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April 2025



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**BOATER TRAINING???**

I see a lot of people sharing our waterways that really need a little boater education. I'm not even talking about boater safety class; it goes without saying that everyone on the water should have taken this at some time. I'm talking about getting a basic understanding of the way that powerboats work. To help those who have not yet had the opportunity to learn some of these basics, I provide my top ten tips for operating a powerboat. For those of you who are experienced boaters, I'm sorry if I am wasting your time.



#10 – Water is wet. If you do not want to get wet it is wise to avoid proximity to water. Wearing a body condom really does not help much.

#9 – Laying a rope loosely around a cleat is not tying up your boat securely. Tightly wrapping, knotting, binding and otherwise generally tangling up 10 feet of rope all around a cleat so that Houdini couldn't get it off is also not the way to tie a boat up properly. Use a little common sense when attaching your ropes to cleats. Keep in mind that it is also important to attach the anchor to the boat in a secure manner, before throwing it overboard.

#8 – Know what the tide is doing while you are boating. Going for a nice walk on the beach and coming back to find your boat 50 feet up on dry land does not make for a fun afternoon!

#7 – If your boat has a kill switch then it will not start without the switch and lanyard properly in place. THAT IS WHY IT'S CALLED A KILL SWITCH!!!

#6 – If your boat is in gear (forward or reverse) the motor will not start. Make sure it is in neutral BEFORE YOU CALL SEA TOW! If you don't do this they will laugh at you and call you silly names.

#5 – If you are docking and the boat is not quite going where you want it to, giving it a lot of throttle will not fix the problem. When docking even the best captains occasionally get screwed up by wind or current and wind up bumping the dock. Boats do not have brakes, pushing on the floor with your foot will not keep you from hitting the dock, that is what reverse is for, if used properly. If you are going to hit something, hit it slowly, idle is your friend!!!!

#4 – Jet Skis are an exception to #3; they do not steer without some throttle, however with too much throttle they may jump over the dock. It is just best to avoid these entirely.

#3 – When launching your boat at the ramp, it is important to insert the drain plug first. The drain is not a one-way hole; it will let water in too. It is much easier if you put the plug in before putting the boat in the water, the launch ramp is not a nice place for a swim! It is really better to just store your boat in a nice dry stack marina, perhaps somewhere like Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs.

#2 – It is not a good idea to attempt to boat where birds are walking, this usually does not end well for you or the birds.

#1 – Alcohol and driving a boat do not mix. In a best case scenario, you can wind up looking really silly stuck on an oyster bar in Fernandina, waiting for the tide and in a worst case scenario, you can do serious damage to your boat and possibly even serious bodily injury to yourself or others.

If you follow these tips you are sure to have more fun and fewer problems on the water.

Merle and Flip the Bird can be reached at Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs at 727.943.8489 or by emailing: [merle@shoredev.com](mailto:merle@shoredev.com).

*Merle & Flip the Bird*



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# APRIL IS A SLAMMIN' GOOD TIME!

by Captain George Hastick

April normally brings water temperatures into the mid to lower 70-degree mark and this is an optimal temperature to really kick the fishing party off. Different types of bait will be showing up everywhere, but the Scaled Sardine will start to inhabit the flats which really turns on the feed bags for Snook, Trout and Redfish. Out in the bay you will see plenty of Threadfin Herring dimpling the top of the water, but they will also be on many structures along with the Scaled Sardines. Bridges, range markers, channel markers and rockpiles to name a few places. What this means is that many fish will come up into the bay following the bait. As stated, Snook, Trout and Redfish will be very active on the flats and out in the bay you will have Mackerel, Sharks, Grouper, Mangrove Snapper, Cobia and even some early Tarpon action.

Now that you have a good variety that you can target, let's talk about getting that inshore slam of Redfish, Snook and Trout.

Look at the tides and the effect the current has on the fish. Moving water is a key element to finding a good bite. Snook and Trout are very much current influenced for when they feed, reds are also but they will still feed even during the slack just not as good. That is not to say you cannot catch them on a slack tide especially if you are live chumming, but the feeding frenzies almost always happen during tidal flow. I am not saying that if a school of baitfish happens to swim into a school of Snook during slack tide that a bite wouldn't happen, but for planning your trip we need to plan around the tides to have better success. In the area you plan to fish, if you can time the tidal movement with a major solunar or during a sunrise or set the bite will be better.

During April most of the high tides are during the afternoon depending on where you are fishing in the Tam-



pa Bay area. So, I would target Trout first thing in the morning when that tide first starts moving. Since it is low tide, many of the Trout will be around the edges of the grass flat where it drops off, as the sun comes up and the water gets warmer, they will move up onto the flats. Sometimes you will have larger trout in two places at the drop off and up on the flat, skinny where the water is warmer.

