

TROUT TIME!

Article by Captain Lace Allenius & Photos by Captain Jeff Hagaman

The dawn was chilly yet promising as I threw on my windbreaker, loaded up the Grizzly cooler and jumped on the boat with Capt. Jeff Hagaman of Reel Adventures charters. Fishing with Capt. Jeff is a great experience and I was excited to see what the day had in store. The sun was just beginning to rise and the breeze was brisk and refreshing. We were targeting spotted Seatrout in Florida's Anclote River and it was a great way to start the day.

Spotted Seatrout are an inshore species of fish and they can be found in grass flats, near mangroves, potholes, and in channels above oyster bars. They are delicious table fare and Florida regulations state that trout must be more than 15 inches and less than 20 inches in order to keep. The fishing season is open year-round and the allowable gear for catching them is either a hook and line or a cast net. **(Please visit myfwc.com for more information.)**

I like to use Tsunami holographic shrimp baits when fishing for trout, because they look more attractive to hungry trout than natural shrimp and they give off an enticing glow under the water. Yo-Zuri Crystal 3D Minnows are also an excellent choice, because they are brighter and stand out from the schools of baitfish.

It's helpful to chum with Fish Bomb, because this adds another incentive for the fish to come near your boat. Live Pinfish can also be used with a bobber to catch trout and it's important to watch carefully for the initial bite.

Florida Spotted Seatrout can be caught all year round, but the winter months bring in larger concentrations of bigger fish. Because of the cooler water temperatures, they migrate into the warmer estuaries of the grass flats in greater numbers, therefore making them more condensed and easier to catch. Although it's legal, I don't like using a net when catching trout because it takes the slime off the fish, and it's not good for them, instead, use a Boga-Grip and be sure to wet your hands before removing the hook and releasing them because it's gentler on their skin.

As we arrived at our first spot, we shut off the motor and silently glided to the spot that we thought looked optimal for Trout. As we took a moment to wait for the grass on the

surface to float by us, I gazed out at the vibrantly sparkling water on the horizon. It felt good to soak up the radiant sun while the peaceful hum of Cicadas gently resounded from the mangrove-lined shore. Snow-white Egrets perched stoically within the greenery watched us in silent camaraderie as they rested in peaceful leisure. For a moment, time stood still and all that could be heard was the bubbling live well and the glassy green water caressing the sides of our boat. In a wave of clarity, the mats of turtle grass passed by our bow and we immediately began casting our lines.

With a sudden hit, we were hooked up and began pulling in gorgeous trout hand over fist! Trout have delicate mouths, so no matter how exhilarated you are, it's important not to set the hook too forcefully, because the mouth can tear. Always use a light drag and fight them gingerly, especially the bigger fish. Circle hooks also help avoid tearing the corner of the trout's mouth while using live bait. Amidst all of the action, a small airplane buzzed over us, gliding between the wispy white clouds. I was certain that the pilot was sharing in our ex-

citement. This day was Florida inshore fishing at its finest and all of my senses were alive to the fullest.

Trout are an ambush predator that like moving water, so a good current flow is a must. Water will flow over the trout as the trout sits still and small baitfish or shrimp swimming in the current pass by them. Essentially, the trout wait for a meal to come to them before darting out and attacking their prey. Structure is also important when looking for this species of fish. People generally might not think of the grass flats as structure, but turtle and eel grass can certainly serve this purpose. Whether it's a pothole, a depression, or a depth change in the water, even a propeller scar can provide great structure for Seatrout. Grass flats have a large amount of irregularity on the bottom and this gives trout places to hide while preparing for an ambush.

After the bite slowed down a bit, we decided to move on. Pumping up the volume on the stereo, we jammed out and took off to our next spot. I assure you, it's hard to find a more fun day on the water than with Capt. Jeff! I could feel the excitement surge through me as we climbed up the tower to scout the water. Racing along the coastline, I held onto my hat as the salty air rushed through my hair. Grinning at each other, Capt. Jeff and I knew that we were headed for another great fishing spot.

Birds are not always a telltale sign when looking for trout, however, sometimes they can be an indicator because diving pelicans or terns are a good sign



when looking for bait, where trout may be feeding. To go after huge "gator" Seatrout, you want to use bigger artificials or bigger live bait. A large trout will likely eat a big meal all at once instead of hunting for a multitude of smaller baits. If you find a good trout spot on any given day, it's smart to continue looking for spots with similar depths, because the water temperatures will be comparable, making it likely for success.

Gliding over the grassy flats, we peered into the gleaming water, spying another prime area. Watching the different species of fish dart through the water below us, we picked a lively spot filled with visible baitfish, Snook, Redfish and spotted trout. The immense grass flats of Tarpon Springs and the excellent current flow in the Anclote River made our fishing day more than ideal. Before long, we began pulling more fish into the boat! Finally fulfilled with the day's catch, we decided to call it day and headed back to shore.

As the sun set to our stern, the cool fall breeze kicked up again and reminded me of the morning of our trip. The blue sky was illuminated with the glow of the blazing

sun sinking lower in the horizon. This inshore day of catch and release had been a good one and we were content as we pulled back into the marina. Fishing for Spotted Seatrout in Florida is a wonderful experience and with a little practice, it can prove to be an enjoyable pastime in the winter months and all year round. ▣

To book a charter with Capt. Jeff Hagaman, please call 727-639-2492 or visit Reel-Adventures.com. He is located in the Tampa Bay and Boca Grande, FL areas.

