

Carrying on the Legacy of the African Queen – The Key Largo Princess

By Rachel R. Peine/Photos by Rich Peine

Snuggled in her berth next to the Key Largo Princess, the African Queen watches with pride as her daughter carries on the family tradition. If you want to introduce the family to the wonders of the coral reef, you can't do better than a trip on the Key Largo Princess Glass Bottom Boat, leaving from the Holiday Inn canal at MM 100.

As passengers board for the two-hour ride, they get their first sighting of local wildlife - Freddie the Freeloader's gorgeous white feathers and long neck above those equally long black legs. This smart egret stretches in toward one of the boat's crew members. Val is slipping Freddie some fresh fish fillets (see top right photo) in between mixing what are reputed to be the best Margaritas in the Keys. One of those Margaritas goes to Darlene, who's visiting Key Largo from Canada, near Niagara Falls. She agrees that the Margarita definitely lives up to its reputation. Freddie, however, prefers the fish.

Once we get out to the reef, another crew member, Chris (see bottom photo), is pointing out what we're seeing through the glass bottom. "Did you know there are over 300 species of fish that live on the reef? That's in addition to crustacean, sponges, worms, eels, and two types of corals - the soft corals such as sea fans and sea rods, and the hard corals, like brain coral, staghorn coral and elkhorn coral. They're all living animals, and they're carnivorous, with tentacles that reach out to catch their food. You never know what you're going to see

out there."

Chris also shows us some schoolmaster snappers, a parrotfish nibbling on some algae, and a barracuda chasing snappers.

Val told us that Molasses reef is the most popular reef for snorkeling and diving because it has multiple levels - it can go from two feet for snorkelers to over 70 feet for divers. You can see fish from the tiny striped sergeant majors to the Goliath Grouper, which can get to over 1200 pounds and over 8-9 feet long.

The members of the crew love introducing guests to the ocean and the sea life. They meet people from all over the world, and they try to educate them about the importance of the coral reefs and how critical they are for the survival of fish and other sea creatures. Just like animals on land, fish need to find places where they can feed and hide, mate and lay eggs. Most of the ocean bottom doesn't give fish that habitat, but the reefs provide the ideal coverage for all those activities. However, the reefs need certain conditions to exist - temperature, and depth, and sunlight. These corals also pull carbon dioxide out of the ocean, and without them, carbon dioxide levels would rise dramatically, which would be deadly to ocean life. That's why it's so important to preserve the reefs.

We also talked to

Captain Mike, who's been on the job for over ten years. He's been out in all kinds of conditions, and he's seen some strange activity. Captain Mike's been in and out of the canal over 6000 times. It amazes me how he can maneuver a boat this long in and out of the canal and dock it exactly where it belongs.

As we return to the dock we say hello to the African Queen, who welcomes us home. It's been a gorgeous day on the water, complete with hot dogs, burgers, and a souvenir Key Largo Princess coolie cup.

Tickets for the Key Largo Princess

are available in the lobby of the Holiday Inn. There are three trips daily - 10:00 AM, 1:00 PM, and 4:00 PM. 451-4655; or adventure @keylargoprincess.com.



Artist of the Month Tim Shaw & Bob Manley



These guys are quite a combination. Bob Manley has been making plaques and furniture for years from extremely rare woods such as Dead Heads, Jamaican Dogwood, Black Ironwood, Mastics, and 150 year old Maderia Mahogany. The wood by itself is beautiful but Bob needed a painter so he teamed up with Tim Shaw to paint wild life paintings on his wood pieces.

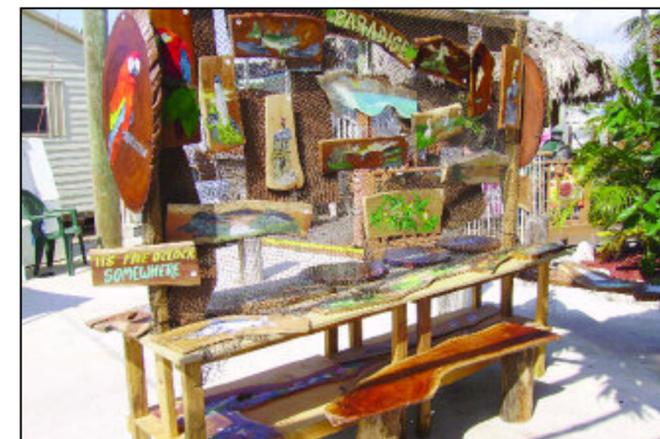
Tim Shaw is totally blind. He started painting 30 years ago at the age of 15 and moved to Key Largo 7 months ago just to paint. He has only

been painting wildlife for 5 years or so.

"I am totally amazed at some of the things I've painted," Tim tell us. "I can't even believe I did it."

Tim paints about 8 or 9 of Bob's wood pieces a week. He has completed 2 murals, one at the Scuba Outlet at MM 106 and the other is at Randy's Gift Shop. You can see their work set up at Gilbert's Resort MM 107.9 on Sunday afternoons.

For more information contact Bob Manley 305-394-0850 or Tim Shaw 305-453-5071.





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