

# December forecast

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Times Correspondent

December is a month of transition in the Tampa Bay area. The fall migrations of kingfish, Spanish mackerel and cobia typically wind down and the winter pattern establishes itself. Weather plays the key role in determining how good the fishing will be and what species will be available.

Some years, including 2001, the water temperature remains in the 70s and there is outstanding kingfish and mackerel action through the holiday season. Most of the time, however, cold fronts send the pelagics on their way south by the end of November.

Water temperature is critical this month. The inshore and the offshore species are greatly affected by it. For the winter you will find that fishing is best during the warmest periods and slowest when it gets chilly. This is the case in most places, but because our area is on the northernmost end of the temperate zone, our fish are even more impacted by the cold.

Snook are not found in any quantity north of Crystal River, and even mangroves won't grow any farther north. They both have a threshold for cold tolerance that is regularly exceeded farther north in the winter.

In our area, snook usually can withstand the cold but are occasionally killed when the water dips below 56 degrees. More often, they simply move into deep-water channels, brackish water lakes, rivers and residential canals. Their metabolism slows to the point where they essentially hibernate for the winter, actively feeding only during the warmest sunny days. Speckled trout and redbfish thrive in the winter months and become the primary target of many inshore anglers.

The largest trout of the year move in to the shallow flats in December and provide great catch-and-release action. (Trout season is closed south of Howard Park, 1.14 miles south of the Pinellas/Pasco line for the months of November and December).

The biggest specks will be found in 2 to 4 feet of water in mild weather conditions and will gather in deep holes and in warm water power plant outfalls after the fronts pass and the temperature drops.

December also is the month that schools of scaled sardines usually disappear, forcing inshore fishermen to switch to artificial baits. Redfish are somewhat impervious to cold water and, unlike most fish, go right on feeding no matter how cold it gets.

December is one of the best months to target "tailing" redbfish on the flats. Low tide is pretty much the only time you will find redbfish with their noses in the grass and their tails sticking out of the water.

This month, the lowest tides will be within a few days of the new moon, which occurred Wednesday, and the full moon, which will occur on Dec. 19.

To get at the tailers, you will need an extremely shallow draft boat or a pair of waders. Quite often, they are found working around in grass that still is protruding from the surface.

Historically, December has been a great month for grouper fishing. Gags prefer the low- to mid-range temperatures, 62 to 75 degrees. But as with a number of local species, gag grouper disappear when the water temperature drops below 60 degrees.

Amberjack fishing usually is very good in December. These big members of the jack family gather in large schools over the deeper wrecks and ledges through the month. Since the water is deep, it is less affected by atmospheric temperature fluctuations. Charter fishermen often rely on amberjack to fill in for the grouper on many frosty cold mornings.

Fog can be a problem for boaters in December. If the water gets extremely cold and the air warms again quickly, the gulf can be a dangerous place to navigate. Since this fog is caused by the difference in air and water temperature, it is common to have clear skies near land and thick fog off shore all day long.

When navigating under foggy conditions, move around at idle speed and listen for others. Traveling slow will keep you from hitting something or someone and will reduce damage if you happen to run aground or bump a marker.

# St. Petersburg Times FISHING GUIDE

PINELLAS AND HILLSBOROUGH COUNTIES

The Tampa Bay area is blessed with some of Florida's best fishing spots. We've got great weather and good water, so get out and go fishing.

