FLORIDA KEYS — The Florida Keys & Key West offer a variety of new and enhanced cultural programs, accommodations, attractions and tours to tempt visitors to the subtropical island chain.

The winner of the Florida Keys Flash Fiction Contest is to have the opportunity to work in the Key West writing studio that was once the sanctum of Ernest Hemingway, one of America’s greatest authors.

The competition is open to residents of the United States and other selected countries who are at least 21 years old. Entries are limited to 500 words or less, and all must be submitted via the contest's official website at fla-keys.com/flashfiction through March 31, 2016.

The prize includes a $1,500 air travel card and accommodations in a residency cottage at The Studios of Key West for 21 nights between July 5 and July 31, 2016. A $500 debit card is included for meals and incidentals, as is a Key West Attractions Association pass and admission to events during the Hemingway Days festival set for July 19-24, 2016.

But the most coveted part of the prize is an opportunity to spend up to 10 days writing in the studio that Ernest Miller Hemingway used when he lived in the Spanish colonial estate at 907 Whitehead St. throughout most of the 1930s. The studio is a treasured part of the Ernest Hemingway Home & Museum.

It was in Key West that the winner of the 1954 Nobel Prize for Literature penned some of his most famous works including “The Green Hills of Africa,” “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” and “For Whom the Bell Tolls.”

There’s now an app for the Ernest Hemingway Home & Museum. Available for both iOS and Android phones, the new app features a detailed map of the property and six separate tours. The tours include an overview of the house and museum, a garden tour, a comprehensive description of Hemingway’s years in Key West, an overview and synopsis of Hemingway’s writing, descriptions of films based on Hemingway novels and a “cat tour” introducing the famed felines — many of them six-toed — that inhabit the property today.

The app is available for $9.99 in the iTunes App store. For more information, visit HemingwayHomeApp.com.
Tavernier Creek Marina in Islamorada now is home to sea life artist David Dunleavy’s new outdoor mural, “Dolphin Rodeo.” The large-scale creation, which features a bull and cow dolphin fish leaping to feed on flying fish, stretches 252 feet wide and 32 feet high.

The artwork is the 62nd in a series of outdoor sea life murals Dunleavy has painted. It is his fourth mural in the Keys and has become the largest outdoor artwork ever created in the island chain.

The marina’s location just off the Florida Keys Overseas Highway ensures the mural’s high visibility for southbound motorists. The vibrant illustration covers two metal boat storage barns located at 90800 Overseas Highway, mile marker 90.8 bayside.

After closing for renovations, the Key West Lighthouse & Keeper’s Quarters has reopened for tours. Renovations included upgrades to both the interior and exterior of the lighthouse from washing, cleaning and painting to other restoration work. The museum store also received upgrades, and renovations to the Keeper’s Quarters are scheduled to be complete by spring 2016.

Located at 938 Whitehead St., the 167-year-old structure serves as a beacon of Key West’s maritime history. Visitors can walk up the 88 steps to the top of the light as well as explore the belongings, photographs and words of the lighthouse keepers and their families.

For more information, visit kwahs.org/visit/lighthouse-keepers-quarters/ or call 305-294-0012.

The Gallery, a new Key Largo venue showcasing local art, has opened in Miller’s Village at 102991 Overseas Highway. The shop features 10 artists who are local to South Florida and specialize in a wide variety of handmade items.

In addition to the art gallery, the grounds are soon to feature a small coffee shop in the back of the building that will also sell homemade Key lime pies, as well as an outdoor reptile pen.

For more information, call 305-916-5117.

In Key Largo, the Playa Largo Resort & Spa, the latest hotel to join Marriott’s Autograph Collection, is to open in spring 2016. The 14.5-acre waterfront resort features 167 luxury rooms and suites, 10 private bungalows and a three-bedroom beach house.

Amenities include a marina, multiple bars and gourmet restaurants, full-service spa and fitness offerings, a wide range of watersports, wedding and conference facilities including a ballroom and bayside event lawn, a white sand beach and more. For more information, visit playalargoresort.com.

Scheduled to open in February 2016, the Courtyard Marathon Florida Keys will feature panoramic bay views and a white sand beachfront.

Located at 2146 Overseas Highway, the hotel will feature 83 contemporary guest rooms, some with balconies overlooking Florida Bay, and 12 deluxe suites.

Hotel guests can enjoy an infinity pool, fitness center, pool bar and on-site casual dining. Other amenities include on-site parking, local restaurant dinner delivery and more than 14,000 square feet of total meeting space.

For more information, visit marriott.com/hotels/travel/mthmc-courtyard-marathon-florida-keys/ or call 305-289-2100.
Two Key West hotels have been inducted into the **Historic Hotels of America**. They include the La Concha Hotel and Spa on Duval Street that was originally built in 1926 and Southernmost House, constructed in 1896.

Historic Hotels of America is the official program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation honoring the finest historic hotels. For more information, visit [laconchakeywest.com](http://laconchakeywest.com) and [southernmosthouse.com](http://southernmosthouse.com).