Redfish many times will travel back and forth along that drop off waiting for the tide to rise to get to that mangrove treeline or oyster mound that is exposed during low tide. Try not to chase them if you see them, it will give them lock jaw. Instead, try to get ahead of them and set up within casting distance of the tree line or oyster mound. At that time, you can throw out some live



chum along with a descent amount of cut baits to try and get them in your area. Having both visual and scent in the water will up your odds. Redfish have a very keen sense of smell that will help bring them to your chum. Now, set out a couple of rods with cut Pinfish, Threadfin, Ladyfish or anything really oily while fishing live baits on the other rods.

Once you have knocked the Trout and Redfish off your list, if the current is still flowing in, get to an area near the mangroves or a bridge that will usually hold Snook. If the tide is slowing, you can find a funnel point where the treeline has a cut through it, or a larger body of water is coming into a pinch point, where the current will pick up speed due to a narrowed area, to extend your chances of a Snook bite. If you miss the current do not worry once the tide turns to go out, all those same places will be feeding zones, with Snook just waiting for baits to come to them with the outgoing tide.



Good luck and go get that slam! 🎣

**Captain George Hastick of "Fish Hunter Fishing Charters" in St. Petersburg has been fishing the waters of Tampa for over 35 years. From novice to professional; Captain George will make you feel as if you have been fishing buddies for years. Contact him at 727-525-1005, www.FishTampa.com or email CaptGeorge@TampaBay.rr.com.**

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# SPRING TIDES & HOT BITES

by Captain Justin Searcy

**A**pril is one of my favorite months to be on the water here along Florida's Gulf Coast. With warmer temps and longer days, the inshore bite really starts to turn on—and so do the spring tides. Whether you're targeting snook sliding out of the backcountry, redfish cruising the mangrove edges, or trout laid up on the flats, now's the time to be dialed in.

### Snook Surge

This month marks a major transition for snook. As water temps climb into the 70s, snook begin staging near creek mouths, passes, and points with current. I've had the best success using live pilchards and select shrimp on light tackle setups. Early mornings around high tide or just as it's falling seem to produce the most aggressive strikes.

### Redfish Patterns

Redfish are feeding heavily on crustaceans right now. Look for them tailing in the shallows around potholes or pushing wakes along grassy shorelines on the higher tides. Cut ladyfish, pinfish, or live shrimp under a popping cork will get the job done. Don't sleep on artificial options—gold spoons and paddle tails in natural colors can

really shine this time of year, especially when you find a school.

### Trout Heating Up

The spotted seatrout bite has been solid over patchy grass and sandy potholes in 2–4 feet of water. Soft plastics rigged on a 1/8 oz jighead are a go-to, especially during the first few hours of daylight. We're also starting to see some bigger gator trout move in, so keep that drag just a little looser if you're throwing topwater plugs early in the morning.

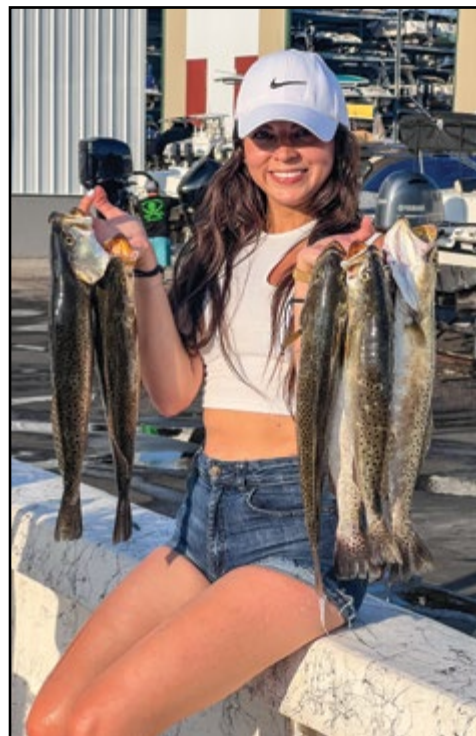
### Watch the Grass

One challenge anglers may notice this spring is the floating grass that starts to show up as winds shift and tides bring it

inshore. It can make working artificials frustrating, especially topwater. Adjust by using weedless rigs or switch over to live bait presentations when conditions call for it.

### Support Local

If you're stocking up for spring fishing, swing by Angler 360 in Dunedin. They've got everything you need to get geared up right—plus a crew that actually fishes and is always happy to give real, local advice.



