



Tour:

KEY SCIENCE

Middle School Edition

Destination:

The Florida Keys, USA

Itinerary:

6-days / 5-nights

Availability:

September through May

KEY SCIENCE - MIDDLE SCHOOL EDITION					
Miami, Key Largo, Pigeon Key & Marathon, Florida					
Day	Meals	Morning	Afternoon		Evening
1	D	Travel to Miami, Florida; transfer to Homestead		Hotel Check-In	Welcome, Safety & Orientation Local Dinner
2	B, L, D	Everglades Alligator Farm Airboat Ride, Show & Tour	Travel to Marathon Key; boat to Pigeon Key	Check-in at Pigeon Key Marine Foundation; dinner	
3	B, L, D	Pigeon Key Marine Foundation - Marine Biology / Ocean Science Programming			
4	B, D	Pigeon Key Marine Foundation - Marine Biology Programming	Turtle Hospital Master Tour	Transfer to Homestead; hotel check-in	Dinner
5	B, D	Dolphin Master Class, Mammal Care Lab & Interaction	Coral Reef Restoration Foundation & Master Class	Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center Visit	Farewell Dinner & Reflections
6	B	Tropical Fruit Sampling	Transfer to Miami; depart for home		



As with all sample itineraries, please be advised that this is an 'example' of a schedule and that the activities and hotels shown may be variable dependent upon dates, weather, special requests and other factors. Itineraries will be confirmed prior to travel.



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A Message From Our Team

At STEM Study Tours, we believe students learn best when they're immersed, engaged, and inspired. Every program is built with intention - blending hands-on discovery, academic depth, and meaningful experiences that help students see the world (and themselves) in new ways. Our goal is for each itinerary to spark curiosity, build confidence, and create moments students carry long after the trip ends. We're honored to partner with schools who share that vision and to help bring learning to life beyond the classroom.

— Michele & The Hammock Expeditions Team

Why Travel With Hammock Expeditions & STEM Study Tours

Schools choose us because we design programs that are organized, intentional, and built around real learning. Our itineraries combine strong academics with smooth logistics, giving teachers confidence and giving students opportunities to explore, ask questions, and grow. We partner with trusted local experts, communicate clearly, and support groups every step of the way so educators can focus on their students - not the logistics.

What Sets Us Apart

- **Purpose-Driven Itineraries** - Students actively participate in meaningful, real-world learning.
- **Safety, Structure & Professionalism** - From 24-hour support to vetted partners and clear communication, we ensure teachers can focus on their students while we handle the logistics.
- **Hands-On, High-Impact Learning** - Our programs emphasize field science, conservation, and experiential learning - the kind that sticks with students long after the trip ends.
- **Student-Centered Design** - We balance learning with fun, reflection with adventure, and structure with flexibility. Every day is crafted to keep students engaged, energized, and supported.
- **A Team That Travels With Purpose** - We're educators, planners, naturalists, and travel professionals who care deeply about student growth. Your goals become our goals.

Our Commitment to You

When you travel with us, you gain a partner who understands your vision, anticipates your needs, and delivers an experience your students will remember for years to come. We're here to support your school, empower your students, and make every moment meaningful.

We want to be your educational partner. Let us know how we may serve you.

Michele, Christina, Izzy, Dana, Taylor, and the Team



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This immersive STEM adventure invites students to explore the dynamic ecosystems of South Florida — from the Everglades to the coral reefs of the Keys. Through hands-on marine biology, conservation workshops, and wildlife encounters, participants gain a deeper understanding of how science connects to real-world environmental challenges. Each experience builds teamwork, curiosity, and confidence as students engage directly with scientists and field experts who bring classroom concepts to life.

The program emphasizes sustainability, ocean stewardship, and the importance of protecting fragile coastal habitats. Students leave with new scientific skills, a stronger sense of environmental responsibility, and the inspiration to pursue future studies in marine science, ecology, or conservation. It's not just a trip — it's a transformative learning journey that fosters awareness and action.