### The lay of the land and water

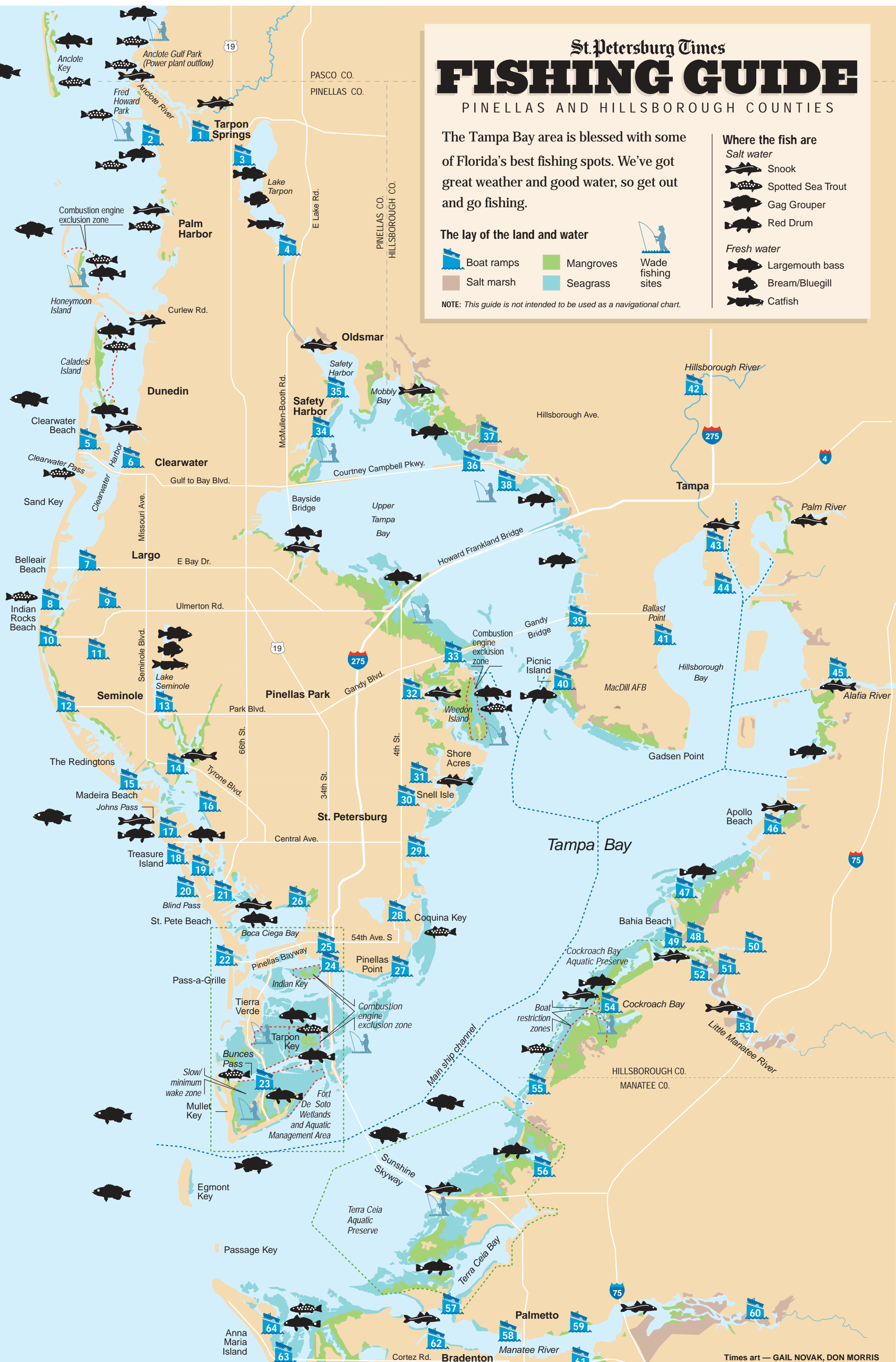
- Boat ramps
- Mangroves
- Salt marsh
- Seagrass
- Wade fishing sites

NOTE: This guide is not intended to be used as a navigational chart.