And some exciting news—we just ordered a new boat from my good friend Kyle Kenyon over at Boat & Motor Superstores, and it's scheduled to arrive in early June. Those guys are solid—honest, knowledgeable, and always willing to share some fishing tips if you catch them in the shop.

As always, handle fish with care, especially as spawning season kicks in. Use circle hooks, wet your hands before handling, and give every fish its best shot at survival if you're releasing.

April is prime time for inshore action, and I hope to see you out there. For trip info, conditions, or just some fish talk, give me a follow on Instagram @capt\_justin\_searcy—I'm always happy to connect.

Tight lines and good tides! 🎣

**Captain Justin Searcy**  
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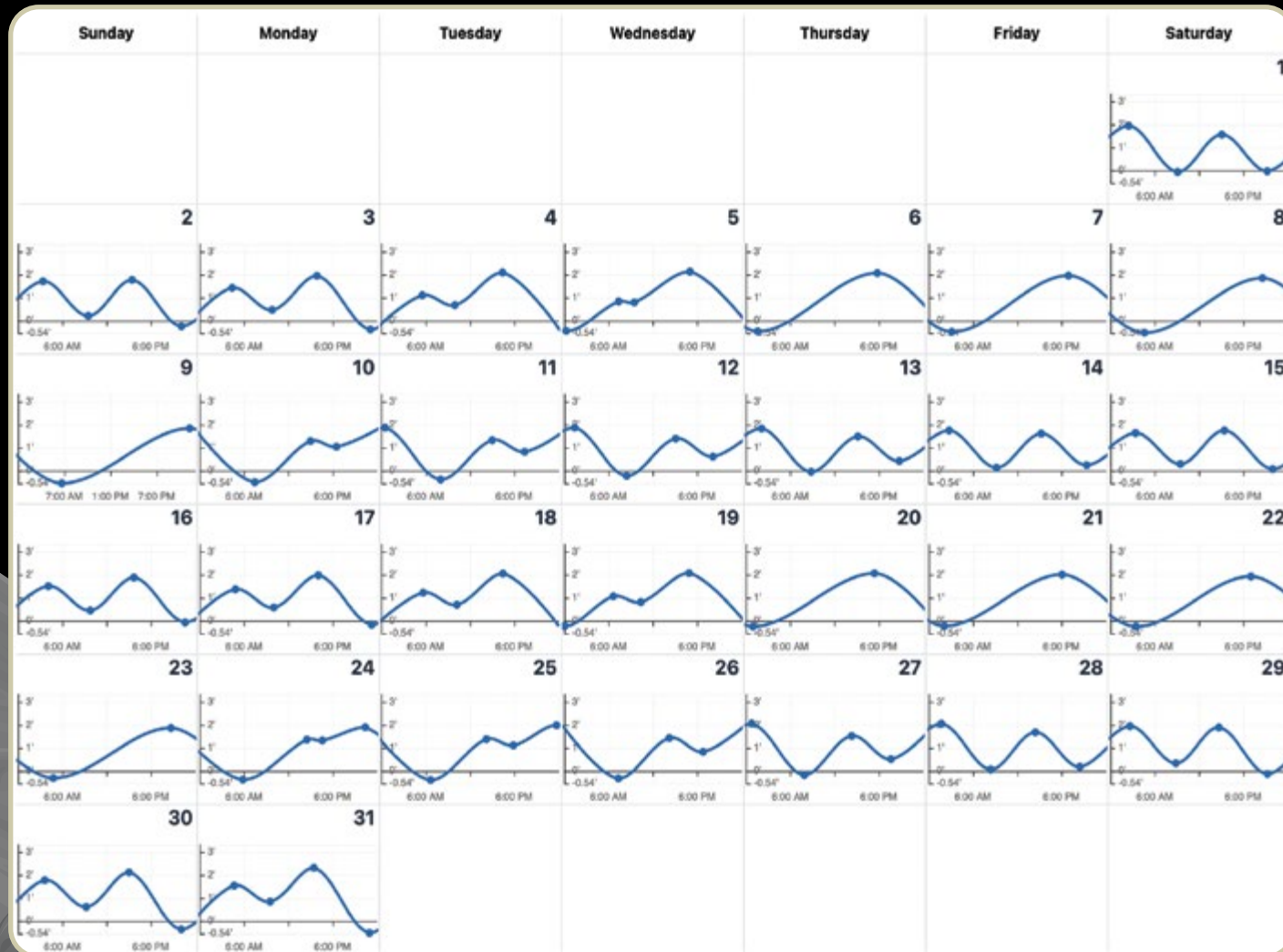
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### Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