About the Florida Keys - Stretching like a ribbon between the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, the Florida Keys offer one of the most diverse marine environments in the United States. The group will stay near Florida City and Homestead for easy access to Key Largo's marine research sites before traveling to historic Pigeon Key for an intensive marine biology program. After visiting the renowned Turtle Hospital in Marathon, students return to Key Largo for coral reef restoration and wildlife rehabilitation experiences — a full circle of discovery that highlights the interconnectedness of ocean life and human impact.



Did You Know? – The Florida Keys

- › The Florida Keys are made up of over 800 islands, though only about 30 are inhabited.
- › The Overseas Highway stretches 113 miles across the Keys and includes 42 bridges, including the famous Seven Mile Bridge.
- › The Keys sit on the third-largest barrier reef system in the world—the only living coral barrier reef in the continental United States (first = Great Barrier Reef, second = Mesoamerican Reef)
- › Key Largo is known as the “Dive Capital of the World” thanks to its clear water and protected marine habitats.
- › Many tropical fruits grown near the Everglades—like mamey sapote, canistel, and key limes—aren't found in most U.S. grocery stores.
- › Sea turtles, manatees, dolphins, and hundreds of bird species rely on the Keys' ecosystems for feeding, nesting, and migration.
- › Pigeon Key was once home to workers building the original Seven Mile Bridge in the early 1900s.



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Day 1 - Travel, Arrival & Welcome to Miami

Dinner on arrival, dependent upon flight times

Students travel to Miami and meet their Tour Director, who will guide them throughout the program. After gathering the group, everyone boards the motorcoach for the short transfer to the hotel and completes check-in, giving students time to settle into rooms, refresh, and get comfortable after a day of travel. If the group arrives early, our head office is happy to help plan an optional Miami activity to kick off the adventure — from a sightseeing tour in Little Havana to a visit to Monkey Jungle, SeaQuarium or even a brilliant science museum, just ask!

The group then comes together for the **Welcome, Safety & Orientation Meeting**, where expectations, communication procedures, and the upcoming schedule are clearly outlined. This first meeting helps students feel grounded, prepared, and excited for what's ahead. The evening wraps up with a Florida welcome dinner, a relaxed chance to connect, meet the team, and ease into the energy of South Florida.

Day 2 - Airboats, Alligators & Off to the Florida Keys

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Today's activities include:



Everglades Alligator Farm: Airboat Ride & Wildlife Show - Students jump right into South Florida ecology with a visit to the Everglades Alligator Farm. The experience begins with an exciting **airboat ride** across the sawgrass marsh, where students observe native wildlife and learn how this unique ecosystem supports a wide range of species. Afterward, they enjoy a lively alligator show led by trained experts who highlight animal behavior, adaptations, and conservation efforts. Students then have time to explore the park. It's a fun, high-energy introduction to the Everglades and a great foundation for the science programming ahead.

After our trip into the Everglades, we'll head south down to the Florida Keys. About midway, we'll hit Marathon Key and get ready to be picked up by boat to be transferred to Pigeon Key.

Pigeon Key Foundation - Nestled in the heart of the Florida Keys, and accessible by ferry boat, The Pigeon Key Foundation operates a Marine Science Center on its private five-acre island. The center gravitates towards hands-on learning, turning the island and surrounding ecosystem into a classroom. Students are provided with a pivotal, one-of-a-kind experience that is invaluable to them the rest of their lives. Pigeon Key only hosts one or two groups at a time, allowing for an individualized experience targeted at your specific curriculum requirements.



Swim Test - Participants do not need to know how to snorkel prior to their visit. The first thing instructors implement with every student is a 'swim test.' This test demonstrates the student's comfort level in the water. There are no required time limits or strokes to swim the 100 feet required in the test. If a student appears uncomfortable at all, instructors pay special



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attention to that student while in the water. All staff members are experienced instructors and hold Lifeguard certifications.

