



Golden waters of Southwest Florida

By: Peter Miller

Southwest Florida is synonymous with incredible inshore fishing. Whether you're targeting Pine Island Sound for gator trout and bull redfish, or you're combing the beaches of Captiva for snook... this area does not disappear!

The barrier islands of Sanibel, Captiva, North Captiva, and Cayo Costa are known for their pristine, white sand beaches lining the edges of the Gulf of Mexico. The beaches are littered with intricate seashells, drawing people from around the world. The surf is home to a variety of sought-after fish species including tarpon, snook, and jacks. These predators push bait right up onto the beaches, and great fishing is easily accessible.

Pine Island Sound is nestled between the afore-

mentioned barrier islands to the west and Pine Island to the east. The sound is filled with all different types of marine habitat. This includes oyster beds, tidal flats, salt marshes, seagrass, and mangroves. The sound is host to some of the best fishing Florida has to offer... with massive bull redfish on the flats and bars, and monster snook in the passes between the islands.

Before European influence, the area surrounding Pine Island Sound was home to the Calusa Indians. The Calusa tribes survived off the waters, thriving on a diet consisting of bony fish and shellfish. Using nets made from palm fibers, the Calusa's caught mullet, pinfish, and pigfish among a number of other species. They also collected oysters, scallops, conch, crabs, and clams.

> **Top Spread:** Jeremy, Nicki, Peter, and Capt. Ozzie Fischer hold up their prize. Multiple hookups are commonplace as redfish will often fight over a bait.

> **Right Page Middle:** Maggie takes a closer look as Peter hoists a large snook. Snook gather around the barrier island passes.



> **Far Left:** Peter Miller releases a chunky bull redfish after a battle on light tackle. Pine Island Sound redfish are very competitive and notoriously strong.

> **Left:** First-time angler Stephanie caught this healthy redfish on a red-head topwater plug. Redfish in this area are not picky and will readily strike a plug or swim bait.



> **Guides to Know:**

Captain Ozzie Fischer with Bay Fischer Charters, runs an operation leaving from South Seas Island Resort. He can be reached at 239-872-8515.

Captain Ozzie Lessinger, leaves from McCarthy Marina on Captiva and can be reached at www.fishsanibelcaptiva.com or 239-910-7764.

> **Where to Lay Your Head:**

For accommodations, there is no better option than South Seas Island Resort, located at the tip of Captiva Island. South Seas offers fun for the entire family, with tons of activities like parasailing, paddleboarding, and golf. Its beaches are ideal for swimming and shelling, and offer breathtaking sunset views. Check out South Seas Island Resort's website: southseas.com



This entire area is still host to the forage species that draw in the gamefish. Tarpon and snook ball bait in the Gulf surf and in the passes; redfish and trout on the flats and bars. Here's how to fish the barrier island beaches, Pine Island Sound, and surrounding areas.

SANIBEL/CAPTIVA BEACH FISHING

Summertime and early fall provide tremendous fishing opportunities from the beaches of Sanibel and Captiva. The big snook spawn in inlets and passes, and then head to the surf to feed. These fish swim along the shallow trough, right along the shore and push baitfish practically onto the beach. You can see the snook swimming parallel to the beach, five feet from shore, dorsal fins, backs, and tails out of the water.

These snook and other gamefish are eating pilchards, threadfin, mullet, and glass minnows. To catch bait; throwing a cast net is your best method. A bucket with aerator and lid is necessary to keep your baits lively.

Tackle wise, medium to medium-heavy spinning gear with 10- to 15-pound braid will do the trick. For leader, 30-pound fluorocarbon for smaller baits and 40-pound for the larger baits. Hook size is important for presentation. For small to medium pilchards: 2/0 light-wire circle hooks. For large threadfin and mullet: 5/0 light-wire circle hooks work best.

Artificial also work very well on the beaches! Try a soft swimbait like a Berkley Gulp. When the fish are feeding on tiny bait, like glass minnows, try a Rapala X- Rap in glass ghost or silver colors.

When the water clarity is clear, you can sight fish for tarpon and snook. A lot of people tend to over cast beyond the fish. Try wading ankle deep and casting your bait directly parallel to the beach. You don't need tons of expensive gear or a boat for this type of fishing. The beaches are easily accessible and sight fishing is incredibly exciting!

PINE ISLAND SOUND/FLATS AND PASSES

The flats, bars, and passes around Pine Island Sound hold some of the most explosive shallow-water fisheries in Florida. Giant redfish schools comb the flats, searching for a snack. You'll see their telltale indicators; tails with black spots just above the water's surface. Sometimes the reds are so thick, the water looks gold. The snook co-mingle with the redfish and both can be caught using the same presentations.

For tackle, light to medium spinning gear rated for 8- to 17-pound test is sufficient. A 3000-size reel spooled with 10-pound braid is perfect for this type of fishing. The light braid allows for long casts when the fish are spooky. Redfish and snook can be targeted with a variety of live bait, dead bait, and artificials. For live bait, shiners are the go-to. For dead bait, cut bait such as mullet, threadfin, and ladyfish are choice. For artificials, soft-plastics, like the many different variations from D.O.A. are a hit. We've also had great luck with topwater baits.

For the best shot at developing a strong strategy for targeting these fish, make sure to check out the local guides on Captiva Island, as they are top notch. 📍



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