

Dry Tortugas

Official Map and Guide

Dry Tortugas National Park
Florida

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Almost 70 miles west of Key West, Fla., lies a cluster of 7 islands, composed of coral reefs and sand, called the Dry Tortugas. With surrounding shoals and water, they make up Dry Tortugas National Park, an area known for its bird and marine life and pirate legends. Fort Jefferson, its central cultural feature, is the largest 19th-century American coastal fort. First named The Turtles, *Las Tortugas*, by Spaniard Ponce de Leon in 1513, these reefs soon read "Dry Tortugas" on mariners' charts to show they had no freshwater. In 1825 a lighthouse was built on Garden Key to warn sailors of rocky shoals; in 1856 the present

light on Loggerhead Key was built. By 1829 the United States knew it could control navigation to the Gulf of Mexico and protect Atlantic-bound Mississippi River trade by fortifying the Tortugas. Fort Jefferson's construction began on Garden Key in 1846 and continued for 30 years but never was finished. During the Civil War the fort was a Union military prison for captured deserters. It also held 4 men convicted of complicity in President Abraham Lincoln's assassination in 1865. The Army abandoned Fort Jefferson in 1874, and in 1908 the area became a wildlife refuge to protect the sooty tern rookery from egg collectors. Proclaimed as Fort Jefferson

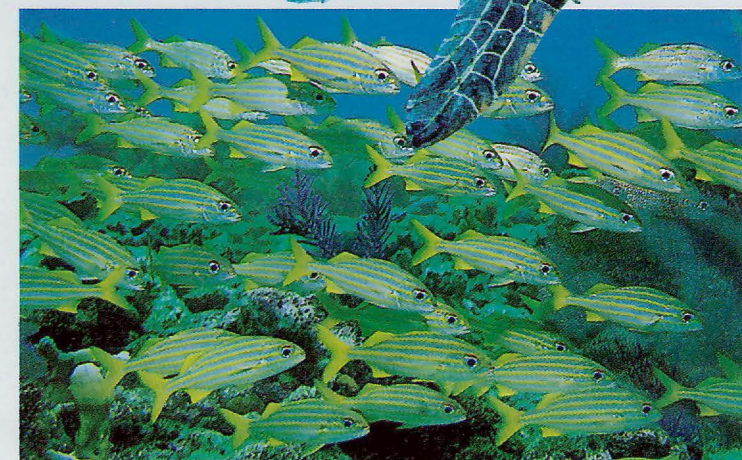
National Monument in 1935, the area was redesignated in 1992 as Dry Tortugas National Park to protect both the historical and natural features. Not least among the natural treasures are its namesakes, the endangered green sea turtle and the threatened loggerhead turtle. Snorkeling, swimming, saltwater sport fishing, underwater photography, and touring the historic fort are popular park activities.

Cover photo of Fort Jefferson on Garden Key



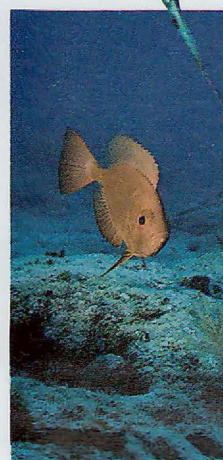
Green sea turtle photo by Kennan Ward

Coral Reefs and More



Smallmouth grunts

Larry Lipsky/Tom Stack & Assoc.



Bigeye

Chris Huss

Vital to Bird Migrations



Sooty tern



Painted bunting

Carl R. Sams II

Be Prepared for Your Visit



Visible ruin Picnic area Primitive campground
Restrooms

Private boaters have a prime opportunity to visit the fort. Nautical charts for the route can be purchased at marinas and

boating supply outlets in Key West. Information can be obtained in Key West from the U.S. Coast Guard Station, the Cham-

ber of Commerce, and the Charter Boat Association. Boaters should be aware of the possibility of extremely rough seas.



Fort Jefferson Archways

Warm, clear, and well lit, the Dry Tortugas' shallow waters foster optimal conditions for coral reefs to develop on the outer edges of tropical islands. Actual builders of these fringing reefs are small primitive animals called polyps. Over centuries polyps accumulate in living colonies that form the reef's rigid structures so often misconstrued as rocks. Though fragile, the Tortugas reef complex supports a wealth of marine life. Multicolored sea fans sway in gentle currents. Sea anemones thrust upward their rose and lavender tentacles in search of food. Lobsters anticipating danger wave their antennae. Sponges dot sandy bottoms, and staghorn coral clusters simulate underwater forests. Most obvious among coral reef inhabitants are the colorful reef fishes. Vivid, boldly patterned reds, yellows, greens, and blues work as camouflage, identity, warning, and courtship messages. Pred-

atory fish include amberjacks, groupers, wahoos, tarpon, and, atop this coral reef food pyramid, sharks and barracudas.

