FISHING

SARASOTA • MANATEE • CHARLOTTE
The Florida Gulf Coast is a paradise for fish. Freshwater streams and rivers flow from Manatee, Sarasota and Charlotte County into a bay protected by the barrier islands. It’s a perfect-sized estuary teeming with a diverse wildlife ecosystem of birds, fish and mammals.

Area freshwater streams, rivers and lakes hold bass, panfish, catfish and more. As freshwater enters the tidal area, species tolerating the brackish water, such as snook, jack, and tarpon can be found. Out into the bay, snapper, mackerel, seatrout, grouper, drum and many other species will be found in the saltwater haven.

With so many options for fishing, where to start can be a difficult choice. Use our fishing guide as a resource to help you catch the next “big one.”

**SALT WATER**

Most visiting anglers opt to cast in the bay or offshore as saltwater fishing offers multiple environments with different species of fish favoring different spots. Seagrass beds are home to seatrout, redfish, and bluefish. Elsewhere snapper, jack crevalle, sheepshead and black drum can be found near piers, bridges and other structures. Offshore, reefs and wrecks are popular hangouts for grouper, amberjack, and snapper.

**FRESH WATER**

Freshwater fishing in Myakka River State Park or Oscar Scherer State Park is a fun option, and can also appeal to visitors looking to also explore other eco-recreational activities. Anglers targeting panfish can find bluegill, speckled perch, and redear sunfish. Largemouth bass are a popular fish in Florida freshwater. Tilapia, an invasive species, must be removed if caught, but many consider this a tasty fillet.
**WHAT TO CATCH**

**INSHORE**

**Spanish Mackerel**
Spanish mackerel can be found throughout Florida coastal waters when the temperature exceeds 70 degrees. These fast, aggressive fish can occasionally be caught off beaches and piers. When cooked Spanish mackerel is flaky, moist and has a rich flavor.

**Flounder**
Gulf flounder are brown fish with both eyes on the left side of the body and strong canine-like teeth. These fish are found on sandy or muddy bottoms and also occasionally on rocky reefs. They are considered excellent to eat.

**Redfish**
Redfish, or red drum, are found in the winter in seagrass, over sandy/muddy bottoms, oyster bars or spring-fed creeks. A popular sport fish, redfish go after a variety of bait including shrimp, crabs, mullet and pinfish.

**Spotted Seatrout**
Spotted seatrout are found inshore around seagrass meadows and above oyster bars. Seatrout are a delicate fish so return unwanted or under/oversized fish immediately to help maintain a healthy population. This fish is considered good to eat.

**Tarpon**
One of the most challenging inshore sportfish, Tarpon are powerful fish found in Florida during the summer months. These fish can easily grow to more than 100 pounds. Not a great tasting fish, tarpon are almost exclusively catch and release.

**Black Drum**
Black Drum is the largest member of the Drum family. They have a high-arched back and teeth capable of crushing oysters and large scales. Black Drum are bottom dwellers found in bays and around oyster beds. Black Drum is decent table fare.

**Snook**
Snook can jump out of the water and make long runs, which means they are a fun fish to have on the line. They can be found in brackish water along mangrove shorelines, seawalls and bridges. Be sure to remove the skin when preparing Snook, which is considered excellent to eat if prepared correctly.

**Sheepshead**
Sheepshead look similar to the Black Drum and have distinct vertical black stripes, and prominent teeth for eating crustaceans. They are considered good to eat, but have sharp gill covers to look out for when cleaning.

**OFFSHORE**

**Grouper**
Grouper is a family of fish that are some of the most popular to fish in the Florida Gulf Coast. Adult grouper inhabit rocky bottoms and reefs more than 60 feet deep. Grouper spawn between January and May.

**Amberjack**
Amberjack are often found around rocky reefs and wrecks, in about 60 to 240 feet of water. They are some of the largest of the jack fish species, and feed on squid, fish and crustaceans.

**Sailfish**
Sailfish have an upper jaw elongated like a spear, and a large dorsal fin in the form of a sail. They feed on small fish and squid, and are known for fast runs, and acrobatic jumps.

**Dolphin**
Dolphinfish, also known as Mahi Mahi are a bright greenish blue and yellow fish. These fast swimmers live no more than five years and eat squid, flying fish and other small fish while moving through weed lines offshore. Dolphin is a popular seafood item.

**TACKLE & BAIT**

Although fish can be caught on virtually any rig, a versatile Gulf Coast Florida fishing rig typically utilizes a spinning rod about six-foot-six to seven-foot-six in length, with light tackle. If you are using your own rig, be aware that saltwater can quickly erode and rust parts of the rod and reel. Be sure to clean and take care of your equipment immediately after fishing. Be very careful about getting sand on the reel, as it can get into the gears.

**Shrimp**
Shrimp, about an eighth of an ounce to a half an ounce is often the ideal bait to use and will catch many saltwater fish.

