

RESORT / Sunbathers can bask in luxury near Key West

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discovers the developer and saved the sale of the island in 1966 by government action.
Eight years later, Ocean Properties Ltd. bought the mainland acreage and Tack Island, which is presently renamed Sunset Key. Construction soon began on the mainland for the 176-room Hilton Resort and Marina along the waterfront.



Across the channel, the development of Sunset Key followed. This ultimate hideaway features a picturesque collection of 73 private million-dollar homes, as well as home sites and elegant rental cottages with names such as Sanctuary, Vista and Lazy Days.
There are no palm tree accommodations here, but the sand and sea are only steps away from Sunset Key's cottages. Each one, two- and three-bedroom villa offers garden, beachfront or ocean view and combines Caribbean touches with Old Florida furnishings, right down to whitewashed wraparound verandas with Adirondack chairs.

COTTAGES ARE FURNISHED with expensive casual furniture in many styles, even linen and costly tape. Rooms are 300-1,000 square feet and comfortable with cable television, CD players, stereo systems, VCRs and patios stocked with food and beverages.
The park area doubles as a living dining room. Kitchens are furnished with china, crystal and coffee makers with gourmet beans. Bedrooms are spacious with king beds and large tropical themes. Hot private baths. Daily maid and turndown service are provided with special touches such as fresh flowers and a note on pillows with times of the next day's sunrise and sunset.

Resort workers deliver picnic baskets of hamlets, molasses, juice and newspapers on villa front porches every morning. Guests also can request that their lanterns be checked with procedures, or they can hire a chef to prepare a meal in their cottages or a private wine-tasting on the island.

Should guests fancy a seaside rubdown, the

concierge will ferry over a massage therapist. By early 2000, spa shuttle service will be necessary. A full-service European spa is slated to open at Sunset Key near its Lattitudes Beach Club and Island Outpost Marketplaces.

GUESTS CAN SWIM in Florida Bay or in the resort's free-swimmer pool. They can relax in one of two Adirondack chairs or enjoy a tropical drink at Poppers Pool Bar, in the heart of the resort.

Since its grand opening in May 1997, Sunset Key has hosted its share of celebrities, among them actor Michael Douglas, Key West singer-critic Jimmy Buffett and television personality Oprah Winfrey, who rented the island's 37 tropical cottages last year.
Indeed, the resort attracts the rich and famous, but it does draw a broad collection of guests. Hilton Resort and Marina, Sunset Key general manager Steve Robbins said the island was initially billed as a romantic getaway for couples, but plenty of families, professionals and retirees have made the resort a vacation destination. Even locals have found Sunset Key a convenient escape from the chaos of Old Town.

"I think the excitement of being on an island close to Key West is really attractive to our guests," Robbins said. "Sunset Key is so near the island that you forget just how close you are to the tourist district and bustle of Old Town. Once you get on the boat, it's as if you're a whole world away."

By Lisa Maguire, a sportswriter for The Tampa Tribune, can be reached at (813) 259-7805.

If you go

► **How to get there:** Located just 500 yards off the west coast of Key West, Sunset Key Resort Cottages are secluded but far from out of reach.
The Key West Hilton Resort and Marina is easily accessible by an air taxi as well as car, although guests cannot be docked at Sunset Key. A launch carries guests to the island on 90 minutes.

► **Get to Key West by car:** From Tampa, take Interstate 95 south to mile marker 100, west on U.S. 1 South to just through Florida City.
Stop on U.S. 1 all the way to Key West, about 2 1/2 to three hours. The toll is on the eastbound.

► **If you're flying into Key West International Airport:** Continental, American and US Airways offer daily service and connecting flights from Tampa.

► **What to eat:** The island has 37 cottages, at one, two or three bedrooms with beach, pool and hot tub, and dining room. Rates October 10-15 range from \$200 for a one-bedroom room garden view, \$300 for a two-bedroom garden view, \$425 for a two-bedroom beachfront and \$600 for three-bedroom beachfront. Rates may increase during 10-12 events, including Fantasy Fest, and the Fantasy Fest season. Lunch service to the Hilton Marina at Key West is included.

► **Where to eat:** Lattitudes Beach Cafe on Sunset Key is actually just a garden in the sand set amid the turtles and cardinals.
With a nice view of the West's turquoise seas, the setting is spectacular as is the interior. The restaurant is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Entrees are priced under \$20 by experience. Reservations are required for non-Sunset Key guests.

► **What to do:** Guests can swim in the pool or on the beach. Key West International Airport is a short drive to the airport. The resort offers a variety of services, including laundry and ironing, faxing, printing, laptop repair and parking.

► **For reservations and information:** Contact Sunset Key Resort Cottages at (305) 292-5262 or toll-free at 1-888-477-7706. Reservations will be kept until the end of the month. Call the Hilton Resort and Marina at (305) 292-4365.
For additional information about the Florida Keys, call the Greater Key West Chamber of Commerce at (305) 299-7297 or log on to www.gkw.com.

Sunsets backdrop for juicy seafood

By Lisa Maguire

KEY WEST - Lattitudes Beach Cafe on Sunset Key has perhaps the best backdrop of any restaurant in Key West.

Not until Monday 10:30 a.m. and rotating coffee bars. The elegant dining establishment has no walls or partitions other than a glass-enclosed kitchen, open position in the sand. Lattitudes serves Caribbean flavors for breakfast, lunch and dinner in an atmosphere so relaxed you could be seated wearing a sarong or your favorite jeans.

A romantic escape and lovely encounter with nature called into one. Lattitudes serves peace and perfection between its magical sunsets and mouth-watering fare.

The menu is fresh and assure primarily big on local seafood, including lobster, fish, snail, the traditional and Florida lobster. Start with the crab-cake shrimp and scallops in apple-wood smoked sauce with roasted onion for \$11.95, or the wrapped scallop yellowtail with pickled ginger, wasabi and scallions for \$10.95.

Both appetizers were outstanding and reasonably priced, given the lovely location.

Remember the sunset with any of Lattitudes' 12 delectable dinner specialties. While nothing on the menu is priced less than \$22.95, the food is well worth the bill to your wallet.

The post-romantic grasper with shrimp cocktail, tomato martini and crisp rigout may prove to be a home favorite at \$14.95, as is the popularly priced tossed-in-land lobster, shrimp, scallops and

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portabella mushrooms for \$28.95. Lattitudes' grilled island seafood with key lime citrus vinaigrette had a steak quality to it with its succulent and was as tasty as fish gets.

The top-rated restaurant also offers great views with its sleek, leafy prepared beef tenderloin in portabella mushroom butter (\$27.95) and roasted potato-encrusted lamb chops with grilled island vegetables and garlic-whipped Yukon potatoes (\$36.95).

Desserts are so scrumptious they're often sold out. The chocolate-macadamia nut tart, Grassy South apple pie and Key Lime checkerboard milk in your mouth and are best accompanied by espresso or cappuccino.

The outdoor dining service, which overlooks Florida Bay and Key West's famed Old Town district, is exceptional and impressive. In addition to the splash of wind, piano music provides a pleasant but not overpowering backdrop.

The retreat is only a short boat ride from Key West's mainland and is open to nonpays of Sunset Key. A launch to the island leaves every 30 minutes from the docks behind Key West Hilton Resort and Marina. A full key lime cocktail drink is as well as wine and ale.

Lattitudes also is wheelchair-accessible, boat ride and all.
Dinner hours are 5 to 10 p.m. All major credit cards are accepted.

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