

December 01, 2005 - Coral Reef-Glass Bottom Boat

We had breakfast in our beach house, and checked out. We drove to John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, which is a marine sanctuary. Here, we took a glass-bottom boat tour (\$22.00 per person + tax) out to the coral reefs. The cruise lasted several hours. The boat took one hour to get to the reef, at which point it stopped and spent one hour floating above the reef. During this time we looked through the glass ports at the bottom and the tour guide would point out and describe the various animals we saw. The water itself was quite clear, we could see down 20 feet. Amazingly, our tour guide told us the water is usually even clearer than this, and one could see all the colors down 30+ feet! She told us that the hurricanes this year have muddied up the waters. First, the hurricanes washed a lot of sediment from land into the ocean. Second, the hurricanes stirred up the sediment that was already in the ocean. The result was muddy waters in the reefs, beaches, and mangrove swamps.

Figure 1: Inside our room in the Bay Cove Motel in Key Largo

Figure 2: This is the front of our hotel suite. Upstairs is our suite. Downstairs is where the hotel manager lives



The weather was great today, not a cloud in the sky. This helped to increase visibility looking through the water. After an hour on the reef, the boat headed back to port. We stood on the front bow along with many other tourists. Newton was remarking to Casey that we did not see any big animals on this cruise; no sharks, no turtles, no seals, no dolphins, etc...

when suddenly Newton spotted a large "**hammerhead shark**" swimming right in front of the bow. Newton quickly yelled out and others saw it too, except for the tour guide. She was busy inside talking to some kids, and was sorely disappointed to have missed it. Between us and other tourists, we put the shark at 12 – 15 feet long. Our tour guide was quite surprised; she told us she often swims these waters at night thinking there were no large sharks. She says she'll think twice about swimming again out here!

Figure 3: The waters are quite clear and not that cold for this time of year



After the tour, we drove back to Miami. We checked back into the same hotel in Miami Beach we stayed at when we first came here, though we were in a different room now.