

The New York Times

Travel In Transit

TRAVEL NEWS, DEALS AND TIPS

TRENDING

For Snowbirds, More Places to Roost

The Florida Keys have long attracted fans of its no-shirt-no-shoes-no-problem culture. Now the 125-mile island chain may see more of them as hoteliers expand capacity, with nine new or substantially renovated hotels.

Room occupancy in the area was significantly higher in 2014, at nearly 80 percent, than the national average of about 64 percent, while room supply was slightly down, according to STR Inc., a hotel industry analyst.

"That's an equation that in economics you love," said Bobby Bowers, STR's senior vice president for operations.

At the top of the Keys, Playa Largo Resort and Spa is to open in December, replacing an RV park with 145 rooms on a 14.5-acre bay-front site. Developers say it's the first hotel to be built on Key Largo in 20 years, and will include a marina, spa and tennis courts.

At the southern end of the island chain, the just-opened Gates Hotel Key West has 100 guest rooms paneled in reclaimed wood. Amenities include a rum bar, Martone Cycling Co. bikes available to guests and a permanent food truck in place of a restaurant. It



The Gates Hotel Key West, with 100 guest rooms, is among the newcomers in the area.

joins the Marker Waterfront Resort, which opened in Key West in late 2014.

Between the end points are renovated and rebranded hotels, including Amara Cay Resort on Islamorada and the Faro Blanco Resort and Yacht Club in Marathon.

Tourism trends indicate that bargains may be harder to find as travelers increasingly fill resorts

beyond snowbird season.

"In the last five years, we've seen a significant increase in summer travel to the Keys, so the expected drop-off in a low season or off-season is not as dramatic as it used to be," said Stacey Mitchell, the director of sales for the Florida Keys and Key West Tourist Development Council.

ELAINE GLUSAC