High	Low	
-0:02	-0:10	Dunedin, St. Joseph Sound
-0:05	-0:15	Anclote Key, South End
+0:42	+0:42	Tarpon Springs, Anclote River
-0:07	-0:03	North Anclote Key
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
+0:33	+0:53	Gulf Harbors
+0:42	+1:05	Hwy 19 Bridge, Pithlachascotee River
+0:50	+1:35	New Port Richey, Pithlachascotee River
+0:36	+0:43	Hudson, Hudson Creek

### Conversions for St. Marks River Area

High	Low	
+0:23	+1:18	Everglades City
-1:17	-1:03	Cape Romano
-1:04	-1:08	Marco Island
-1:59	-2:04	Naples
-0:46	-0:09	Indian Bay
-0:59	-0:42	Bayport
-0:25	+0:23	Withlacoochee River

### Conversions for Tampa Bay Area

High	Low	
+0:49	+0:58	Gandy Bridge
+1:38	+1:55	Courtney Campbell Cswy.
+1:38	+1:55	Safety Harbor
+0:20	+0:22	Ballast Point
+0:07	+0:26	Hillsborough Bay
+0:21	+0:29	McKay Bay Entrance
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
-2:27	-2:24	Egmont Key
-2:53	-2:46	Anna Maria, Bradenton Bch
-2:10	-2:19	Anna Maria, City Pier
-1:24	-0:55	Bradenton, Manatee River
-0:30	+0:14	Redfish Pt., Manatee River
-2:22	-1:58	Mullet Key Channel, Skyway
+0:08	+0:17	Shell Point
-0:22	-0:29	Point Pinellas
-1:34	-1:30	Pass-a-Grille Beach
-1:32	-1:05	Gulfport
-1:18	-0:44	St. Pete Beach Causeway
-2:14	-2:04	John's Pass
-1:40	-1:18	Madeira Beach Causeway
-2:00	-1:25	Cortez, Sarasota Bay
-1:38	-0:58	Sarasota Bay
-2:02	-1:38	Venice Inlet
-0:57	-0:40	Englewood, Lemon Bay
-1:27	-0:59	Placida, Gasparilla Sound
+1:38	+1:56	El Jobean, Myakka River
+1:52	+2:30	Shell Point, Peace River
+1:06	+1:27	Punta Gorda, Charlotte Hbr.
-1:12	-1:56	Boca Grande, Charlotte Hbr.
-0:19	+0:26	Pineland, Pine Island
+0:43	+1:28	Matlacha Pass
-0:55	-1:14	Redfish Pass, Captiva Is.
-0:46	-0:20	Captiva, Pine Island Sound
-2:20	-2:28	Captiva, Gulf Side
-0:25	+0:16	Galt Isle, Pine Island Sound
-0:30	-0:44	St. James City, Pine Island
+2:08	+2:44	Fort Myers
+1:15	+2:02	Cape Coral Bridge
+1:08	+1:40	Iona Shores
+0:51	+0:42	Indian Rocks Beach, ICW

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# TOURNAMENT SEASON IS HERE

by Misty Wells

Anglers are excited as the spring weather starts to arrive and thoughts of the winter months fade into the past. The Spring and Summer months not only bring warmer weather and better fishing conditions, it also brings a lifelong tradition of fishing tournament season. Each year just like any sport there are many saltwater fishing tournaments all over Florida, the Caribbean and beyond. There are some tournaments that are newer to the fishing community and some that have been around for quite some time, I thought I would put together a list of upcoming tournament so you can mark your calendars and get ready to gear up.



The first tournament on the line-up is happening fairly soon; it is the **Florida Keys Spanish Fly Shark Tournament**. Tournament dates are April 3rd – the 5th, 2025. This is more than just a fishing tournament, it's a catch, tag, and release event that supports the Jose Wejebe Spanish Fly Memorial Foundation. This tournament will take place at the Key West Yacht Club with registration and the captains meeting on Thursday, April 3rd, followed by two days of fishing and tagging.

