

Season is here . . .

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A commonly overheard word in towns with tourist-based economies such as ours is “season.” It really is a simple way to keep track of the time of year if you think about it. Why weigh yourself down with keeping track of 12 pesky months? With this system there are only two possibilities to remember. Either it is *season* or it is *off-season*. Granted, the calendar year has its merits in regard to keeping track of holidays and birthdays. Nonetheless, these attributes pale in comparison to the simplicity and importance of whether or not it is or isn’t season down here.

A commonly overheard question regarding season is when exactly it takes place. This is a slippery question and the answer will differ depending on who you ask. For our many “snowbird” residents season usually starts when they begin to arrive around Thanksgiving. A hotelier usually will shift to seasonal rates right before Christmas and then lower them to off-season rates after Easter or Memorial Day at the latest. A fishing guide, however, could probably point to this President’s weekend as the official start to the season. From the holidays until now, guides fish quite a bit, but it’s little like a NASCAR race under a caution flag. The cars are cruising around the track, all systems are a “go” and they’re just waiting for the signal to floor it. The President’s weekend is the shot of the pistol that marks the beginning of fishing virtually every day for a fishing guide until the end of June, so start your engines.

Fishing right now is quite diverse. Flats fishing for bonefish and permit has been excellent at times with some big fish showing up on both the ocean and bayside flats. The patch reef fishing is as good as it gets. Every type of snapper, mackerel and grouper that swims down here can be found out there right now. The Gulf is teeming with fish including cobia, mackerel, sharks and spawning redfish the size of labrador retrievers. Finally, the backcountry fishing for snook and redfish has been a bit spotty but the large tarpon are starting to fill into early season spots, so that’s good.

Unfortunately, the most consistent weather of the year to fish the flats and backcountry does not necessarily coincide perfectly with tourist season. Weatherwise, we’re kind of in a tweener period. We are in between the cool, windy winter months and the warm, Chamber of Commerce weather days of the spring. One day it can be 80 degrees and flat calm and two days later cold, crappy and the wind is honking.

On the eve of the millennium, Kurt Vonnegut wrote an article for *Time Magazine* that touched on Mother Nature and the way mankind envisions Her. He claimed that as a whole, mankind views Mother Nature as a nurturing entity that loves and wishes all of us well. He then went on to point out that She is in fact quite ambivalent and can be kind of a (sounds like) witch. It’s a bit extreme I know, but it crosses my mind when there are people everywhere who want to go fishing with willing captains who want to take them out and the weather turns to poop. The point is, this time of year we experience variable weather patterns that run the gamut from gloriously perfect to down right crummy. Don’t try and predict anything this time of year. If the weather is beautiful take advantage of it. Drop what you are doing and get out on the water. The fishing is good. But if you think about it too long, the weather will change to the other end of the spectrum before you can say “go.”

