



Hairy Truman is one of the museum's feline greeters.

## Get Your Fur Fix at the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum

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If you're heading to south Florida — to Key West, specifically — and are in need of a fur fix, you'll be happy to know that the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum, the one-time residence of the great American novelist who was equally famous for his love of polydactyl cats, is open 365 days a year.

This beautiful property is currently home to 40 to 50 felines, most of whom can trace their bloodline back to Snow White, the white six-toed feline given to Hemingway by a friend. They all carry the extra-toe gene in their DNA. Currently, about half the cats who reside here are, in fact, polydactyl.

"The cats on the property are truly pampered and very well-cared for," said Dave Gonzales,

media director and curator of the museum home. "There is a veterinarian who visits weekly, and our cats get more medical checkups in a year than some cats get in a lifetime."

Different staffers have different duties, and special attention is given to the older felines to ensure they get the right age-appropriate diets and are eating properly.

"On average, our cats live until

18 to 22 years of age," Gonzales said. "We have one litter a year of between two or four kittens and lose a similar number annually, so nature keeps the balance."

Each cat is allowed to father or produce a litter before being neutered or spayed, and these young adults are kept under strict supervision to make sure there are no wild nights!

Hemingway named his cats after his famous friends, and the museum staff has continued this tradition. The current residents include Hairy Truman and Betty Grable, who are the self-appointed feline greeters and love to accompany guests around the grounds

and the home. “The naming process is very democratic,” Gonzales said. “We have a running list of names; when kittens are born, every employee is allowed to vote on two male names and two female names. The newest family members are Shirley Temple, Daisy Buchanan, Ginger Rogers, Hedy Lamarr, Fred Astaire, and Bugsy Siegel.”

Like every museum, the Hemingway Home has a gift shop. Apart from Hemingway’s books and related memorabilia, feline mementos are the most popular items. The merchandise includes mugs, hats, T-shirts, and a variety of feline jewelry, but, without a doubt, the most admired souvenir is a bowl designed by Hemingway’s second wife, Pauline. “It’s actually a general utility bowl,” said Gonzales, “but visitors over the years have come to consider it a cat dish, and it’s become a very popular take-home gift for cats around the world. We get a constant stream of phone calls and emails about them, too.”

There is no shortage of accommodations surrounding the property. The historic Lighthouse Court Hotel across the street at 902 Whitehead Street overlooks the famous home and even has a Hemingway Suite ([historickeywestinns.com/the-inns/lighthouse-court](http://historickeywestinns.com/the-inns/lighthouse-court)). Backing the Hemingway Home on the pool side is the equally popular Andrews Inn,



a pet-friendly bed-and-breakfast at 223 Eanes Lane. ([andrewsinn.com](http://andrewsinn.com)).

Lots of different Hemingway events in Key West take place throughout the year. One of the most popular is a festival called Hemingway Days, which occurs every July around the author’s birthday on July 21. Apart from an Ernest Hemingway look-alike competition, one of the highlights is a short story writing competition organized by the writer’s granddaughter Lorian Hemingway. She is a proclaimed author, and she both judges and hands out the \$2,500 prize to the annual winners. For more detailed event information, visit [shortstorycompetition.com](http://shortstorycompetition.com) and [hemingwaydays.net](http://hemingwaydays.net).

Restaurants on Key West are known for their fabulous seafood, and many support local fishermen in a special dock-to-dish program.



These include the following local favorites: Pisces Key West, The Commodore Restaurant, Kelly’s Caribbean Bar/Grill & Brewery, Roostica, Firefly, Hogfish Bar & Grill, Abbondanza, Bad Boy Burrito, The Stoned Crab at Ibis Bay Beach Resort, and the Key West Yacht Club.

And don’t forget to try the local beer, too. Some of the brews are infused with those famous Key limes.

**i** The Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. year-round.  
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[hemingwayhome.com](http://hemingwayhome.com)



Ziggy (pictured) and Fudge “work” as feline muses for Sandy Robins, an award-winning multimedia pet lifestyle expert and pet industry personality. They have helped “write” three books, including *The Original CAT FANCY Cat Bible* (I-5 Press, 2014). When he is not lying on her desk blocking the computer screen, Ziggy likes to play fetch with his toys and direct food operations in the kitchen. Learn more about Sandy at [sandyrobinsonline.com](http://sandyrobinsonline.com).