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FLORIDA KEYS



12 Key West Bites for Under \$20

You don't need to spend a lot to eat well in the Conch Republic.

The Gates hotel serves up nibbles on site from its food truck, The Blind Pig.

Want to keep your savings high while down in Key West? Here are a dozen restaurants, diners, and cafes where you can grab a decent meal for under \$20, meaning you'll have more dough to burn through **later in the night.**

1. The Blind Pig: The Gates may be the newest hotel on the island, but they're not shy about having a good time. Alongside its Rum Row poolside bar, the luxury hotel located just as you enter the island on the highway (and not too far from the airport) is offering small bites and tapas from its new food truck. It's all yummy (including breakfast options such as Jake and Bake, an egg sandwich with Applewood bacon on Cuban bread), but when in doubt stick to the truck's self-titled hit, which includes smokey pulled pork meat, aged cheddar cheese on Pretzel bread, with cider barbeque glaze and sweet onions for just \$7.

2. Sarabeth's Key West: You can get three squares and still save money at the Key West outpost of the popular New York City bakery Sarabeth's. Breakfast, lunch and even brunch are definitely manageable on a slim budget — omelets run at about \$10.50-12.00 and sandwiches hover at about \$14-16. — but dinner can get a bit tricky. Our suggestion? Calamari for \$8.25 and then a 7.25 Caesar salad. But, you know, that's just a thought.

3. Old Town Mexican Cafe: Don't be thrown by the "dolphin" on the menu at this Caribbean-infused Mexican joint. That's just a colloquial term for mahi-mahi, so don't worry that you're chomping into Flipper when you order the \$14.50 dolphin enchiladas or baja tacos with dolphin. If you're not into eating fish at all, Old Town Mexican Cafe has vegetarian options, too, and they're often cheaper: the spinach and mushroom quesadilla's only a little over ten bucks.

4. Hogfish: The name might not be pretty, but don't overlook this open-air locals destination located in an out-of-the-way spot at the Safe Harbor Marina on Stock Island. You'll be happy ordering anything with the namesake fish, so just dig into the sandwich (\$14.95) and be content. But the tacos are great too as is the peel-and-eat shrimp.



Fish tacos will only run you \$11 at the Rum Barrel

5. Rum Barrel: Don't fill up on the inventive rum-based drinks at this hot spot on Front Street, because you'll definitely want to save room for their equally creative and reasonably priced dinner menu. Though a full rack of ribs breaks the \$20 rule, you can get a half-rack for \$16. But if you're hoping for a more robust, well-rounded dish, try one of their killer island fish tacos for \$11. Or may the penne pescatore for \$16 is more your speed? If you go with the former, though, you'll still have the \$6.95 needed for their famous cinnamon bun bread pudding. It's worth every penny.

6. Pepe's Cafe: The oldest eatery on the island, Pepe's Cafe has been a local favorite since 1909 - and for good reason. Again, it is possible to spend over \$20 here, but with oysters on the half-shell for \$1.10, a chopped beef dinner for \$14, a three vegetable plate for just over \$10 and a grilled fish sandwich for just a bit more, you can definitely create an entire meal for a reasonable price. And you should!

7. Croissants de France: You can easily wander off budget at this French-inspired eatery — cordon bleu goes for \$21 — but it is possible to construct a fulfilling meal with little money. For example, the French onion soup, a reliable choice, will run you \$8.25. The escargot appetizer is \$10.50, and the island infused sirloin skewer entree is \$16.75. Or, if you'd rather not dine her, you can just pop in to pick up some sweets at the bakery, which also carries gluten-free options.

8. Camille's: Camille's may look unassuming, but this belle of Key West's culinary scene really has it going on in the kitchen, and always keeps an eye on your back pocket. Breakfast dishes like eggs benedict with Key West lobster, yellow corn cashew waffles and French toast with white chocolate Godiva sauce are all under \$14, and lunch's grilled mahi-mahi and hand-pulled chicken salad are similarly priced. Again, dinner entrees can break the \$20 limit, but there are definitely plenty of options on their "big bang" dinner menu, which includes a crisp pear salad, grilled mahi-mahi and cracker dusted grouper with avocado and chive. The dinner prices vary depending on season, but you'll definitely find something to sink your teeth into at this cheeky establishment.



Save some dough, and a cow, by trying the \$10 veggie burger at The Cafe.

9. The Cafe: Fruits and vegetables rule the roost at this mostly vegetarian and vegan cafe on Southard Street. The only dish on the menu that goes over \$20 happens to be non-vegetarian, or at least non-vegan: mussels. Otherwise, feel free to graze on seitan peppersteak (\$10), organic white polenta cakes (\$16), fig and gorgonzola pizza (\$16.25) or the colossal veggie sandwich with eggplant (\$9.50).

10. Mr Z's: Inevitably some Key West travelers will find themselves roving the streets looking for a meal **after a night at the bars**. Rather than wandering like a zombie, sashay, saunter, stumble or just plain walk over to Mr. Z's and grab one a freshly-made stromboli, a signature cheesesteak, pizza by the slice or by the pie and other helpfully greasy bites to help you wake up feeling a bit more clear headed.

11. Mangia Mangia: The term "pasta cafe" may sound casual, but Mangia Mangia's one of the fancier cheap eats in town, and that's at times reflected in some of their more ambitious dishes, like \$21 lobster linguine. If you're trying to save dough, though, it's best to go with the more basic pasta program: Alfredo or tomato-based seafood sauces with scallops, conch and mahi-mahi for \$16-17. Standard meat sauce, meanwhile, is only \$12.99 and the portions are generous enough to fill even the most hungry of diners.

12. Harpoon Harry's: Another institution where Key West's zany creativity remains on full display — the plastic doll chandelier is a favorite — Harpoon Harry's has been serving up diner fare since the 1950s. The BELT [bacon, egg, lettuce and tomato] starts your day for \$7, or baked pork chops or a Cuban sandwich can both be had for ten bucks at lunch. And even dinner's reasonably priced: fish and chips are caught for \$11 and baked lasagna is about the same. This isn't groundbreaking cuisine, but it also won't break your wallet.