"After the overwhelming success of our first year, this event has reached an exciting new milestone-it will be televised by Outdoor America," said Krissy Wejebe. The Spanish Fly Shark Tournament is not only a tribute to my father's enduring legacy but also a landmark event for both our foundation and Outdoor America. This is a Bull Shark species only, once the shark takes the bait and the reel is engaged only one angler can touch the rod and catch the



fish for them to score. I suggest start doing push ups now, these Bull Sharks are huge and they are mean. Visit [www.josewejebe-foundation.org](http://www.josewejebe-foundation.org) for more info. Next up is one of Florida's largest fishing tournaments, the "**King of the Beach**" Kingfish Tournament. King of the Beach has two tournaments each year; one in the Spring and one in the Fall as these are the times of year that Kingfish make their runs. Starting April 24th – 26th is when all the action starts on the West Coast of Florida. Last year, team Wood Butcher won over \$40,000 for their 1st place fish. King of the Beach also has a Youth, Ladies and a Spanish Mackerel

Division. If you have a single engine boat, don't worry, they have you covered as well. This tournament takes place in Maderia Beach, Pinellas County Florida and it's a great party. Check out [www.oldsaltfishing.org](http://www.oldsaltfishing.org) for more.



We are going to move a little further South for this next tournament. We are talking about one of the longest running tournaments in the Caribbean, the **Cayman Islands International Fishing Tournament**. This tournament has been running for over 25 years and has one of the biggest payouts in the history of Caribbean tournaments with over \$65K up for grabs. Starting April 29th and lasting through May 6th, this tournament is also one of the longest that takes place this year. You will be fishing for a variety of species from Wahoo, Yellowfin Tuna, Dolphin and Billfish. Registration starts April 29th with an exciting captains party at the George Town Yacht Club. They turn up the heat on day one of the tournament with a "Bimini Start" for all the teams. You can get more information at [www.fishcayman.com](http://www.fishcayman.com).

One tournament that needs to be on your calendar is the **Suncoast Ladies Classic Tournament** that's held July 24th – 26th, 2025, right here in Pinellas County, Florida and it is "Ladies Only". This year marks the 4th year this tournament has been held and it keeps getting bigger each year. Suncoast Ladies Classic is a multi-species offshore tournament where there are lots of ways to win, even for the guys. All the events are being held at the SkyBeach Hotel & Marina again this year and it's a blast. This ladies tournament is one of the few tournaments that has real payouts for the species with up to a \$1,000 for first place and lots of swag to boot. Learn more by visiting [www.suncoast-classicevents.com](http://www.suncoast-classicevents.com).



If you are looking to target some bigger species and really go 'BIG', I suggest signing up for the **North Drop Open** in the British Virgin Islands out of Virgin Gorda. This tournament starts August 6th – 8th, fishing the historic North Drop in the B.V.I., where you will get 3 days of non-stop action fishing for Blue Marlin on the August moon. At the North Drop Open they have been passionate about fishing all their lives and they feel it is time to revive sportfishing in the most amazing fishing area in the world; the British Virgin Islands. This is another tournament where you better be ready to reel, and of course, this is an all catch-n-release event on a point system for prizes up to \$12K and they also have a Bimini Start. Last year, they raised more than twenty-four Blue Marlin, had eleven Blue Marlin strikes, six Blue Marlin hooked-up, and three Blue Marlin caught-n-released. You can get more information about fishing this new and epic tournament at [www.northdropopen.com](http://www.northdropopen.com).

I look forward to seeing some of you at one or all of these tournaments, plus many other up and down the coast of Florida. Tournament fishing is not just about winning, but it is also about keeping that fighting spirit alive in all of us. Tournaments are a great opportunity to make new friends, learn new techniques and maybe even find the love of your life; I met my husband at a King of the Beach Tournament. 📌

Misty Wells is producer & Host of "Let's Take It Outside" TV show airing to over 320 million on Discovery Channel, Waypoint TV, Bally Sun Sports, H2O, Pursuit Up, Hunt Channel, MOTV, TCT, Discover Florida Network & Carbon TV. Bass Pro-Outdoor Pro & Outdoor & Travel Writer. Founder of "A Reel Future" non-profit devoted to teaching the passion of fishing & conservation to foster children, over 3,800 children & counting. [www.mistywells.com](http://www.mistywells.com)





ARTICLE BY: QUINLYN HADDON  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: JULIO TELLES



# *Yacht Camping In* **PARADISE!**

**Cabo San Lucas is known for its outstanding Marlin fishing. They have blue, black and striped marlin; all found only a few miles offshore. The marlin are so close to shore that on occasion they'll be spotted in the marina waters.**

**A**utumn and Winter are the peak times of year for catching marlin, but there are still many fish worth hunting in the summer. Even if you miss out on that trophy marlin, I believe the incredibly bizarre rooster fish to be far from a consolation prize.

For the entire month of July, I decided to head to Cabo all by myself to work and live on the Blue Sky fishing boat. It was confirmed by many people that I had lost my mind. A 26 year-old female travelling alone to live at a marina in Mexico does sound a little crazy, but it was one of the best decisions that I have ever made.