**Baitfish**
Several species of baitfish, such as pinfish, sardines and minnows can be netted from the Gulf of Mexico, particularly during the warmer months. Bait shops often also sell species of baitfish.

**Cut bait**
Dead fish can catch dinner too. Undesirable fish, such as ladyfish, can be cut into chunks and used to catch snook, sharks and more.

**Artificial lures**
Artificial lures such as a soft plastic on a jig can look just like the real thing to a fish. These lures are often even scented. Other lures, including metal jigs, spoon fishing lures, plug lures and spinnerbaits can attract and catch fish.

**Sources:** www.fishwatch.gov, www.myfwc.com
AN EXCELLENT PLACE FOR FISHING

Shore
Fishing from the shore is an easy way to get a line in the water and there’s several places to go. Depending on the time of year, tide and a few other factors, hitting the right place at the right time can mean a major payload. Visit a local shop such as CB’s Saltwater Outfitters (941-349-4400) on Siesta Key or New Pass Grill and Bait Shop (941-368-3050) on Lido Key to learn about current hot spots. When out on a beach or pier, look for schools of baitfish and/or birds diving as indicators of fish in the area.

Boat
With a motorized boat you can cover much more ground, but follow boating etiquette and obey vessel speed regulations. Tides, water temperature, depth of water, wind and even moon phases play a role in a day’s success. When looking for a spot to fish, keep an eye out for reefs and seabeds, rock and wood structures. Area fishing reports help identify how and where to fish, and several can be found doing an online search. Boats can be rented at outfitters such as CB’s or at Cannons Marina (941-383-1311)

Kayak
A Kayak can be the best of both worlds — giving anglers the ability to paddle further from shore while sneaking where boats won’t fit. Though not able to travel nearly as far or as fast as a motorized boat, fishing by kayak can be a quieter and more eco-friendly experience. Consider renting or even taking a kayaking tour from outfitters such as Almost Heaven Kayak Adventures (941-594-6296), All About Water (239-887-2545), or Bay and Gulf Adventures (941-893-7221)

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**BOAT/KAYAK LAUNCHES**

| Bradenton | Fort Hamer Public Boat Ramp | 1805 Fort Hamer Rd | B | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 2 Jiggs Landing | 6106 E 63rd St | F | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 3 Lake Manatee State Park 20 HP Motor Restriction | 20007 State Rd 64 | F | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 4 Manatee Avenue Causeway Kayak Launch | Manatee Ave West (SR 769) | S | ● | ● | ● |
| 5 Manatee Avenue Causeway Public Boat Ramp | Manatee Ave (SR 789) | S | ● | ● | ● |
| 6 Parrot Cove Marina | 11510 36th Ave West | S | ● | ● | ● |
| 7 Ray’s Canoe Hideaway Small Boats Only | 1289 Hague Park Rd | B | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 8 Robinson Preserve Canoe / Kayak Launch | 1704 99th St Northwest | S | ● | ● | ● |
| 9 State Road 64 Public Boat Ramp | 3020 Manatee Ave East | B | ● | ● | ● |
| 10 Warner’s Bayou Kayak Launch | 5800 Riverview Blvd | S | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 11 Warner’s Bayou Public Boat Ramp | 5900 Riverview Blvd | S | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |

| Bradenton Beach | Coquina Beach (north) | SO Gulf Dr (SR 789) | S | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 12 Coquina Beach (south) | SO Gulf Dr (SR 789) | S | ● | ● | ● |

| Ellenton | Highland Shores Public Boat Ramp | 353 Shore Dr | B | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |

<p>| Englewood | Lemon Bay Park | 570 Bay Park Blvd | S | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 16 Ainger Creek Park | 2011 Placida Rd | S | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 17 Indian Mound Park | 210 Winson Ave | S | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 18 Oyster Creek Park | 6791 San Casa Rd | S | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |</p>
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<td>Myakka City</td>
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<td>Cesperson Beach Park</td>
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FISH FACTS

■ More than 500 native species of saltwater fish are protected and managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

■ FWC manages 200 species of freshwater fish.

■ Nearly 1.4 Florida residents saltwater fish in Florida each year.

■ More than 1 million nonresidents saltwater fish in Florida each year.

■ Florida saltwater fishing generates $7.6 billion dollars in economic impact each year, and is responsible for 109,300 jobs.

SOURCE: www.myfwc.com

TAKING A CHARTER

Offshore
If you want a trophy deep-sea denizen, go off shore fishing with a charter. Fighting to reel in behemoths such as a cobia, king mackerel, black fin tuna, grouper and even sharks can be a battle of a lifetime, and you could need the full day to do it. Consider 6 to 8 hour trips from charters such as Siesta Key Fishing (941-244-3474), Outriggers Charter Fishing (941-809-2211), and King Fisher Fleet (941-639-0969).*

Inshore
Inshore fishing means less traveling but no less fun. Popular fish such as snook, Spanish mackerel, and spotted sea trout are not only fun to fight, but delicious to eat. Charters such as Wolfmouth Charters (941-720-4418), Magic Fishing Adventures (941-345-7788), Flying Fish Fleet (941-366-3373), and King Fisher Fleet (941-639-0969) offer anywhere from 4 to 8 hour trips.*

*NOTE: Many charters offer both inshore and offshore options.

