

BLACKFOOT CHARTERS

Florida Backcountry Flats Fishing



Winter Wonderland

Cooler temperatures greet us as we begin the month of December in the Upper Keys, it is wintertime and the fish are here. There are lots of opportunities for shallow water anglers during the cooler months it all depends, what is on your wish list of species as to where the best bite is. Having two flats boats on trailers means flexibility for my clients, and being able to trailer to different destinations as the weather changes is a fantastic advantage for fishing. While my home base remains Dove Creek Lodge (www.dovecreeklodge.com) MM 94.5 O/S where I meet a majority of my clients looking to fish for bonefish, tarpon, and permit, I provide guided fishing charters and eco tours through out the Upper Keys, Biscayne National Park, and Everglades National Park.

The outer banks of Florida Bay have a lot to offer this time of year and are absolutely alive with action. Mackerel, seatrout, jacks, grouper, shark, tripletail, and even cobia provide drag screaming runs on light tackle and are fun for the whole family. While fishing with bait always works, fishing with artificials like gold/silver spoons and Trigger-X baits tipped on jigs or fished naked almost work better in certain situations. Fly fisherman can have banner days catching over 50 mackerel a day on long shank flies retrieved as fast as you can. For serious anglers these trips require a full day charter to make the run out to the banks worth it but this type of fishing can be done during half-day trips as well. Typically I meet my clients at Caloosa Cove Marina MM 73.5 O/S for the shortest run to the fishing grounds.

Even though it is winter big tarpon can still be pursued in Whitewater Bay located inside Everglades National Park. During the colder months these prehistoric giants take up refuge inside the Bay and range from 40-120lbs. Artificial lures like top water and diving plugs work great as well as 5-7inch jerk baits, fly fisherman using crab and clouser patterns have great success when conditions are calm with there softer presentation. No matter how windy it may be there is always somewhere to get out of the wind and find fish in Whitewater Bay. For the days that the tarpon have lockjaw there are many other species to go after snook, redfish, grouper, and cobia are available in the same areas.

Most people think that the worst months to chase the gray ghost or bonefish as they are more commonly known are the winter months, this is wrong. As the cold fronts descend from the north they bring cooler water temperatures pushing most of the bonefish population south. Many schools take refuge here in the Upper Keys due to our proximity to the warm Gulf Stream current found 6-7 miles offshore. Last year I set a new record for catching the most bonefish on a charter, 18 bones in under 4 hours during the month of February. While this type of fishing can be very weather dependant I ask my clients to contact me first before deciding on a date in order to have the best chance of catching a gray ghost.



Barracuda



Sunset in the Keys

For those of you, who know me, know that to me fishing is more than just a game; it is a way of life. So fish hard and fish often!

Look forward to seeing you soon...

Capt. Mike Makowski
Blackfoot Charters