The marina community made staying on the boat a really special experience for me. It was a unique lifestyle that I can only describe as being like that of a homeless Queen. Many days, the neighboring boats would invite me over for fresh sashimi, ceviche and cold beers. Everyone was extremely friendly and generous; I rarely wanted for anything. To top it off, some nights, when the boat was too hot to sleep in, I would go to the top tower and fall asleep in the cool breeze as I watched the stars.

One of the rare days that we did not have charters, one of the first-mates and I took out the kayak for some bottom fishing. He had never kayak fished before, but since I do it a lot in Florida I felt confident that we could

head offshore together in a two person kayak. The two of us headed out with determination and a thick language barrier in a kayak with no seat attachments and no rod holders. He selected a point 11 kilometers away and we began to paddle there. In the beginning the waves weren't overly large and we were able to ride the current a little bit. It took us a few hours to get to the spot and by that time the wind had begun to pick up creating some white-caps.



We set up over the spot and dropped down our bait. Immediately I hooked up with a triggerfish and as I reeled it up, there was another fish following it. With a heavily rolled 'R', Julio started shouting "rooster, rooster". We rigged up with a bigger hook and tried to entice him back, but to no avail. The current was picking up and pushing us into the rock wall, where the waves were breaking 30 feet tall. Julio was getting a little nervous and was unable to steer us away quickly enough. We got into a rhythm where he would rig up the bait while I paddled for 10-20 minutes to get back to the rock bottom. We had time for one drop as we drifted back a quarter mile and repeated the process for hours. I was exhausted and it was too rough to even stop to eat my lunch.





A few hours later, we decided to call it a day.

We paddled back into the current as the wind picked up significantly. With no rod holders, I pinched a rod between my legs to troll a top-water popper-lure for roosterfish, all the while paddling and steering hard to keep from being spun by the waves. It took about 3 hours to paddle back and each boat we passed stared at us and took photos. Apparently kayak fishing isn't very popular in Cabo and I now understand why.

I worked almost every day that I was there, as the lovely crew and I would take one to three charters out daily. We would spend most of the time during the trips trolling a variety of lures for tuna, Dorado and marlin. The days when we were unsuccessful during this off-season, we would head inland to bottom fish. On the days when we were successful catching the game fish, we would raise a flag for each fish with an image of the species. It was interesting to see all the boats at the marina at the end of the day flying the flags of their recent catches and it provided a great opportunity for bragging rights.

We were able to catch several roosterfish this month including two five footers that were replicated for trophies. I was informed that the roosters of this size are very intelligent and can only be tricked into taking a hook using pink fluorocarbon leader with a line test of no greater than 50 pounds. We also used medium sized 5/0 j-hooks with live bait. It seemed that the type of bait was not as important as it was to have it be lively. All of the roosters were caught about 100 yards from the shoreline, both near sand beaches and rock outcrops.

The roosterfish may not be known for its consumption quality, but it is one of the hardest fighting fish for its size. Both of the trophy fish took over twenty minutes to land. If you are looking for a different kind of fishing in a place with good food and great people, come to Cabo for your trophy rooster! The FishBrain App will be running a contest in the near future to win a trip on the Blue Sky fishing yacht. Download the free mobile app and check in at fishbrain.com for more information. I look forward to being your host for this trip!



The locals don't fully understand the appeal of catching this species, but since this unique critter is not found in many places in the world, it is definitely sought-after by many tourists.

During the month of July in Cabo, we experienced the nearby hurricane Dolores.

For a few days it had affected the success of catching marlin and Dorado, but the rooster and grouper bites remained consistent both before and afterwards. The bottom fishing is always a guarantee and lush with gorgeous and colorful species I had never seen before.

I thoroughly enjoyed my month of yacht camping on Blue Sky in Cabo San Lucas and I have to give a huge thank you to my sponsor Dorsal Brand for sending me! To all of the crew, Captain Juan, Julio, Mario and the boat owner, Jim, thank you for the stellar hospitality-- see you again soon! ■

**Quinlyn Haddon**  
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PHOTOS BY: Julio Telles  
Dorsalbrand.com  
BlueSkyFishing.net

## PIRATE JONNY'S CUBAN SANDWICH



**T**erri and I had the great chance to go to Cuba last summer, before the visitation programs were eliminated again. We got to tour around Havana Old Town, the waterfront, visit some nightclubs and meet some of the local artists and of course enjoy some great Cuban Food, oh...and not to mention the \$2.49 per flask of Havana Gold Rum. One thing that Cubans do not eat is Cuban Sandwiches. These tasty sandwiches were invented, I am told, in Tampa, and they are now found mostly in Florida. The Cuban is a great hot sandwich combining cold cuts and mojo roast pork, Cuban bread, pickles, mustard and Swiss cheese.

