



Cheeca Lodge & Spa

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May 29, 2013

CHEECA LODGE & SPA: A LEGACY OF LUXURY SINCE 1946

The history of Islamorada's most famous resort reveals the genesis of one of America's premier resort destinations.

ISLAMORADA, FLORIDA KEYS – The history of Cheeca Lodge & Spa began in the late 1800's, a time of ship wreckers, marauding Indians and the arrival of the first hardy pioneers of the Florida Keys. Called "Conchs," these founders chose the beach now home to Cheeca Lodge to carve out a tenacious living in the isolated beauty of the undiscovered Florida Keys. There, they formed a Methodist congregation and built a two-room school house and a cemetery. Cheeca has preserved this Pioneer Cemetery, where members of the founding families of Islamorada are buried. You can explore it today; it is a designated historical site. The Angel with the Broken Wing watches over the grave of Etta Pinder, who died in 1914. This small homestead was the first footprint of Islamorada, which means "Island Home" in Spanish.

Civilization came to Islamorada in 1905, when Henry Morrison Flagler built his Overseas Railway, linking the Keys to Miami and beyond. With legendary storytellers like Zane Gray and Ernest Hemingway painting an alluring landscape of romance and adventure in the Keys, it didn't take long for the country's richest to discover this picture perfect tropical island paradise. They came to escape the colder climates of the East and to enjoy a sportsman's paradise. A Miami Herald newspaper reported, "Small wonder that so many sportsmen are attracted to the Keys. Here is the fishing ground of the world, where strikes are as frequent as sunny days, and specimens that would be record catches in other parts of the world are tossed disdainfully overboard to grow up." Islamorada was on the map.

The early 1940's brought electricity and fresh water. Mrs. Clara Mae Downey from Olney, Maryland, opened the Olney Inn in 1946. She described this early bellwether of Cheeca as "different – rather comparable to the tropical estate of a gifted host." Clara's first guest was President Harry Truman, who cherished his time loafing around the pool and wondering amidst the resort's 22 quaint bungalows. Over 1,000 graceful palm trees swayed in the cool ocean breezes. Another visitor was famed newsman Edward R. Murrow, who helped the Olney Inn gain an immediate reputation as a political retreat for the Washington elite.

Fast horses, high society and a healthy dose of Keys vivacity marked the reign of the Twitchell Family in the 1960's. Cynthia, better known as "Chee," was an heiress to the A&P grocery chain and owner of a top thoroughbred racing farm. "We took my nickname, combined it with my husband Carl's, and came up with "Cheeca," she recalled. The Twitchells completely refurbished the property, building the main lodge, the oceanfront villas, tennis courts, golf course and Cheeca's trademark wooden fishing pier. Chee raised miniature

tarpon and her beloved seahorses in the aquariums throughout the resort. “Suzy the Seahorse” became Cheeca’s mascot and logo, gracing the resort’s menus, brochures, towels and linens.

Avid outdoorsman and Coca Cola magnate Carl Navarre purchased Cheeca Lodge in 1976, hosting his Fortune 500 friends in for sunny days of sport fishing and golf. Celebrities flocked to the hotel during the Navarre tenure, including Jack Parr, Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Ted Williams and Jack Nicklaus. Famous guests were reeling in giant bonefish right off the resort’s pier. The “Sport Fishing Capital of the World” was born, seducing wealthy adventurers from around the world.

Perhaps the most famous angler to visit Islamorada is George H. W. Bush, 41st President of the United States. A passionate fisherman, he started coming to Cheeca in the early 1970’s and spent time here before his inauguration in late 1989. He has been a regular visitor to Cheeca Lodge over the years, and helped co-found the annual George Bush Cheeca Lodge Bonefish Tournament held from 1994 to 2004. That tournament drew a plethora of celebrities and wealthy businessmen who love to fish, and has raised thousands of dollars for various charities since its inception. During the 2002 tournament, Cheeca opened the doors of the George Bush Presidential Retreat, the resort’s most luxurious accommodation. This beautiful suite is a living history of Bush’s personal and political life. It is filled with priceless photos and mementos that were donated by this former leader of the Western Hemisphere.

In 2005, Cheeca underwent a \$30 million renovation which greatly enhanced the resort’s accommodations and grounds. Then, on New Year’s Eve 2008, a devastating fire destroyed the main lodge. Just one year later, the main lodge was completely re-built with a fabulous open-air lobby, a spectacular oceanfront banquet room with panoramic seaside views and an exclusive indoor/outdoor lounge area for Cheeca Club members and guests.

Cheeca Lodge & Spa is owned by Northwood Investments LLC, a privately-held real estate investment advisor with over \$2 billion of assets under management. It has headquarters in New York and Los Angeles. Cheeca is managed by Northwood’s management company, Northwood Hospitality.

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