cuban-American dishes, particularly sea food. Among the unusual foods served are turtle steaks, conch chowder and arroz con pollo—chicken and yellow rice. Approximately 50 restaurants and 2,000 hotel and motel rooms provide food and lodging for visitors to the island.

Fishing, in addition to being a popular sport, is also important commercially. The annual shrimp catch alone is estimated at more than five million dollars. Just beyond the turtle crawls on Margaret St. is the plant where green turtle soup, for which Key West is famous, is made.

Among the points of interest in the city are the lighthouse, the southernmost point in the United States, and the Municipal Aquarium containing many varieties of tropical fish and other marine life, found only in the waters off the Keys and the West Indies.



Official U. S. Navy Photograph

Air View of Key West—Southernmost City



Travel the

Overseas

Highway

Miami to Key West