

# SET SAIL FOR GOLD COAST SAILS

Winter's cold fronts bring snowbirds to Florida's Gold Coast where sailfish plus a variety of near-shore species are anxiously waiting.

by Jeff Merrill

## Florida's Gold Coast draws anglers searching for an escape from the winter's wrath and an opportunity to tangle with feisty gamefish.

From Jupiter to Palm Beach, sailfish are the target species as these high-flying acrobats make their annual trek past the coast that's home to some of the country's most valuable real estate. The best action with sailfish occurs in December and January though an extended winter with repeated cold fronts moving down the east coast sometimes extends the season well into February. Cold fronts are the key to scoring this time of the year and a blast of winter wind from any northerly quarter will push sailfish down the coast and stimulate feeding. Timing your trip is tricky as sails will sometimes ball up schools of bait as the front goes by while in other instances the fishing can be red hot a day or two after the front passes.

The Gulf Stream is closest to the coastline of any state here and it's rarely a longer ride than three miles to the cobalt blue warm water that's home to the spindlebeaks. This river of warm water pushes north carrying nutrients that attract bait and sailfish as well as wahoo, dolphin, bonito and kingfish this time of the year. Most of the sailfish action occurs along the



A fleet of gorgeous sportfishing vessels annually make the winter trip to Palm Beach to cash in on the area's hot billfish action.

edge of the Gulf Stream in water depths of 60 to 250 feet and power drifting with live bait such as goggle eyes (big eyed scad), blue runners, tinker mackerel and threadfin herring is the ticket. Hearty souls can catch their own live bait but be prepared to lose some sleep as most bait fishing is done along the reefs from Palm Beach to Miami during the night. A better choice is to hail one of the live bait boats on the radio. These pros huddle around the mouth of the Lake Worth Inlet and at Sailfish Marina every morning looking for customers but expect to pony up between \$50 and \$75 a dozen for these tasty baits and well over \$100 during the popular sailfish tournaments in January. Kites are often used to suspend the baits on the surface and the commotion caused by a frisky baitfish scattering on the water rings the dinner bell for spindlebeaks. Often it's possible to see the sailfish rise up

on the bait with its sail raised breaking the surface as it circles the bait prior to the bite. On rough days tailing sailfish can often be seen swimming down sea searching for an easy meal. Sails often travel in packs so don't be surprised if two or three show up in a bait spread at one time and be prepared to battle double and triple-headers when the bite is on.

Though live bait will produce twice the number of bites as dead bait trolling tactics with ballyhoo has become popular again off Palm Beach and many traditionalists wouldn't think of catching sails any other way. Dead bait rolling with ballyhoo while utilizing teasers such as single, double and even triple mullet

or ballyhoo dredges will draw the most strikes. For the most part sailfish are lazy so trolling baits at speeds above four to five knots will rarely draw any interest. For this game you need to fine-tune your drop back skills as many a sailfish pro has been frustrated by these sometimes finicky billfish.

On days when the offshore action slows or even for a change of pace, it's not hard to find a hungry species along the inshore reefs, around the inlet or in Lake Worth itself. Various jacks, snappers and grouper as well as pompano, snook, tarpon and barracuda are often willing to inhale a variety of live baits, or artificial offerings. It should be noted Florida is a tightly regulated state when it comes to seasons, sizes and bag limits of any species and it's a good idea to check with the local tackle shops to find out which seasons are open and closed. These shops also carry the appropriate tackle for the area and can offer tips and

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tricks to increase your score. A saltwater fishing license is required for residents and non-residents and to purchase a three-day, seven-day or annual fishing license or view the summary of fishing

regulations visit [www.floridaconservation.com](http://www.floridaconservation.com).

Enter Lake Worth Inlet and just a ¼ mile north on Singer Island is Sailfish Marina and Resort. This 94-slip

marina can accommodate vessels up to 110 feet and is a beautiful vacation resort complete with lodging, pool, restaurant, ship store and gift shop. Gasoline and diesel in-slip fueling is available 24 hours a day and a world-class charter fleet is also available. Transient slips are often available but it's best to call ahead during the busy winter season. Hail the marina on channel 16 on the VHF and a uniformed dock attendant will meet you when you arrive if space is available. Other possibilities for transient dockage include North Palm Beach Marina and Old Port Cove. Those who trailer a boat will find numerous launch ramps in the area including the newly renovated facility at Phil Foster Park on East Blue Heron Blvd.

Away from the boat when visiting The Palm Beaches one can also indulge in the fine shopping, beautiful beaches, excellent restaurants and various cultural



Live bait is usually available from local bait pros.

events. The Palm Beach Water Taxi stops at Sailfish Marina and shuttles passengers to and from shopping and restaurants when a car is not available. Stops are made in downtown Palm Beach where you can take in a day of shopping along Worth Avenue, Florida's answer to Rodeo Drive. Numerous championship golf courses in the area will test your skill or you can spend a day at the beach in one of the many state parks that dot the coastline. Museums, art galleries, zoos and dog track are all a short cab ride away. Complete the day with a great meal at The River House in Palm Beach Gardens, Limoncello Italian Grill or Bonefish Grill in North Palm Beach and Jetty's in Jupiter as well as Kee Grille in Juno and The Sailfish Marina Restaurant on Singer Island.

### For docking assistance and recommendations please contact Marinalife (1-800-736-8275).

#### Inshore/Sound Fishing

Permitted – Captain Greg Bogdan  
561-848-2405

#### Gulf Stream Fishing

Boomerang – Captain John Krohn  
561-575-6553

Glory Days – Captain Robbie Inghima  
561-714-5576

Osprey – Captain Joey Drosej  
410-977-9669

#### Tackle Shops

Black Bart International  
561-842-4550

Fisherman's Center  
561-844-5150

Grand Slam Sportfishing Supply  
561-841-2848

Lott Brothers  
561-844-2848