



Gaining popularity, kayak fishing has followed the waterways into nearly every corner of the state from the panhandle to the Keys. Many anglers have picked up a paddle because of the kayak's simplicity, convenience and economic value. People also like the feeling of being so close to the water and nature.

The draw of anglers to paddling has helped fishing kayaks become the fastest growing area of kayak sales. More than 81 million people fished at least once in the past three years while almost four million tried kayaking, according to research by Leisure Trends. Those numbers add up to enough sales to generate a new craze for fishing.

Kayak fishing has grown steadily for more than 20 years. The sport has gained popularity with anglers in every part of Florida from the Big Bend to the Keys, the First Coast to the Space Coast and along the Gulf Coast.

"It's really just the beginning," says Ken Daubert, a former kayak fishing guide in Florida and author of *Kayak Fishing: The Revolution*.

An estimated 75 percent to 85 percent of customers coming into Osprey Bay Outdoors, an outdoor outfitter

located in Clearwater, ask about fishing kayaks, says employee Bryan Doehleman. The store has expanded its fishing equipment section and carries a wide variety of accessories for kayak fishing to satisfy the demand.

More and more people are trying the sport for the first time.

"There's no end in sight to where this is going to go," says David Loger, a kayak fishing guide based in the Tampa area. Most of Loger's local clients want to learn about the sport so they can begin kayak fishing regularly.

Kayak fishing has distinct advantages that encourage longtime anglers and paddlers to drift toward the sport. A new kayak including all of the fishing equipment needed to get started will cost only \$800 to \$1,000. Most kayaks weigh 40 to 60 pounds, making them easy to carry. Kayaks are made out of plastic, which resist corrosion from saltwater. Although, too much direct sunlight will cause the finish to fade, and storing a kayak away from sunlight will help prevent this. The plastic also makes cleaning the vessel as simple as rinsing it with water and washing it with soap occasionally. With a kayak, the cost of engine maintenance

# KAYAK FISHING

## Has Hooked Anglers in Florida

and gas prices will not plague owners.

Kayakers should consider safety when they grab their paddle. Most guides recommend bringing water and a first aid kit, wearing a life vest, being aware of surrounding wildlife and taking paddle lessons. Checking the weather forecast is also a good idea. Beginners should start out slowly, taking short trips while they discover their limits, Daubert says. They should also fish for smaller game while learning how to handle the kayak. After gaining experience, kayak anglers can paddle out on longer trips and try to land larger fish.

“From there you can raise the adrenaline to wherever you want,” Daubert says.

The craft also aids in bringing in more fish. Kayakers can launch from anywhere water exist. The boat’s quiet movement in the water and low profile help anglers get closer to fish.

“You’ll have fish staring back at you all the time,” Daubert says.

The craft also reaches places inaccessible by other boats. Kayaks fit into narrow, shallow waterways and travel through grasses better than bigger boats giving anglers more fishing possibilities.

“You’ll be surprised where you can find fish,” Loger says.

Most people come into the sport as fisherman first

Photos Courtesy of Mike Kogan



## Kayak Fishing Tips

- Wear a personal flotation device (PFD)
- Take paddling lessons before starting the sport
- Learn about kayaks before buying one
- Take a first aid kit, bilge pump, signaling flares & drinking water
- Don't stand up in kayaks
- Paddle with others & let people know trip plans
- Be prepared to get wet
- Wear sunscreen
- Check the weather before the trip

then gravitate toward paddling, Daubert says. However, some paddlers begin fishing out of the kayak.

“Most people, when they go to a kayak, they don’t go back to a boat,” Daubert says. “It’s almost like rediscovering fishing.”

And in Florida the possibilities for kayak fishing are endless. From the Big Bend’s paddling haven to Central Florida’s lakes and springs to the Florida Keys and the Jacksonville area, Florida has thousands of sites suitable for kayak fishing.

“You take a dart, throw it at a map of Florida and you can fish there,” Daubert says.

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