

# **THE FLORIDA KEYS & KEY WEST: “CONNECT AND PROTECT”**

## **Objectives**

Miami-based NewmanPR, representing the Florida Keys & Key West destination marketing office for nearly 40 years, launched the “Connect and Protect” initiative to position the 125-mile-long island chain as a global leader in responsible tourism.

The Keys’ environmental protection dates back more than a century with the Key West National Wildlife Refuge established in 1908; the National Key Deer Refuge in 1957; John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, America’s first underwater park, in 1963; and the 2,800-square-nautical-mile Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in 1990, protecting all Florida Keys waters.

The “Connect and Protect” theme emphasized tangible and intangible values of a Florida Keys vacation by focusing on sustainability while motivating visitors to include experiential, transformational, environmental and voluntourism activities. Objectives included protection of the destination’s unique natural environment and preservation of its local lifestyle.

Objectives also raised awareness of the Keys’ pioneering efforts to restore and sustain the continental United States’ only living coral barrier reef. In recent years, Keys scientists have spearheaded restoration of endangered corals by replanting new growths from coral nurseries to the reef.

“Connect and Protect,” launched in late 2018, ran through 2019, and was incorporated into a (U.S.) \$1.15 million public relations budget for Florida’s Monroe County (Florida Keys) Tourist Development Council. Target audience included all 4 million annual international and domestic visitors.

“Connect and Protect” objectives encouraged visitors to participate in environmentally responsible activities: exploring Marathon’s world-famous Turtle Hospital, diving and fishing with eco-conscious “Blue Star” operators, purposefully choosing sustainable stone crab claws and locally sourced fish, or “voluntouring” with coral reef restoration.

Objectives included attaining successful global media coverage with Toronto-based LMA Communications Inc. and United Kingdom-based KBC Marketing PR & Representation, overseeing efforts throughout Europe; and other international affiliates.

## **Strategies**

Strategies focused on creating “Connect and Protect” promotions by a dedicated 7-person NewmanPR team and subcontracted international agencies to spotlight Florida Keys sustainable travel offerings and natural eco-experiences to media throughout the world.

Strategies included “Connect and Protect” themed media research trips, social media mini-videos, a consumer contest, a new website section, a “Keys Traveler” print magazine and dedicated e-newsletters.

Elements included:

- A monthly “Connect and Protect” section in “Keys Traveler” e-newsletter.
- Creation of “Connect and Protect” press releases for global distribution, a dedicated press kit and “Keys Voices” blog posts on [fla-keys.com](http://fla-keys.com).
- A new [fla-keys.com/sustain/](http://fla-keys.com/sustain/) section: “The Keys to Sustainable Travel.”
- Monthly “Sustainable Spotlight” stories and weekly “Sustainable Sunday” social posts.
- A social media “Connect and Protect” sustainability campaign with Florida Keys Council of the Arts to highlight Keys eco-artistry.
- A social media consumer contest awarding a four-night Keys eco-adventure vacation for two.
- Dedicated media familiarization trips themed “Connect and Protect,” “Travel with a Purpose” and “Stewards of the Keys” targeting U.S., Canadian and European media and influencers. Introduction of “Connect and Protect” to Chinese key opinion leaders (KOLs) through a destination tour.
- Nine 20-second social video vignettes spotlighting natural Keys scenes.
- A “Keys Traveler” e-newsletter, with stories about unique eco-attractions and experiences: [fla-keys.com/newsletter/201905/](http://fla-keys.com/newsletter/201905/)
- Production of a “Connect and Protect” 16-page “Keys Traveler” magazine for online downloading and distribution at World Travel Market: [fla-keys.com/pdf/KeysTravelerMagazine2019.pdf](http://fla-keys.com/pdf/KeysTravelerMagazine2019.pdf)
- Conceived and supported all creative and production elements of the one-hour syndicated television program “Florida Keys: Protecting Paradise,” with Crawford Productions, showcasing the Keys’ sustainability movement and devoted stewards.

## Techniques

“Connect and Protect” techniques included extensive use of social media and engagement throughout all program elements, encouraging use of “Connect and Protect” hashtags, vibrant imagery and widespread sharing of campaign elements.

Techniques also encouraged hands-on participation by media and influencers with Keys coral restoration, promoting the destination’s commitment to “reef friendly” practices.