Pirate Jonny's makes a great dry Cuban Mojo Seasoning that is perfect for cooking up some Roast Pork and leftover roast pork makes for this delicious Florida Classic!

This is a pirate's twist on a Tampa Classic sandwich that has been a favorite for a century.

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 loaf Cuban bread, a 24-inch loaf is ideal.
- 1 ounce Spicy Brown Mustard.
- 4 slices Swiss Cheese.
- 1/2 cup Pickle slices or enough to spread across the sandwich evenly.
- 5 Slices Honey Baked or preferred style ham (deli sliced).
- 2 Slices Pirate Jonny's Mojo roast pork or Mojo pulled pork.
- 1 ounce butter.

### DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat a sandwich grill on medium heat, or a flat pan over medium flame on the range.
2. Slice the loaf in half lengthwise. Spread mustard evenly on the cut side of each bread half and top one half with the pickles.
3. Layer the Swiss cheese, then the ham over the pickles.
4. Top the ham with heated slices of roast pork and add the remaining bread half to finish building the sandwich.

5. Spread butter on the outside of both bread halves evenly. If you have a sandwich grill, lay the sandwich down on the grill and close the lid, pressing down on the sandwich.

If using a griddle or flat pan, place the sandwich down on the pan and press the sandwich down with a spatula or your hands gently. Grill the sandwich until golden brown, flip the sandwich and repeat for the other side; about 4 to 6 minutes for each side.

6. Once the outside is brown and the cheese has melted, remove the sandwich from the heat and slice it into four quarters and slice each portion diagonally, so that there are two smaller triangles for each portion.



Plate each portion and serve with chips or the side of your choosing.

Yields four sandwiches. Enjoy! ■



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### Captain Sergio Atanes

April is the bonus month when every bite turns on! From Snook & Redfish to Cobia, Trout and Mackerel. Bait starts to move into the flats if the water temperature holds and that starts the Spring and Summer cycle. Early risers

in April that get to the spot first has the best chance at the "big girls", so start early for the Snook and Reds. Fish for mackerel and cobia after 9:00am. Artificial bait is always a plus, especially early in the morning and it allows the angler to cover more area and find the schools of reds roaming the flats.



### Captain George Hastick

April has always been a fun month in Tampa Bay due to the loads of Scaled Sardines moving back onto the flats. Prime conditions for "Bait balls" in the middle of the bay are water temperatures in the 70s. This combination really

sparks the action throughout the bay. There will be Mackerel & Snapper action into the bay and the flats will light up with Snook, Trout and Redfish action. Chumming with live bait in the month of April can really create a great bite; especially with Snook, Redfish and the always tasty, Snapper.

### ABOUT THE CAPTAINS

Captain Sergio and Captain George Hastick fish the Florida waters, specializing in and around the West Coast of Florida and Tampa Bay. Their show, Fishing Adventures Florida, is about two captains sharing their knowledge and experience of the local waters. Encouraging others to share in their love of what the outdoors has to offer. Their goal is to educate, entertain and share the experience of fishing opportunities the state has to offer.

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# A CHANCE TO MEET THE KING

by Captain Sergio Atanes

If all goes well, the water temperature is slowly working its way into the mid 70s and you know it is Kingfish and Spanish Mackerel time. The longer days of spring and warmer waters bring the schools of baitfish to the shallow Gulf waters. When water temperatures start to increase to 72-degrees, king mackerel start their northern migration, stopping to feed on the schools of sardines and cigar minnows along the coastline of Florida. Kings are caught each year from many Gulf piers and extend to twenty miles from shore, which puts them within the range of the average angler.



Although the quantity of Kings is a thing of the past and yes for newbies there seems to be plenty take from us who grew up fishing the Gulf of America, its nowhere what it used to be you could go out for a couple of hours hook 20 to 30 Kings and be home for lunch.

watch the fish strike and make that long first run, especially early calm morning when the water looks like a calm peaceful lake. Trolling allows you to cover more areas, but I would rather sit and chum, on one note I have caught many a permit while anchored waiting for the kingfish to arrive.

There are many ledges, and artificial reefs can be found on Florida's west coast, especially between Tarpon Springs and Boca Grande. If you decide to drop anchor, make sure you are up current from any ledges or reefs to prevent getting snagged. Getting too close to these areas can cause you to lose, not only your rigging, but also your fish. By cutting some bait into small pieces and allowing it to drift with the current, king mackerel will quickly pick up the scent and zero in on the bait.