Initial Snorkel - After completing the swim test and getting outfitted with gear, we will embark upon an initial Snorkel. This allows for participants to get their bearings and test their equipment. All swimming and snorkeling are done under constant watch of instructors

Meals – All meals are taken at Pigeon Key starting with dinner on your night of arrival and ending with breakfast on your day of departure. Breakfasts include continental-style offerings with one hot option daily such as pancakes, French toast, biscuits and gravy, eggs and bacon, etc. Fresh fruit is always available. Lunches include sandwich meals, fruits and salads, with options rotating daily. Dinners include a starter, an entrée with sides and a dessert. Vegetarian options are available and the food team is more than happy to work with special dietary needs. Coffee, water and assorted beverages are always available.

EDUCATIONAL TOPICS:

Students will participate in multiple snorkel sessions during their stay at Pigeon Key, exploring the surrounding marine habitats up close. When not in the water, the Marine Science Center offers a variety of lesson topics that you can customize to fit your group's age range and learning goals. Schools select the programs that best match their curriculum, allowing each trip to focus on the exact themes and scientific elements they want to highlight.

Marine Habitats of the Florida Keys: Students are introduced to the four major ecosystems of the Keys — mangroves, seagrass beds, shallow hardbottom, and coral reefs — building a foundation for everything they'll explore during their stay. The session highlights each habitat's role, benefits, and current conservation challenges in a clear, student-friendly way. The program wraps with a fun island scavenger hunt where students search for real examples of what they just learned.

Reef Fish Identification: This interactive lesson prepares students for snorkeling by teaching them how to recognize the most common reef fish they'll encounter at Sombrero Reef. Through engaging visuals and discussion, students learn how fish behavior, body shape, and coloration help them survive in coral ecosystems.

Invertebrate Biodiversity: Students explore the shoreline as their living laboratory, searching for invertebrates in tide pools or while snorkeling. After a short introduction to the major invertebrate groups, they examine their finds in the wet lab, identifying key features through hands-on observation. All specimens are gently returned to their habitats, giving students a meaningful look at the incredible diversity of life around Pigeon Key.

Shark Biology & Dissection: This student-favorite program demystifies sharks by exploring their biology, adaptations, and importance within marine ecosystems. After learning about shark morphology and common myths, students participate in a guided dissection that reinforces each anatomical feature and its function. The experience concludes with a shark feeding in the enclosed saltwater pool, connecting science concepts to real animal behavior.

Marine Adaptations: Students explore the remarkable adaptations that help marine organisms survive — from fins and gills to camouflage, night vision, and bioluminescence. After learning about these traits, they design their own imaginary marine creature using the adaptations discussed. Groups can add an optional evening



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tide-pooling session to search for nocturnal species and examine them in the touch tanks for deeper hands-on learning.

Plankton Lab: Students discover why plankton are essential to ocean health as they learn what qualifies an organism as plankton and why these tiny drifters matter. They collect samples from the waters around Pigeon Key and examine them under microscopes to uncover the incredible variety of life within. Common finds include planktonic organisms, fish larvae, and nudibranchs, giving students a close look at the ocean's smallest residents.

Squid Anatomy & Dissection: Students explore the unique adaptations that help squid survive in their environments, connecting morphology to behavior and habitat. After a short introduction, they dissect a squid to examine its anatomy and understand the function of each major feature. This hands-on session reinforces how well marine organisms are designed for life in the ocean.

Conservation Angling: Students learn responsible fishing practices before heading to the Pigeon Key dock to try catch-and-release angling with staff support. A variety of species may be caught, including snapper, grouper, barracuda, tarpon, and even sharks. Some students may have the chance to tag a shark for a citizen-science database and receive a certificate recognizing their contribution.

Sustainability in Marine Fisheries: This session teaches students how fisheries are managed and why sustainable practices matter for both recreational and commercial species. They explore concepts like slot sizes, seasons, and responsible consumer choices to understand how humans impact marine populations. It's an excellent companion to Conservation Angling, giving students a broader foundation in sustainable fishing.

Conservation Town Meeting: Students step into a real-world decision-making scenario as half the group acts as Developers and the other half as Conservationists debating the future of Pigeon Key. A student Board of Directors listens to both sides and makes the final decision, encouraging teamwork, communication, and critical thinking. This capstone activity is a meaningful way to close the Pigeon Key experience.