Campaign elements included specific ways for visitors to understand and participate in Keys sustainability efforts.

“Connect and Protect” included the legal process of trademarking an agency-created “Connect & Protect” tagline and logo.

Techniques used for a "Connect and Protect" consumer contest coincided with a media campaign focused on the Keys' unique environment and resources.

The contest, launched across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, helped to increase readers of the free monthly “Keys Traveler” e-newsletter, with entrants opting in as subscribers.

Promoted with 21 posts across branded Florida Keys social media platforms, the contest awarded the winner a Keys eco-adventure. Over 10,130 entries were received in a month, generating a total campaign reach of nearly 500,000.

NewmanPR collaborated with Crawford Productions to produce a one-hour national television show, "Florida Keys: Protecting Paradise," examining conservation and sustainability efforts throughout the island chain. It debuted on Discovery Channel Dec. 29, 2019, and subsequent airings were seen on Destination America and WGNA. In production is a cut-down, 30-minute version to be presented to American Public Television for broadcast.

Budget for the entire production was (U.S.) \$90,000 with the agency assisting in all phases, including but not limited to script creation, scheduling and post-production.

## **Results**

Of 14 Florida markets surveyed by Smith Travel Research Inc./ STR Global Ltd., Keys markets tallied the highest year-to-date occupancy and average daily room rates in December 2019 — with Key West at 84.2 percent and the entire Florida Keys at 76.6 percent; Key West at \$291.52 and the Florida Keys, \$277.32.

“The Connect and Protect initiative, we believe, has boosted interest in the Florida Keys, especially among millennial travelers who are showing a deep affinity for environmentally-conscious destinations and resorts,” said Jodi Weinhofer, president of the Lodging Association of the Florida Keys & Key West.

Average Florida Keys daily room rate increased 3.9 percent, to \$277.32 from \$266.93, in 2019.

Perhaps more important are the intangibles: the increased awareness among visitors that helps protect the unique natural resources of the Florida Keys, from coral reefs to scenic, precious land areas.

“Connect and Protect” highlights:

- A month-long social media sustainability campaign with Florida Keys Council of the Arts attracted a reach of 479,693 and 6,000+ engagements.
- A social media campaign, “Connect with the Florida Keys,” for a four-night Keys eco-adventure vacation, achieved 10,133 entries and a reach of nearly 500,000.
- Nine 20-second video vignettes generated 137,245 social media views.
- A monthly “Keys Traveler” e-newsletter, with “Connect and Protect” stories, has 90,000 opt-in subscribers.
- Followers on **Instagram** (@thefloridakeys) jumped 41 percent, gaining 88,357 new followers (127,213 to 215,570).
- **Facebook** (@floridakeysandkeywest) fans increased 6.5 percent, adding 29,042 new fans (421,863 to 450,905). Reach: 4.3+ million.
- **Twitter** (@thefloridakeys) gained 5 percent or 2,438 new followers (46,720 to 49,158). Reach: 4.2 million.

## Media Coverage

### United States

#### “Florida Keys: Protecting Paradise”

NewmanPR assisted Florida-based Crawford Productions, providing support for all production elements of the one-hour television show, “Florida Keys: Protecting Paradise,” examining Keys’ conservation and sustainability efforts. Its focus included ways viewers can participate in environmental initiatives when visiting the Keys. Debut was Dec. 29, 2019, on Discovery Channel, and subsequent airings were on Destination America and WGNA. Other broadcasts include Fox Sun Sports and Discover Florida; also viewed globally on phone apps ROKU, Apple TV and Amazon Fire TV. Additionally, a half-hour adaption is scheduled for “How to Do Florida” in 11 statewide markets, to be presented to American Public Television for potential broadcast.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epKYbg5dKPg&feature=youtu.be>

Throughout “Connect and Protect,” NewmanPR and affiliate agencies produced a series of press releases and media kit: <http://media.fl-keys.com/presskits/connect-and-protect.htm>

A few examples of “Connect and Protect” coverage:  
<https://fathomaway.com/eco-friendly-travel-guide-florida-keys/>; Reach: 56,000+ unique visitors per month (UMVs)

