

DIVING EPICENTER

with Ben & Jen

Seasonal Diving Calendar

Crystal River & the Nature Coast, Month by Month

When to see manatees, when to scallop, when the water's clearest, and when to keep an eye on the sky. Plan your year on the water.

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

A quick map of the big seasons. Details for each month follow.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Manatees	PEAK											
Scalloping							Jul 1– Sep 24					
Clearest water									BEST			
Hurricane season									PEAK			
Fewest crowds												

Key: ■ manatees / clear water ■ scalloping / good conditions ■ hurricane watch ■ peak risk / peak season

The two rules that beat any calendar:

Go early — springs are clearest and calmest in the morning before wind and swimmers stir the bottom. And in winter, go right after a cold front — a cold snap packs the springs with manatees and brings the clearest water of the season.

SEASON BY SEASON

Winter December – February

- **Manatee peak.** Hundreds gather in Kings Bay — the biggest numbers of the year, with the absolute peak in January after strong cold snaps. The only place in the U.S. you can legally swim with them.
- **Springs closed to paddlers.** Manatee sanctuaries and Three Sisters Springs are closed to in-water/paddle access (Nov 15–Mar 31). Use the boardwalk or a guided tour.
- **Cold air, warm water.** Springs hold a steady ~72°F while the air can be cold — wear a wetsuit and bring warm layers for before and after.
- **Clearest on cold mornings.** The morning after a cold front is the sweet spot: most manatees, calmest water, best visibility.

Spring March – May

- **Manatees thin out.** By late March into April most manatees head back to coastal feeding grounds. Sanctuary closures lift March 31 — paddle access to the springs reopens.
- **Great all-around diving.** Warming water, longer days, and fewer crowds once manatee season ends make April–May a lovely window for springs and flats.
- **Cavern season.** A good time for the deeper cavern sites (Devil's Den, Blue Grotto, Ginnie) before summer crowds arrive.

Summer June – August

- **Scalloping opens July 1.** The Nature Coast's marquee summer activity — snorkel the grass flats between Crystal River and Homosassa (season runs July 1–Sept 24).
- **Hurricane season begins.** Atlantic season runs June 1–Nov 30. Watch the forecast, especially for boat and backcountry trips, and have a flexible plan.
- **Afternoon storms.** Summer means near-daily afternoon thunderstorms — get on the water early and be off by early afternoon.
- **Warm, busy water.** Peak tourist season and warm water; springs are refreshing but crowded, so early mornings and weekdays win.

Fall September – November

- **The clearest water of the year.** Fewer storms and lighter boat traffic make Sept–Oct the clearest, glassiest water — the locals' secret season.
- **Scalloping winds down.** Last call for scallops around Sept 24, then the flats quiet down.
- **Hurricane peak is September.** The statistical peak of the season — stay weather-aware, but the calm stretches between systems are gorgeous.
- **Manatees return mid-November.** As Gulf water cools, manatees start filtering back in; season and sanctuary closures begin Nov 15. Your last chance to paddle Three Sisters is early November.

Dates shift year to year — scallop season and manatee closures are set annually, and weather never reads a calendar. Confirm current dates (FWC for scalloping, the Crystal River refuge for manatee closures) before a trip.

See you at the next spot.

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