Seawater Chemistry: Students become field researchers as they test salinity, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, nutrients, temperature, and pH to assess water quality around Pigeon Key. Their results are added to an ongoing data bank, contributing to long-term monitoring efforts. Each group presents its findings, building public-speaking skills while learning why water quality is essential for healthy marine ecosystems.

EarthDive Research Project: Students become citizen scientists as they snorkel in teams to record indicator species found in the waters around Pigeon Key. Using dive slates, they document what they observe and in what quantity, contributing real data to an international research effort. Back on the island, students upload their findings to the global EarthDive database, adding their voices to a worldwide conservation project.

Renewable Energy on Pigeon Key: Students explore renewable and non-renewable energy sources through an open discussion about how communities power themselves and why sustainability matters. The session highlights Pigeon Key's solar array and how the island transformed when it adopted solar energy. Students then experiment with small solar panels, using creativity and teamwork to solve hands-on energy challenges.

Invasive Species of South Florida: Students examine why Florida is a hotspot for invasive species and learn how non-native animals impact local ecosystems. The session focuses on lionfish — one of the Keys' most damaging invaders — and why their spread is so problematic. Schools can choose from three activities: a lionfish-spotting snorkel, a field game, or a lionfish feeding demonstration.



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Marine Debris: Students learn how marine debris affects ocean health and why the Keys see so much washed-up trash along their shores. After discussing types of debris, causes, and solutions, they participate in an island stewardship cleanup to remove litter from Pigeon Key. Staff turn the activity into a friendly competition, with students often finding surprising items from fishing buoys to old boots.

Day 3 - Snorkels, Science Labs & Island Discovery

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Full day of Marine Science programming!

Day 4 - Saving Sea Turtles & Heading North

Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own



After wrapping up their final morning of programming on Pigeon Key, students board the boat back to the Overseas Highway and continue their journey through the Middle Keys. The group travels on to Marathon and then head back north to Key Largo to settle in for the next phase of their marine science adventure.



The Turtle Hospital: Rescue, Rehab & Release - Students visit the renowned Turtle Hospital in Marathon, where they learn how injured sea turtles are rescued, treated, and prepared for release back into the wild. Staff introduce the most common threats facing Florida's sea turtles and explain how veterinary care, rehabilitation pools, and long-term monitoring support recovery. Students observe current patients up close and gain a meaningful understanding of conservation in action. It's an inspiring stop that connects their marine science learning to real-world impact.

Day 5 - Dolphins, Discovery & Hands-On Science

Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own

Today's activities include:



Dolphins Plus Master Class, Mammal Care Lab & Interaction - Spend the morning immersed in marine mammal science through hands-on learning and close-up encounters. This Master Class introduces students to dolphin biology, communication, and behavior, giving them a deeper understanding of how these intelligent animals thrive in their environment. In the Mammal Care Lab, they learn how trainers support animal health through enrichment, nutrition, and daily care routines, followed by a guided dolphin interaction that connects their new knowledge to real animal behavior.

A "shallow water interaction" and a "structured interaction" dolphin program may be added on at extra cost. No photography is allowed by individuals, however professional photographers are available for group pictures sold through Dolphin's Plus.



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Coral Reef Restoration Foundation – The foundation is the leading nonprofit dedicated to restoring and protecting Florida’s coral reefs. Their team of scientists and divers grows threatened coral species in offshore nurseries, outplants them onto degraded reef sites, and monitors their long-term recovery. Through large-scale restoration, research, and community education, the foundation is rebuilding one of the most vital and vulnerable ecosystems in the Florida Keys.

Coral Restoration Student Master Class - In this hands-on master class, students learn how coral nurseries work, why restoration is essential, and how scientists track reef health over time. Staff introduce coral biology, current threats, and the innovative techniques used to grow and outplant corals across the Keys. Students examine real restoration tools and methods up close, gaining a clear understanding of how science, teamwork, and conservation come together to protect Florida’s reefs.



Florida Keys Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center - Students visit to learn how injured and displaced native birds are rescued, treated, and prepared for release back into their natural habitats. Staff introduce common causes of injury, the challenges of rehabilitation, and the specialized care each species requires. During the master class, students observe current patients, explore the tools and techniques used in avian medicine, and gain a firsthand understanding of wildlife conservation. It’s an inspiring experience that connects compassion, science, and real-world impact.

