

Rod 'n Reel

Sailfish reign supreme in Martin County waters

[By Laura Spinale](#)

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"There isn't any symbolism. The sea is the sea. The fish is a fish."

— Ernest Hemingway, writing about *The Old Man and The Sea*

The Atlantic waters off Martin County are a sailfish haven

Martin The Mackerel Place.

If you're fishing in **Martin County**, we know what you're after. Sure, in the wonders of the **Indian River Lagoon** – arguably the continent's most biologically significant estuary – you can spend your days angling for snook, Spanish mackerel, mangrove snapper and their ilk. But in fishing nomenclature, no one calls

They call it the Sailfish Capital of the World.

If you're traveling down here, we bet you're itching for a fight. We bet you're picturing epic struggles between man and beast. Something Hemingway-esque. Maybe being strapped into a boat as you battle big fish. Maybe the chance to take a *National Geographic* shot of *your* sailfish as it breaches the water, attacking its bait.


We also bet that you remember your English lit lectures well enough to know that Hemingway's protagonist, Santiago, spent three days hunting a giant marlin – *not* a sailfish. But they *are* in the same fish family.

Treasures of the Deep

Martin County sits in a section of Southeast Florida known as The Treasure Coast. The name comes from the wrecks of Spanish galleons that dot area waters. But for game fishers, the sailfish are the real treasure. Arguably the nation's most recognizable game fish, these creatures (spanning an average seven feet and weighing 40 pounds) wage aerial battles with their prey,



breaching the water in an attempt to slash it with their bills.

 Fishing charters invite novices and experts to reel in sailfish and other local catches

No one knows exactly what makes the Atlantic waters off Martin County such a sailfish haven. Many thank the county's location on the border of the temperate and subtropical latitudinal zones. Whatever the reason, sailfish congregate here in waters of 60 to 180 feet. You can find them throughout the year, but the fishing's especially good between late November and March, with a second season of plenty in June and July. (To protect the fishery, all sailfish outings are catch-and-release expeditions.)

You don't have to be an expert to catch your own sailfish. Just ask V.J. Bell, captain of Bone Shaker Charters. (Other charter options in town include the Snarlin' Marlin, Free Jumper, Lady Stuart, Catch 22, Daddy's Girl Too, eBoatCharters, Hungry Bear Adventures and Safari I Deep Sea Fishing.) "If you're here during peak season – Thanksgiving through the end of January – your chances of catching multiple sailfish are very good. You can catch a sail or two any day year 'round, but at the height of the season, we've had double-digit catches." Like most area charters, the Bone Shaker accommodates everyone from established sportsmen to families.

In hunting the big fish, charters employ a variety of techniques. These include trolling with dead bait, trolling with live bait and kite-fishing. Along the way, don't be surprised to enjoy a haul of wahoo, snapper or cobia.

Blue Lagoon





Bone Shaker Charters has seen double-digit catches in peak season

First thing you need to know about fishing the Indian River: It's not a river. It's an estuary – an area in which fresh and salt waters mix. More specifically, it's a lagoon – a type of estuary separated from the ocean by barrier islands. Running about 150 miles along Florida's East Coast, this complex of grass flats and sand bars houses an astonishing cornucopia of wildlife and plant life: more than 4,300 species, according to the Florida Oceanographic Institute. Among them are dolphins, roseate spoonbills, manatee and osprey. Still relatively untraveled (by Florida standards), the lagoon is a lazy place to visit, a place to taste old Florida.

You've come, though, for the fish. The species you'll hunt vary with the season. Bob Bushholz, captain with the Catch 22 charter company, is happy to reel them off. From October through early April, he says, pompano, Spanish mackerel and bluefish rule. During other seasons, catch, and feast on, snook, trout, redfish, goliath grouper, whiting, flounder – the list goes on and on.

The lagoon itself is shallow, typically running only three to five feet. This makes wade

fishing a popular activity, along with charter excursions. The Catch 22 pontoon boat can hold up to six guests as it mounts flats fishing trips. So named for the shallow water in which you angle, these trips take you to grass beds where fish congregate to hunt their own dinners. Typically using light tackle or flies, you'll find catches so plentiful that, unlike Hemingway, you won't have to exaggerate when describing the experience to your friends.

For more information on boating and fishing in Martin County, visit www.martincountyfla.com or call the Martin County Tourist Development Council at 877-585-0085 for a free brochure.