Hunted by humans—mostly illegally—for gourmet meat, leather, and cosmetic oils, sea turtle numbers have diminished greatly worldwide, but green, loggerhead, and hawksbill species still are seen in the Dry Tortugas. Sea turtles, themselves, prey on small marine invertebrates and forage turtle grass and other aquatic plants. Twice or more per season females climb onto sand beaches to dig out nests, lay some hundred eggs, cover them, and retreat seaward. Hatchlings crawl seaward by instinct, but most succumb to natural predators between the nest and sea. It is critical that humans not disturb sea turtles.

In season, a continuous succession of songbirds and other migrants flies over or rests at the Dry Tortugas. Strategically set, these islands lie across a principal flyway from the United States to Cuba and South America. Familiar up north in summer, many gulls, terns, and migratory shore birds winter here.

One great wildlife spectacle happens yearly between March and September as some 100,000 sooty terns gather on Bush Key for their nesting season. They come from the Caribbean Sea and west-central Atlantic Ocean. As early as mid-January, sooties perform nocturnal maneuvers above the Dry Tortugas but spend their days at sea. When they do land here in February, egg-laying starts immediately. Bush Key is closed to landings during tern nesting season, but the rookery is readily witnessed from the fort with binoculars.

Sooty parents take turns shading their single egg, laid in simple depressions in the warm sands, from the sunlight. Once the young grow strong enough for continuous flight, the colony disperses. Interspersed among the sooties' rookery are 2,500 breeding brown noddies. Unlike sooties and most other terns, noddies nest in vegetation, such as bay cedar and sea lavender. Both sooties and noddies feed by capturing fish and squid from the sea's surface while still in flight. Magnificent frigate birds that soar with 7-foot wingspans prey on tern hatchlings in nature's endless give and take. Visitors often also see masked and brown boobies, roseate terns, double-crested cormorants, and brown pelicans, a species recently delisted as endangered.

The park is open all year. Fort Jefferson on Garden Key is open during daylight hours; closed at dark. Public transportation—boat and amphibious aircraft—serves the park from Key West; check with its Chamber of Commerce. **You must provide for your own existence:** there are no housing, water, meals, bathing facilities, or supplies at the park. A 10-site primitive campground is available free, first-come, first-served. **For park information write to: Superintendent, Dry Tortugas National Park, P.O. Box 6208, Key West, FL 33041-6208.**