Farewell Reflection - After a full day of science and hands-on learning, students gather for dinner and a final Reflection Evening to close out their time in the Keys. Through guided prompts and small-group conversations, they share highlights, insights, and memorable moments from the week’s adventures. It’s a relaxed, thoughtful way to celebrate everything they’ve experienced—building gratitude, connection, and a sense of accomplishment before heading home.

Day 6 - Tropical Tastes & Farewell to the Keys

Breakfast included but dependent upon departure time

Today’s activity includes:



Robert is Here: Exotic Tropical Fruits - Students stop at Robert Is Here, South Florida’s famous tropical fruit market, for a vibrant tasting experience unlike anything back home. Surrounded by colorful displays of locally grown produce, students sample fruits such as dragon fruit, starfruit, key limes, guava, papaya, passionfruit, mamey sapote, and even the region’s beloved canistel. Staff explain how these fruits are cultivated in the unique microclimate of the Everglades agricultural area, giving students a flavorful introduction to the region’s farming heritage.

Students begin the journey home with a sense of accomplishment and connection to the ecosystems they've explored throughout the week. From coral reefs and marine mammals to tropical agriculture and wildlife rehabilitation, they’ve gained firsthand insight into the science, culture, and conservation efforts that shape the



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Florida Keys. As they check out and load the bus, the group carries home new knowledge, shared memories, and a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

Students with an evening departure have time for one final adventure before heading out. Depending on the group's schedule, they may spend the afternoon exploring John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park - enjoying its beaches, nature trails, and visitor center exhibits - or take part in a Miami-area activity before arriving at the airport. It's a relaxed, low-key way to wrap up the week and enjoy a last look at South Florida's unique ecosystems.

Farewell Florida Keys!



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Minimum Booking Numbers: 20 students

What's Included:

- ✓ Roundtrip flights or motorcoach transfers
- ✓ 5-nights' accommodation: 3-nights Homestead; 2-nights Pigeon Key
- ✓ Airport transfers and coach transportation to activities
- ✓ All breakfasts, 2 lunches, 5 dinners
- ✓ 3-day / 2-night Marine Science program at Pigeon Key (programs subject to change)
- ✓ Use of Snorkeling gear at Pigeon Key
- ✓ Dolphins Plus Educational Master Class & Marine Mammal Care Lab
- ✓ Everglades Alligator Farm & Airboat Ride
- ✓ Turtle Hospital Master Class Tour
- ✓ Coral Reef Restoration Master Class
- ✓ Florida Wild Bird Rehabilitation Master Class
- ✓ Robert is Here Tropical Fruits + Milkshake
- ✓ Personal Tour Director
- ✓ 24-hour emergency service

What's Not Included:

- ✗ Fully comprehensive insurance (**mandatory**)
- ✗ Photography or Swim programs at Dolphins Plus
- ✗ Wetsuit use (if needed, please bring one for personal use)
- ✗ Baggage costs, pay directly to airline if required
- ✗ Baggage handling - everyone should be able to pull / load their own bag
- ✗ Transfers to/from home airport
- ✗ Lunches on days not indicated; snacks or beverages other than at mealtimes
- ✗ Meal selections other than ones provided for the entire group (we are generally able to cater for allergy conditions, vegetarians, halal and in some cases vegan)
- ✗ Cost of visas, visa waivers, passports or other legal requirements for entry/return
- ✗ Cost of inoculations or medication required for travel
- ✗ Sightseeing / Entertainment / Transport not shown in Itinerary
- ✗ Hotel incidental deposits & bills – mini-bar, movies, etc.
- ✗ Gratuities – drivers, hotel services, local guides, tour director
- ✗ Credit card fees if individuals wish to pay via credit card instead of ACH
- ✗ Additional taxes, fuel surcharges or fees levied by governments / suppliers

As always, our staff are available to you to answer any questions you may have regarding programming.

If we may serve you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us.



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