When drifting, first find a school of baitfish and start your drift up-tide from the school while free lining your bait on the outer edges of the school. Repeat the process when the school is out of casting range. Using live bait, whether drifting or anchoring, will increase your chances of boating a nice King Mackerel.

Live bait can be easily caught on the grass flats, along the edges of the channels, or around channel markers. A 10-foot bait net is best for shallow waters and a 12-foot larger mesh net is recommended for deeper waters.

Baitwells are definitely a necessity due to the Scaled Sardine requiring a large volume of moving water and oxygen to

stay healthy. I recommend adding an aeration system to ensure lively baits. Several add-on systems are available for either bridge anglers or boats without baitwells.

King Mackerel are fast swimmers that need a constant supply of oxygen to stay alive. Even a short period out of water can be fatal. It is important to be ready with gloves and pliers for a quick release. King Mackerel have a 24" fork size minimum and a 3-bag limit per day in Gulf waters. Keep only what you can eat and release the rest for another day.

So, anglers prefer to use tackle that insures more boated fish; 40-pound coffee colored wire, black swivel, double hook or stinger reg tied to 40-pound, 4-foot long fluorocarbon leader with 40-pound braided line on a conventional reel and a 7-foot medium heavy rod. My personal preference is a medium spinning outfit with a 20-pound braided line and a number 10-barrel black swivel tied to 40-pound fluorocarbon leader with a stinger rig.

Some of my best baits for big Kingfish are Blue Runners and Cigar Minnows. Catch extra bait for chum or just buy

several boxes of chum; worth the investment in the long run.

Just a final note. Don't try to be the first anglers on the water looking for kings. Catch your bait, make your chum, get the gear ready and then go get looking for what I call the "parking lot" (bunch of boats gathering in a area). These boats are telling you where to start your day, but the rest is up to you. God Bless and tight lines! ☑

**Captain Sergio Atanes is the host of Fishing Adventures Florida and Captain Sergio Fishing Chronicles on YouTube, Waypoint TV, Carbon TV, Outdoor Action TV and Angling TV. s on staff. For info call 813-973-7132 or email: atanes@msn.com.**





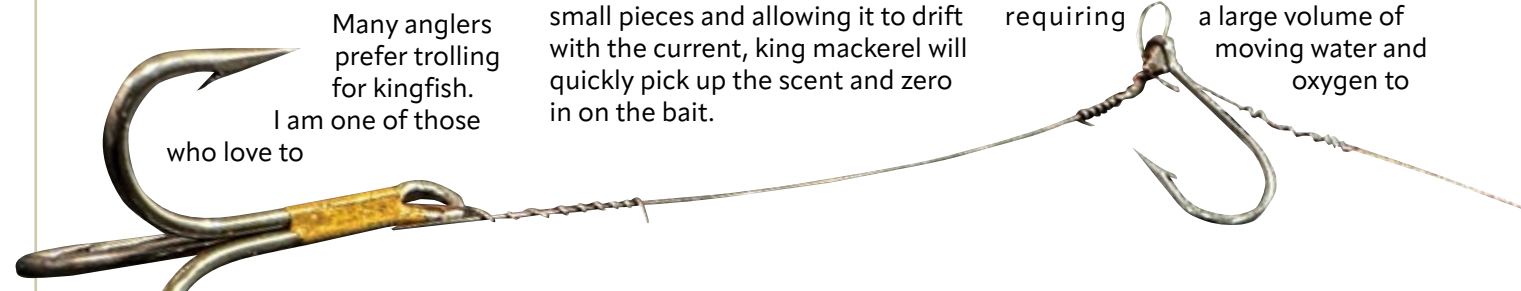
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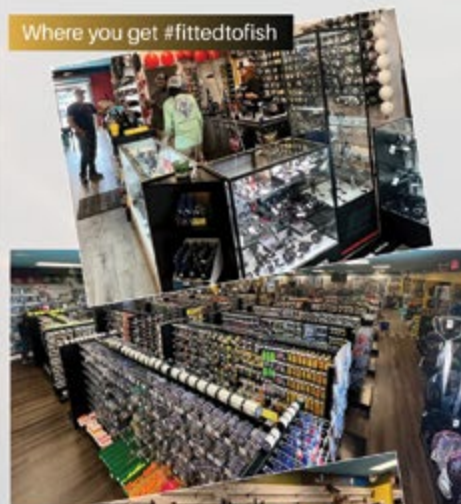
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