<https://www.cntraveler.com/story/how-to-plan-an-eco-friendly-trip-to-key-west>; (**Condé Nast Traveler online**): Reach: 3.7 million UMVs

<https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2019/06/13/top-3-eco-friendly-vacation-spots/> **CBS Interactive** (syndicated through CBS Local network on 23 “CBS Local” sites)

<https://matadornetwork.com/read/florida-keys-sustainable-wildlife-tourism/> Reach: 3+ million UMVs

## Canada

<https://horizontravelmag.ca/2019/11/22/unlocking-the-secrets-of-the-fabulous-florida-keys-key-west-2/> and <https://horizontravelmag.ca/2019/03/07/unlocking-the-secrets-of-the-fabulous-florida-keys-key-west/>; **Horizon Travel & Lifestyle** (Toronto Star)  
Circulation: 100,000+

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/travel/article-fixing-the-florida-keys-locals-turn-conservation-into-ecotourism/>; Reach: 2.51 million+ UMVs; print: 156,878

From a **Canada Media Mission** in Calgary and Toronto:

[https://news.paxeditions.com/news/tourism-board/florida-keys-shifts-focus-sustainability-2020/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=pax-2-newsletter-2019-12-06&utm\\_content=travel-news](https://news.paxeditions.com/news/tourism-board/florida-keys-shifts-focus-sustainability-2020/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=pax-2-newsletter-2019-12-06&utm_content=travel-news); Reach: 69,000

<https://www.travelpress.com/time-to-explore-the-florida-keys/#.XepvJi3MxTY>; Reach: 54,000

<https://www.openjaw.com/onthetown/13760/a-florida-keys-state-of-mind>; Reach: 24,000

<https://ca.travelpulse.com/news/destinations/outdoor-adventure-sunsets-and-sustainability-the-florida-keys-come-to-canada.html>; Reach: 43,000

## United Kingdom

<https://soundcloud.com/travelmole/are-coral-reefs-that-important>  
**TravelMole** podcast with Key Largo-based Coral Restoration Foundation’s Alice Grainger: Reach: 1.5 million listeners

[www.mtv.co.uk/travel/news/why-the-florida-keys-are-the-perfect-destination-for-an-ecoconscious-holiday](http://www.mtv.co.uk/travel/news/why-the-florida-keys-are-the-perfect-destination-for-an-ecoconscious-holiday); Reach: 2.3 million UMVs

[www.thesun.co.uk/travel/9449297/reconnect-nature-outdoor-activities](http://www.thesun.co.uk/travel/9449297/reconnect-nature-outdoor-activities) Reach: 2.5+ million UMVs

[www.thehandbook.com/reviews/eco-tourism-just-got-turtle-y-awesome-down-in-florida](http://www.thehandbook.com/reviews/eco-tourism-just-got-turtle-y-awesome-down-in-florida)  
Reach: 108,000 UMVs

[www.theweek.co.uk/102826/a-holiday-with-a-purpose-protecting-the-florida-keys](http://www.theweek.co.uk/102826/a-holiday-with-a-purpose-protecting-the-florida-keys);  
Reach: 101,439 UMVs

## **Germany**

<https://www.alpenjoy-tourismus.de/pdf/DIE-NEUE-ReiseLust-Ausgabe-Dezember-2018.pdf> pg. 14; Reach: 140,000 UMVs

<https://www.fvw.de/galerien/Florida-auf-die-gruene-Tour-3168>; Reach: 70,000 UMVs

<https://www.fvw.de/destination/news/florida-mit-bildergalerie-oekotourismus-floriert-im-sunshine-state-204757>; Reach: 70,000 UMVs

## **France**

[lalsace.fr/culture-loisirs/2019/12/25/decouvrir-les-keys-de-floride-cote-nature](http://lalsace.fr/culture-loisirs/2019/12/25/decouvrir-les-keys-de-floride-cote-nature): 3.8 million online visitors, 9,642,375 pages viewed. Readership: 259,000; print: 91,758

<https://babel-voyages.com/etats-unis/nature/coral-restoration-foundation-et-rainbow-reef-plonger-pour-la-preservation-des-coraux-en-floride.html> Reach: 20,000 UMVs

## **China**

<https://m.weibo.cn/status/4422654242957815?> (782,000 impressions, engagement of 1,356)

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