

# SARASOTA SNOOK FISHING

by Capt. Lace Allenius. Photography by Capt. Jimmy Nelson.

**D**o you know the feeling of waking up at the crack of dawn, excitedly rubbing the sleep from your eyes and rushing down to the marina brimming with anticipation for a Snook fishing adventure? I do! This week I had the pleasure of staying at the Lido Beach Resort in Sarasota, Florida in order to rest up for an early morning Snook trip with the Flying Fish Fleet. Snook season opens, in the Gulf of Mexico, on September 1st, 2013 and I am prepared for all the excitement ahead!

After the freeze in 2010 that caused Snook season to close, the season is now being reopened. The reopening of Snook season is the talk of the fishing community on the west coast. Even though I don't usually keep Snook, since I eat so much Grouper and Snapper, Snook is a delicious fish to eat, as long as it is within the legal size limit. My number one favorite place to catch Snook is Sarasota, Florida with the "Flying Fish Fleet Charter Company".

Upon my arrival at the resort, the staff was excellent. I had dinner at the Lido Beach Grille and the panoramic views were breathtaking. The accommodations are wonderful with a beautiful pool and Jacuzzi. After a delicious dinner, it was not long before I was ready to head to my room and get some shut-eye to prepare for the big morning ahead. Fishing is always an exhilarating experience for me regardless of what kind of fish I am targeting. Sleeping was difficult with all of the anticipation and I tossed and turned in my cozy bed, dreaming of the catch we would go for in the early morning hours.

Snook fishing has been the subject of debate for several years in the state of Florida. The freeze of January 2010 caused a moratorium on Snook season throughout the state. Because of the cold snap, many adult and juvenile Snook died

and the population took a sharp decline. On June 12, 2013, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) held a meeting in Lakeland to discuss the Snook population on the Gulf and Atlantic sides of Florida. The meeting was to consider whether to open Snook season once again. The FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute confirms that the Snook population should rebuild at a relatively normal rate once the season is reopened. There have been many efforts such as closures and slot limits to increase the Snook population statewide.

My wake-up call came at 4:30AM and I jumped out of bed, ready for the day. Snook like to bite early in the morning and I didn't want to miss out on the opportunity to catch them before the sun peeked over the Sarasota horizon. Taking a moment to reflect on the right way to snag these beauties, I made sure to remember my Yo-Zuri 3D Crystal minnows. These are my favorite lures for catching Snook. These sought-after fish always seem to hungrily snap



and powerfully inhale the hook when I use the best lures. Smiling, I grabbed my tackle box and headed over to the docks.

After taking a deep breath of the Sarasota air, I met with Capt. Jimmy Nelson of Extreme Fishing Adventures and Capt. Tim Noe of "Flying Fish Fleet Charters". We've all fished together before, so we were looking forward to our next great experience on the water. Flying Fish Fleet knows the area well, so we knew that we were in for a real treat. After loading our belongings onto the vessel, "The Buster", we pulled out on the glassy water, enveloped by early morning darkness.



Our journey took us under several bridges, through no wake zones and mangrove-lined channels. Soon, we reached our first destination. It was a wooden bridge surrounded by the warm morning mist. Then, we quietly prepared to hunt for some Snook. Gripped with excitement, we began to chum. It's always a good idea to chum the water next to the structure where Snook are hiding. This causes a feeding frenzy and the water will likely start popping with action. Once the fish are eating you can throw your line out and the Snook will start taking your lure. Talking in whispers, we opened a can of Fish Bomb menhaden oil from the side of our boat and waited for the whirlwind to begin.

Almost instantly, the water started churning and then splashing with hungry Snook devouring our chum. Silently, we began casting our lures into the turmoil and held our breaths waiting for fish on! Snook thump the line when they hit, so be ready for the sudden tug on your line when one of these fish swallows your bait. Sure enough, a huge Snook swam up and smashed my lure and I instantly started reeling the monster in! I was breathing

heavily and my Tsunami rod was bending; the battle had begun. Snook have soft mouths, so you don't want to set the hook too hard. It can be very easy to lose one of these fish, so the execution of the fight is crucial. Taking full control, I managed to get the Snook a few feet away from the boat. As soon as I thought I had him, he suddenly jumped off and was gone. I was heartbroken! Perhaps my method was incorrect, but as an angler, you can never be sure.

Moving on, I began chumming once again. Capt. Jimmy and Capt. Tim gave me words of encouragement and I tried yet again to catch my prized Snook. Those guys are really great to fish with and it's always a pleasure because we share tips and tricks in order to land the quantity and quality of fish that we're looking for. Grabbing some more chum, we started the process once again. Luckily, the Snook were still hungry and they soon started going off like fireworks on the fourth of July!

Elated, I could feel a surge of excitement rush through me and I began working my lure again. It didn't work the first time around, but this time I felt like I had found a good rhythm. In the early morning dawn, I could feel the sweat beading on my brow and the warmth of the sun rising in the distant horizon. It was my time for catching a Snook, and I could feel it. Peering through my Salt Life Sunglasses, I could clearly see the action just below the surface of the water. With a jolt, I was hit by a large Snook, and the fight began!



Reeling one of these sleek, silvery fish into the boat is truly a great experience. Confident in my angling skills, I fought the Snook a little more gently this time. Maybe it was the same one that had gotten away before. Regardless, I didn't want to pull the hook out of the one I had on the line. I concentrated