

**MARCH'S BEST BET
SEBASTIAN INLET STATE PARK**



SHRIMPING

(Penaeus aztecus/Penaeus setiferus)

DESCRIPTION: Of the numerous species of shrimp found worldwide in both freshwater and saltwater, Sebastian Inlet's shrimp runs play host to mainly two species; the brown shrimp (*Penaeus aztecus*) and the white shrimp (*Penaeus setiferus*). Brown shrimp are far more common in this area, from what I have seen, but occasionally whites are dipped along with the browns. Most of these whites probably go unrecognized by the average sportsman but they can be distinguished by their overall paler appearance, longer antennae, and various tinges of greens, reds, or blues around the legs and especially the edge of the tail.

HEIGHT OF SEASON: Seasons for shrimp runs vary greatly from area to area. The best shrimp runs at Sebastian Inlet seem to come in late February, March, and April. Especially warm winters can bring good shrimp runs as early as January at Sebastian Inlet. Shrimp that run earlier in the season tend to be larger than those seen near the end of the season, overall. Oddly enough, about the time the shrimp runs seem to finish up here at Sebastian Inlet, just to the north around the Melbourne and Eau Gallie Causeways, shrimp runs are generally just getting under way for the year (April, May, June).

RULES AND REGULATIONS: Recreational shrimping restrictions are detailed in their descriptions of bag limits, allowable gear, and baiting laws (please see 46-31.007). Since most baiting techniques are used north of here mainly for white shrimp, basically one must observe that there is a 5 gallon limit (heads on) for any shore-bound individual that is shrimping, and a 5 gallon limit (heads on) for any vessel (boat) in state waters. Two or more individuals shrimping out of a boat are limited to 5 gallons of shrimp for that vessel. Nets should not be attached to permanent structures, i.e. bridge railings, piers, etc. Dipnets used for shrimping should measure no larger than 96 inches around the perimeter and frame nets should measure no larger than 16 feet around the perimeter. Keep up to date on the fishing regulations, something is almost always changing. You will need a saltwater fishing license.

TIMES AND TIDES: Shrimping at Sebastian Inlet is only done during dark hours. Any outgoing tide (Indian River is flushing out into the Atlantic Ocean) after dark, during the season, is apt to produce shrimp. Shrimp runs are predictably unpredictable, one night might be great for shrimping, the next night poor. Stick with it and odds will turn your way. Occasionally, the beginning of an incoming tide, just after an outgoing tide, might produce some shrimp, especially during the first 20-30 minutes of the incoming when mainly river water is being brought back in the inlet.

BAITS: No baits are used for shrimping at Sebastian Inlet.

TACKLE: Shrimping at Sebastian Inlet requires either of two distinct types of tackle, one for "dipping" shrimp, the other for "straining" shrimp. Tackle for dipping generally consists of a long handled dip net and some form of brightly powered light (some individuals prefer lanterns, while others stick with 12 volt battery powered lights). Any type of net material used in shrimping of course must have a mesh size which will not allow escape of the shrimp. Mesh measuring 1½" to 3¼" is generally used, and net made from monofilament is preferred, allowing the least resistance when moved through the water. "Frame nets" are used when straining for shrimp. For this method no light is necessary. A frame net is basically a straining device made with a square or rectangle frame attached to a long, purse-like piece of netting material. Long ropes attach this unit to a boat as it acts to strain the water of any shrimp as the current passes through the net. Obviously this method is used only in areas where the current is strong enough to push and hold shrimp into the net, like here at Sebastian Inlet.

METHOD: Shrimping from a boat in Sebastian Inlet is usually far more productive because of the advantages an angler has in positioning into more productive areas of the current as well as keeping away from the often crowded jetties and catwalks. Dip netting with lanterns is done both from boats and bridge catwalks, but can also be done on the inlet's north jetty. Shore bound shrimpers are much more limited to productive areas and when the shrimp are running these areas are often very crowded. Dip netting shrimp at Sebastian Inlet as the strong current pulls them by a light is often not as easy as it might seem, especially during the strongest parts of the tide. This feat can be even more difficult from the bridge's catwalks and the jetties where the swift, concentrated currents lie 20 feet under the angler. Like many things, this sport may take a bit of practice before it is perfected. Watch and learn from the "pros" around you if you're having trouble. One thing I've learned and many shrimpers will tell you is you should always dip a shrimp head first into the net, even if the shrimp is heading into the current. If you're dipping shrimp, also try to keep your stare on the water at the leading edge of your light's cast. This way you have the most response time to try to catch the shrimp before the current has swept it past you. Shrimp are not attracted to lights as most people think, and lights will often make a shrimp dive deep. Lights are strictly for the assistance of the angler. Fortunately Sebastian's swift currents control the shrimp's path more than the shrimp itself does, so lights are not such a hinderance to productive shrimping here. In areas\times when the current is slow, try dimming lights down or letting lanterns burn low for more productive shrimping. During slow inlet currents, and especially when shrimping in the slow moving river, I have often seen shrimp avoiding the cast of a light, usually by outskirting the light, staying in the shadows, or by simply diving under it, only to pop back up in the safety of the dark.

PREPARATION: Cleaning shrimp can be very simple if the shrimp are kept fresh- moist and cool, but not immersed in water. If you want to store them in a cooler before cleaning, try putting them in a bag or sack and then laying them on top of the ice. If they become too warm or waterlogged after dying, their heads can become "mushy" and make a simple process a little more difficult. The simple task of heading and deveining a shrimp is done with one hand

grasping the body or abdomen of the shrimp, thumb placed at the break between the head and the abdomen, with the other hand grasping around the head of the shrimp, thumb also placed at the "neck" break of the shrimp. With hands placed this way, a simple twist, thumbs going in different directions, will break the head from the body of the shrimp. If you don't over twist at this point and the shrimp is still fresh, by pulling the shrimp's head directly away from the body, the "vein" of the shrimp will stay attached to the head portion and does not have to be removed later by splitting the body meat of the shrimp. The vein in a shrimp is actually its digestive tract and although unsightly it does not hurt one to consume it. Shrimp are easily peeled after cooking but if your recipe calls for peeled shrimp before cooking, try refrigerating them (if freshly caught) a couple of hours before peeling. Enjoy!

ALSO THIS MONTH: Look for fishing to pick up when the weather permits. Bluefish and pompano should still make a strong showing, with March still producing some black drum and sheepshead fishing around the inlet. Snook fishing will depend on the weather, with warmer temperatures inducing the fish to start feeding. Eating sized blue crabs may also pass by for those trying their luck shrimping.

Good Luck,
Ranger Ed Perry