### Where the fish are

- Salt water**
- Snook
  - Spotted Sea Trout
  - Gag Grouper
  - Red Drum

- Fresh water**
- Largemouth bass
  - Bream/Bluegill
  - Catfish



## Where to find boat ramps

1. Craig Park Boat Ramp, Craig Park, Tarpon Springs
2. Sunset Beach Boat Ramp, Sunset Beach Park and Gulf Road, Tarpon Springs
3. A.L. Anderson Park, 39699 U.S. 19 N., Tarpon Springs
4. John Chestnut, Sr. Park, 2200 East Lake Road, Palm Harbor
5. Bay Esplanade Boat Ramp, Clearwater Beach Rec Center
6. Seminole Boat Ramp, 198 Seminole St., Clearwater
7. Belleair Boat Ramp, 3900 W. Bay Drive, Belleair Bluffs
8. Indian Rocks Beach Boat Ramp, 3rd Avenue and 1st Street, Indian Rocks Beach
9. John Taylor Park, 1100 8th Avenue S.W., Largo
10. Indian Rocks Boat Ramp, 15th Avenue and Bayshore Blvd, Indian Rocks Beach
11. Walsingham Park, 12620 102nd Ave. N., Largo
12. Park Boulevard Boat Ramp, 18651 Gulf Boulevard, Indian Shores
13. Lake Seminole Park, 10015 Park Blvd., Seminole
14. War Veterans Memorial Park, 9600 Bay Pines Boulevard, St. Petersburg
15. Madeira Beach Municipal Marina, 503 150th Avenue, Madeira Beach
16. Jungle Prada, Park Street and Elbow Lane N., St. Petersburg
17. 123rd Avenue Ramp, 123rd Avenue and Lagoon Lane, Treasure Island
18. Treasure Island Public Boat Ramp, Gulf Boulevard and 100th Ave., Treasure Island
19. Egan Park, 9101 Blind Pass Road, St. Pete Beach
20. Treasure Island Boat Ramp, Gulf Boulevard and 84th Ave., Treasure Island
21. Bay Winds Sports Motel, Corey Avenue and Bay Street, St. Pete Beach
22. St. Pete Beach Boat Ramp, East 33rd Avenue, St. Pete Beach
23. Fort De Soto Park, 3500 Pinellas Bayway South, Tierra Verde
24. O'Neill's Skyway Boat Basin, 6701 34th St. South, St. Petersburg
25. Maximo Park, 34th Street S. and Pinellas Point Drive., St. Petersburg
26. Gulfport Marina Complex, 4630 29th Avenue South, Gulfport
27. Bay Vista Park, 4th Street and Pinellas Point Drive, St. Petersburg
28. Grandview Park, 6th Street and 38th Avenue South, St. Petersburg
29. Demens Landing South, 1st Avenue South and Bayshore Drive, St. Petersburg
30. Coffee Pot Park, 1st Street and 31st Avenue NE, St. Petersburg
31. Crisp Park, Poplar Street and 35th Avenue NE, St. Petersburg
32. Sunlit Cove Park, Bay St. NE and Sunlit Cove Drive., St. Petersburg
33. Gandy Bridge Marina, 13050 Gandy Blvd, St. Petersburg
34. Safety Harbor Marina and Pier, South Boulevard and Bayshore, Safety Harbor
35. Philippe Park, 2355 Bayshore Drive N., Safety Harbor
36. Courtney Campbell Boat Ramp, north side of Causeway, Tampa
37. Baycrest Boat Ramp, Baycrest Blvd off Memorial Hwy., Tampa
38. Rocky Creek Boat Ramp, Rocky Creek Drive, Upper Tampa Bay
39. Gandy Boat Ramp, Gandy Bridge (East Causeway), Tampa
40. Picnic Island Boat Ramp, End of Commerce Road., Port of Tampa
41. Ballast Point Boat Ramp, Ballast Point and Interbay Drive, Tampa
42. Lowry Park Boat Ramp, Sligh Ave., Tampa
43. Marjorie Park Boat Ramp, 115 Columbia Dr. (Davis Island), Tampa
44. Davis Island Boat Ramp, Davis Island Blvd. (south side), Tampa
45. Williams Park Boat Ramp, 6401 Riverview Dr. (Alafia River), Tampa
46. Apollo Beach Boat Ramp, Apollo Beach Blvd., Apollo Beach
47. E.G. Simmons Boat Ramp, 2401 19th Ave. NW, Ruskin
48. Bahia Beach Marina, 3301 Sea Grape Dr., Ruskin
49. Shell Point Marina, 3324 W. Shell Road, Ruskin
50. Ruskin Commongood Park, 1st Avenue NW and 2nd Street, Ruskin
51. Domino Boat Ramp, South end of 22nd Ave. SW and 8th Street SW, Ruskin
52. Sun City Heritage Boat Ramp, 3030 S. Hwy 41, Ruskin
53. Wildcat Creek Park, Stephens Rd. East of U.S. 41, Ruskin
54. Cockroach Bay Boat Ramp, Cockroach Bay Road, Ruskin
55. Piney Point Boat Ramp, West End of Piney Point Road, Port Manatee
56. Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp, Bishop Harbor Road, Bishop Harbor
57. Tropic Isles Marina, 3100 10th St., Palmetto
58. Riverside Park Boat Ramp, 801 Riverside Dr., Palmetto
59. Highland Shores Boat Ramp, 351 Shore Dr., Ellenton
60. Fort Hammer Boat Ramp, Fort Hammer Rd., Parrish
61. Highway 64 Boat Ramp, Hwy. 64 and Braden River, Bradenton
62. Warners Bayou County Park, NW Riverview Blvd., Bradenton
63. Kingfish Boat Ramp, Manatee Ave. (west of Intracoastal Waterway), Bradenton
64. 63rd St. Memorial Park, East End of 63rd Street, Holmes Beach

— Compiled by Rodney Page

(Note: Numbers are located on map, above.)