

Find your relaxed center at The Moorings

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Hammocks are easily found, including this one on the pier. Photo by Mary Thurwachter

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The Honeymoon cottage at The Moorings Village in Islamorada has a king bedroom, kitchen and a large porch overlooking the ocean. Photo by Mary Thurwachter

By Mary Thurwachter

This time of year, I can't help but think of The Moorings Village in Islamorada. My husband and I celebrate our wedding anniversary in December, and usually go somewhere tropical to mark the occasion. One of our first destinations was The Moorings, an 18-acre resort with 18 cottages.

We stayed in The Honeymoon Cottage – a perfectly cozy and quiet beachside retreat snuggled under a canopy of coconut palms.

Shady paths covered with fine sand ensure tranquility, even when heavy-footed guests tromp to and from the shoreline. Black cormorants splash into the water in search of fish. Every now and then, a ripe coconut drops to the sand. Hammocks are strung between trees, and guests never have to battle each other for a chance to stretch out in one. There are plenty to go around, and even one at the end of the pier.

There's a cool pool for lap swimmers, and those who prefer the ocean often kayak to deeper, more swimmable waters.

Fishing is a big lure in Islamorada, and from the shores at The Moorings guests can watch fishermen reel in the catch of the day.

Fully equipped kitchens are part of the deal, but it's hard to resist sneaking away to Pierre's restaurant for a fine seafood dinner, or perhaps Lignumvitae Key State Botanical Site, for a ranger-led tour to learn about the Keys' tropical flora and fauna.

The World Wide Sportsman, a tempting shopping spot for outdoor lovers, has a 46-foot replica of Ernest Hemingway's boat, the Pilar.

But sooner or later, guests feel The Moorings pulling them back for a little more R&R. It's a very romantic place, and the perfect perch for honeymooners, or those marking a special occasion like an anniversary or a birthday. It's also a popular site for photo shoots from "Victoria's Secret" to "Sports Illustrated" swimsuit edition.

The stars are fond of The Moorings, too. Last time we visited, we discovered Jennifer Lopez had been a guest there just days before we arrived.

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IF YOU GO

The Moorings Village, 123 Beach Road, Islamorada. MM 81.5. 18 cottages.

Pool, spa, tennis courts, laundry service. Rates begin at \$650 a night and varies by season and cottage.

Call 305-664-4708 or visit www.themooringsvillage.com.