

S15LK Day Paddles - Lower Keys

Key West Circumnavigation Information Sheet

Description: This is approximately a 12-mile paddle around the southernmost city in the US. In order to paddle through Fleming Cut with the current (this has the strongest current along the route), leave Smathers Beach at a rising tide and paddle clockwise. There aren't a lot of stopping places on the route. Allowed are Fort Zachary Taylor State Park (do not approach the beach in the swim area), the north end of Simonton Street just before the historic seaport, and Lazy Dog Outfitters on Stock Island off of Cow Key Channel, where you can also get a bite to eat. Do not land anywhere on Navy property on Fleming Key or Sigsbee Island. At the south end of Cow Key Channel, there is shallow water so avoid the temptation to take a short cut close to shore.

Skill Level: Advanced

Distance/Time: 12.1 Miles/6 Hours

Launch Site: Key West - Smathers Beach Paddle Launch

Special Considerations: It is not permissible to launch kayaks within the swim zone at Smathers Beach. Launch at either end of this 2-mile long beach. Be careful of speeding boats and personal watercraft. A great way to do this paddle while helping a swimmer fulfill their dream of swimming around Key West (and make a few bucks) is to participate as a kayak escort in the Swim Around Key West every June. Go to www.SwimAroundKeyWest.com to volunteer. This will also assure that the tides will be in your favor.

Skill Level Definitions

Beginner: New to paddling and may need tips and or instructions about paddling strokes, safety procedures, and entering/exiting kayaks. Comfortable on short trips of 1 to 3 miles on protected waters, when wind does not exceed 5 mph.

Novice: Paddlers acquainted with basic paddle strokes and can manage kayak handling independently in winds not exceeding 10 mph on protected waters. Comfortable on trips up to 6 miles.

Intermediate: Paddlers with experience in basic strokes and some experience on different venues, including some open water. Comfortable on trip distances of 6 to 10 miles, winds not exceeding 15 mph.

Advanced: Seasoned paddlers who possess skills and experience to paddle all venues and conditions. Experienced in self-rescues. Should be comfortable paddling more than 10 miles in a day.

NOTE: Great care has been taken to ensure this guides accuracy, but weather, tides, and water conditions can change rapidly and create hazardous conditions. These maps are for visual reference only, please consult NOAA Charts for navigation. Paddlers should have all proper safety equipment and check conditions before departure. All paddlers should always wear PFDs while on the water, and leave a float plan. There are inherent dangers in any paddle sport. There are special hazards along the Florida coast due to shifting tides, changing wind and weather, shallow waters, and treacherous bottoms with soft mud, rocks, and oyster bars. It is up to each paddler to be aware of these dangers, to accept and be prepared for the risks involved, and to be certain they have the skills to safely paddle in these conditions.