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### KEYS ATTRACTIONS

The Florida Keys Wild Bird Center in Tavernier has expanded its Mission Wild Bird building at 92080 Overseas Highway to include **Wild Bird Explore**.

Wild Bird Explore features a series of interactive exhibits including streaming videos of bird releases and hospital activities, Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology eBird kiosk, a children's build-a-bird puzzle section, interactive bird migration maps, and a section on bird anatomy with X-rays, articulated skeletons and more.

The Florida Keys Wild Bird Center rescues, rehabilitates and releases native and migratory wild birds that have been harmed or displaced. The facility also provides or locates a humane shelter for those birds that cannot be released and educates the public about the importance of coexistence with all wild bird species.

For more information, visit [keepthemflying.org](http://keepthemflying.org) or call 305-852-4486.

Key West author and ghost hunter David Sloan is bringing two new paranormal adventures to **Haunted Key West** this season.

The Infamous Hauntings Ghost Tour is an intriguing walk that visits the island's most captivating hauntings and iconic locations. The tour explores Isleno's curse, a murdered Klansman’s spirit, human and feline ghosts of the Ernest Hemingway Home & Museum at 907 Whitehead St. and the historic lighthouse at 937 Whitehead St. The evening concludes inside the haunted “secret brothel room” at Viva Saloon, 903 Duval St.

Also new for 2016 is the Haunted Happy Hour Saloon Stroll, where guests can raise a toast to ghosts before the sun goes down. The two-hour-plus saloon stroll features drinks including rum from a still as well as stories about botched hangings, in-bar burials, a haunted bar stool and a unique collection of haunted artifacts.

For more information visit [hauntedkeywest.com](http://hauntedkeywest.com) or call 305-395-1435.

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### KEYS FOOD AND DRINK

A 150-seat restaurant and bar dubbed **Fish** recently opened to provide casual fine dining in the Lower Keys.

Located at mile marker 14.5 on the Overseas Highway, the waterfront restaurant and bar offers an upscale yet casual dining experience with fresh food and creative cocktails, beers and wines.

Owners Matt McKnight, Matt Moline and Jason Gwynne have conceived a menu that specializes in fresh seafood from local Keys captains.

For more information, visit [facebook.com/fish14.5/](http://facebook.com/fish14.5/) or call 305-735-4201.
Anniversaries of a marine preserve and the National Park Service are being celebrated in the Florida Keys in 2016.

Thousands of scuba divers, snorkelers, anglers and watersports enthusiasts visit the Keys annually to dive or snorkel the continental United States’ only living coral reef and enjoy Keys waters. The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is marking 25 years of protecting the world’s third-largest barrier reef and other marine resources.

Established in November 1990, the sanctuary protects 2,900 square nautical miles of waters surrounding the Keys island chain.

Within these boundaries lie spectacular, nationally significant marine resources, historic shipwrecks and other archeological treasures, extensive seagrass beds, mangrove-fringed islands and more than 6,000 species of marine life. Sanctuary details are at floridakeys.noaa.gov.

The National Park Service, often called “America’s best idea,” celebrates its 100th birthday in August 2016. Keys visitors can learn, discover and be inspired by two national parks accessible from the island chain.

Dry Tortugas National Park, one of the most remote parks in America, is situated approximately 70 miles west of Key West in the Gulf of Mexico. A cluster of seven tiny coral-and-sand islands covering 100 square miles, Dry Tortugas is accessible only by seaplane or boat.

The park’s centerpiece is Fort Jefferson, one of the largest masonry structures in the Western Hemisphere, whose construction began in 1846. During the Civil War, Fort Jefferson — sometimes called the Gibraltar of the Gulf — served as a Union military prison for captured deserters and others. Its most famous prisoner was Dr. Samuel Mudd, convicted of conspiracy in President Abraham Lincoln’s 1865 assassination, but later pardoned.

Outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy ranger-guided tours, pristine beaches for sunning, excellent bird watching and clear blue waters for snorkeling. Garden Key, one of the most desert-like of the islands, is popular for overnight tent camping.

Everglades National Park, established in 1947, spans 1.5 million acres. Featuring many rare and endangered species, it is the largest subtropical wilderness in the United States.

Everglades National Park abuts the near-shore waters of Key Largo and Islamorada. Those waters are an ecologically fascinating place where fresh water from the Everglades mixes with the saltwater of Florida Bay, making the area a popular spot for sport fishing.

An array of wildlife is commonly sighted including roseate spoonbills, ospreys, American eagles, bottlenose dolphin, crocodiles, sea turtles, alligators and manatees. Park sport fishing, with a focus on catch and release, is world renowned for snook, trout, tarpon and a host of other species.

Extended kayak and canoe trips are available for those who enjoy camping and paddling excursions. More information can be found at nps.gov/drto and nps.gov/ever.

More information on the Florida Keys is available at fla-keys.com or, in the U.S. and Canada, call toll-free, 1-800-FLA KEYS.