FLORIDA KEYS WATERFRONT SPECIALIST

Buying a Rental Property in the Florida Keys

A Buyer's Guide to Short-Term Rental Rules, Licenses, and Investment Options

Thinking about buying a vacation rental in the Florida Keys? It's absolutely possible — but the Keys are one of the most regulated real estate markets in the country when it comes to short-term rentals. Your success as an investor often comes down to one thing before you ever list a property: the zoning and minimum-stay requirements of that specific island. Here's what you need to know before you buy.

The Rules Change by Island

Short-term rental (STR) regulations shift significantly as you move down the island chain. Here's how the minimum-stay requirements break down region by region:

Region	Minimum Stay	Investor Takeaway
Marathon & Key Colony Beach	7-day minimum (many zones)	Most investor-friendly; primary target for weekly vacation-rental income.
Islamorada	7-day minimum (residential) with special license	Some "Mixed Use" zones allow nightly rentals — rare and highly sought after. Must apply for license.
Key West	30-day minimum (most residential)	Most restrictive. Nightly/weekly rentals require a capped, rare "Transient License."
Unincorporated Monroe County (Key Largo, Tavernier, Lower Keys)	28-day minimum (most residential)	Standard rule across most of the Upper and Lower Keys outside city limits.

What to Check Before You Buy

Beyond the zoning map, there are a few "invisible" factors that can make or break a rental property investment:

Transient Licenses

Some properties come with a legal "right to rent" that is grandfathered in. If a home doesn't already have this license, it can be extremely difficult — or impossible — to obtain one in certain jurisdictions. Always confirm license status before you fall in love with a property.

HOA & Condo Rules

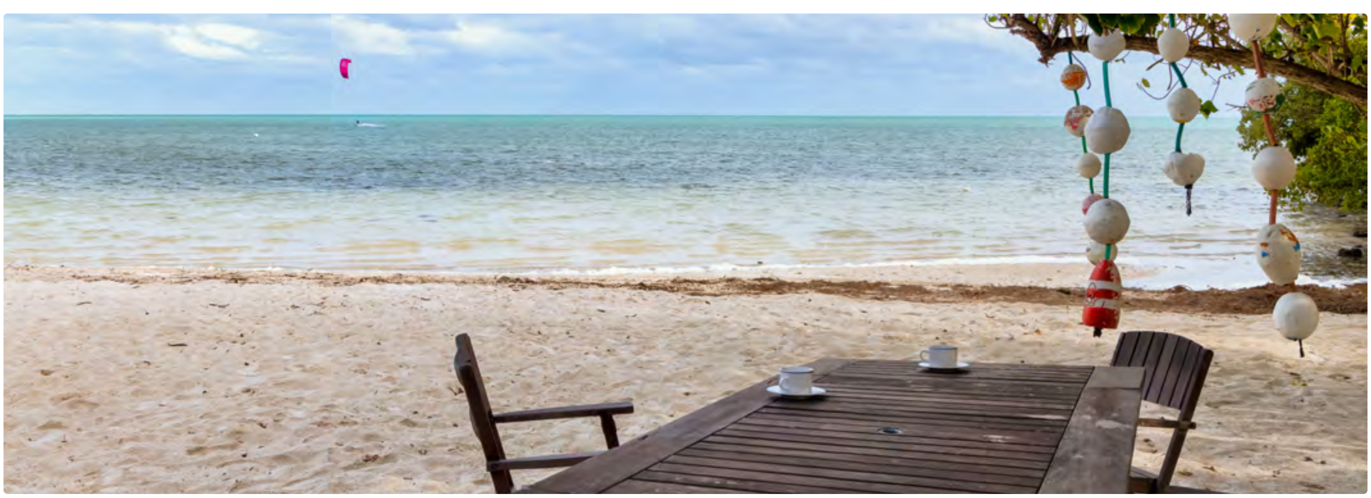
Even where the city or county allows weekly rentals, a Homeowners Association can impose stricter rules of its own — a 90-day minimum, or a total ban on short-term rentals. Always review the HOA/condo docs, not just the zoning.

Downstairs Enclosures

Many older stilt homes in the Keys have enclosed ground-floor space. Be cautious — a number of these enclosures sit below flood elevation and are considered illegal, meaning they can't be counted as official bedrooms or living space for rental permitting.

Taxes

Rental owners are required to collect and remit both the Florida Sales Tax and the Monroe County Tourist Development Tax (the "bed tax"), currently 5%. Factor this into your rental income projections from day one.



Investment Alternatives

If the minimum-stay restrictions in your target area don't fit your investment goals, there are a couple of hands-off alternatives worth exploring:

Condo-Hotels

Units within a resort — think Duck Key or parts of Key Largo — where on-site management handles the rentals for you. Fees tend to run higher, but you get guaranteed short-term rental rights and a truly hands-off ownership experience.

Fractional Ownership

Select luxury resorts in the Keys offer 1/4 or 1/8 ownership shares. You get several weeks of personal use each year, while the property generates rental income the rest of the time.

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