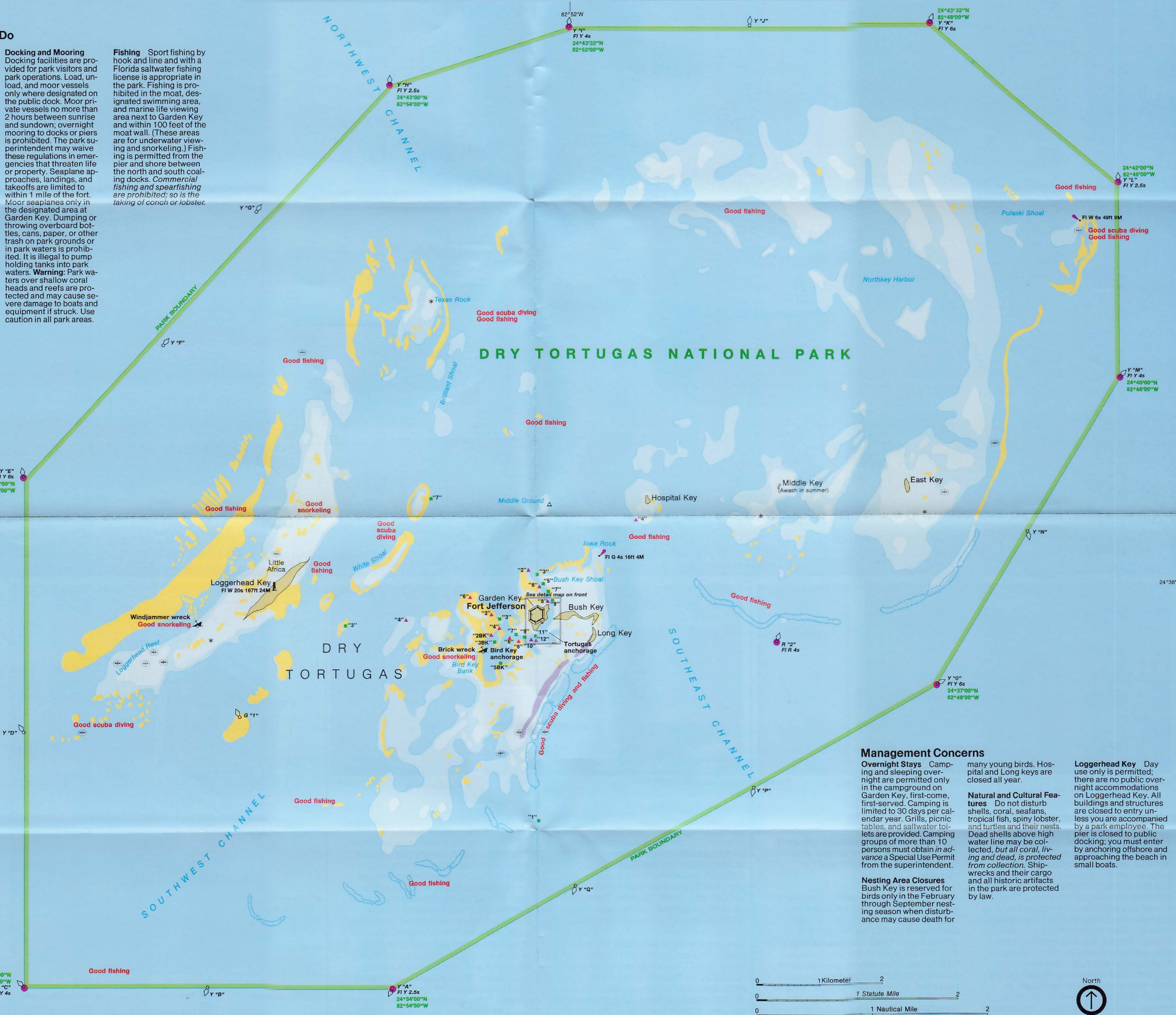
Things to See and Do

Getting Around at the Park
Upon arrival, see the orientation program at the visitor center and take the self-guiding fort tour. The parade ground contains ghostly remains of 2 huge buildings, the Officers' Quarters and Soldiers' Barracks, 2 magazines, and the cistern. Watch out for loose mortar and bricks and dangerous wall edges. Please help preserve the park's natural and historic features. Violations of park regulations may result in a citation to appear before the U.S. Magistrate.

Snorkeling, Swimming, and Underwater Photography
Snorkelers find marine life concentrated around patches of live coral. Swimmers can explore coral wonderlands in only 3 or 4 feet of water. Coral formations and bright tropical fish are prized subjects for underwater photography. **Divers' Warning:** Strong currents run through the park in many areas.

Docking and Mooring
Docking facilities are provided for park visitors and park operations. Load, unload, and moor vessels only where designated on the public dock. Moor private vessels no more than 2 hours between sunrise and sundown; overnight mooring to docks or piers is prohibited. The park superintendent may waive these regulations in emergencies that threaten life or property. Seaplane approaches, landings, and takeoffs are limited to within 1 mile of the fort. Moor seaplanes only in the designated area at Garden Key. Dumping or throwing overboard bottles, cans, paper, or other trash on park grounds or in park waters is prohibited. It is illegal to pump holding tanks into park waters. **Warning:** Park waters over shallow coral heads and reefs are protected and may cause severe damage to boats and equipment if struck. Use caution in all park areas.

Fishing
Sport fishing by hook and line and with a Florida saltwater fishing license is appropriate in the park. Fishing is prohibited in the moat, designated swimming area, and marine life viewing area next to Garden Key and within 100 feet of the moat wall. (These areas are for underwater viewing and snorkeling.) Fishing is permitted from the pier and shore between the north and south coal-ing docks. *Commercial fishing and spearfishing are prohibited; so is the taking of conch or lobster.*



Management Concerns

Overnight Stays
Camping and sleeping overnight are permitted only in the campground on Garden Key, first-come, first-served. Camping is limited to 30 days per calendar year. Grills, picnic tables, and saltwater toilets are provided. Camping groups of more than 10 persons must obtain in advance a Special Use Permit from the superintendent.

Nesting Area Closures
Bush Key is reserved for birds only in the February through September nesting season when disturbance may cause death for

many young birds. Hospital and Long keys are closed all year.

Natural and Cultural Features
Do not disturb shells, coral, sea fans, tropical fish, spiny lobster, and turtles and their nests. Dead shells above high water line may be collected, but all coral, living and dead, is protected from collection. Shipwrecks and their cargo and all historic artifacts in the park are protected by law.

Loggerhead Key
Day use only is permitted; there are no public overnight accommodations on Loggerhead Key. All buildings and structures are closed to entry unless you are accompanied by a park employee. The pier is closed to public docking; you must enter by anchoring offshore and approaching the beach in small boats.

0-6 feet (0-1.8 meters)	More than 12 feet (more than 3.6 meters)
6-12 feet (1.8-3.6 meters)	

This chart is an orientation aid for visitors to Dry Tortugas National Park. It should not be used in place of National Ocean Survey chart 11438, which is indispensable for safe boating on these waters.

Land	Shoal area
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Coral reef and/or coral rubble	Barrier reef
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Lighthouse	Rock
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Sunken wreck	Partially submerged wreck
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Red starboard daymarker	Green port daymarker
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Daybeacon	Light
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Buoy	Light buoy
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Buoy characteristics
R Red
G Green
Y Yellow

Light characteristics
Fl Flashing
W White
R Red
Y Yellow
s Period (in seconds)