TOP SPOTS TO FISH

Englewood, Manasota Key and North Port ●
Lemon Bay Park in Englewood is good for wading, but be sure to have the proper equipment, or consider renting a kayak. Stump Pass State Park on the south end of Manasota Key is a good fishing spot as the tidal currents from the pass bring in schools of fish. North Port canals will have brackish water, and in the winter season should have snook and small tarpon.

Placida ●
For non-boaters, long fishing piers made from the old railroad bridge on both sides of the Boca Grande Causeway offer ample opportunities for species including snook, redfish and sheepshead. A smaller pier accessible from the parking on fishary road partially crossing Coral creek adds additional opportunities.

Port Charlotte ●
Great fishing in El Jobean on SR 776 at the Myakka River pier. Several bait and tackle shops are also nearby. Port Charlotte Beach Park, a public Charlotte County park, also has a long pier reaching into Charlotte Harbor. Both offer a plethora of species, including some monster snook, reds, sheepshead and seatrout.

Sarasota ●
Sarasota has several locations that are great for fishing by foot. The bridges and seawalls of Bird Key Park, Siesta Key Bridge, and New Pass Bridge between Lido Key and Longboat Key are both popular spots. Meanwhile, fishing from the beach is productive when the tide is right, especially in locations like North Shell Road, on Siesta Key, and South Lido County Park.

Venice ●
Rocky structures, such as the Venice Jetty's or the groynes at Caspersen Beach are great fishing habitats and therefore decent places to fish, but you might want to consider bringing some extra tackle. Venice Pier is another special place to fish, as it is one of the longest piers in the area, and is next to a local restaurant, Sharky's on the Pier.

Punta Gorda ●
Piers and fishing docks are widespread in this beautiful small city. For easy, no-cost parking, check out the piers at Gilchrist Park and Laishley Park or the multiple docks connected by boardwalk at Ponce de Leon Park. Typical catches at these parks include Sheepshead, snook, spotted seatrout and redfish.
FISHING FACTORS

Tidal currents can attract bait and small fish, which brings in larger fish to a location. Check the high and low tides before fishing and ask an outfitter or a guide about where to fish on an incoming or outgoing tide.

Water temperature will determine what species of fish are available and in what location they can be found. When the water gets too cold, try fishing in a creek or consider moving out to deeper water with temperatures still warm at lower depths. A sudden front bringing in cool or warm weather can also affect fishing. Typically just before a front comes through fishing will be good. Shortly after a front passes fishing can be poor.

Dawn and dusk are often the best time to put a line in the water if other factors are good too. However, depending on the season and migration patterns of different fish, any time of day can be a good time to fish.

TOURNAMENTS

Capt. John Breuggeman Memorial Grouper Tournament
When: Winter 2015 (January)
Web: captainjohnrb.com
Phone: 941-474-6586

IFA Redfish Tour
When: Spring 2015 (March 7)
Web: ifatours.com
Phone: 941-266-5338

Sarasota Sertoma/Southern Kingfish Association King Mackerel Tournament
When: Spring 2015 (April 23-25)
Web: fishska.com
Phone: 800-852-6262

20th annual Coastal Conservation Association Florida’s Sarasota Photo All-Release Challenge
When: Spring 2015 (Last weekend of April)
Web: ccalflorida.org
Phone: 941-270-0895 (Adam Miller)

Sarasota Tarpon Tournament
When: Late Spring 2015
(May - 5 week tournament)
Web: sarasatatarpontournament.com
Phone: 941-356-8470

Historic Spanish Point Inshore Slam Fishing Tournament
When: Spring 2015
Web: historicspanishpoint.org
Phone: 941-966-5214

Sarasota Slam HBA Fishing Tournament
When: Summer 2015 (August)
Web: sarasotaslam.com
Phone: 941-907-4133 Ask for Leslie

Suncoast Saltwater Shootout
When: Fall 2015
Web: suncoastshootout.com
Phone: 941-809-3505 or 941-955-9588

SCS Fall Classic, Inshore Tournament
When: Fall 2015
(First or second weekend in October)
Web: www.sarasotachristian.org
Phone: Betsy 941-371-6481 ext. 222

Englewood Open Spearfish Tournament
When: Fall 2015
Web: englewoodopen.com
Phone: 941-270-2040

RULES REGULATIONS

A fishing license is required for both Florida residents and visitors, though licenses are provided if you take a charter. Licenses can be purchased at an outfitter or by calling 888-347-4356. If you intend to keep fish, be aware of bag limits, size regulations and season restrictions. Check www.myfwc.com for regulation information.