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Top 5 Things You'll Only See in Northwest Florida

 by [Matthew MacDonald](#) | Contributor | January 29, 2016



I may have mentioned previously that my neck of the woods is a bit of an *odd duck* when it comes to anything, really. While we do have all of the normal amenities (like toilets that flush or overweight men named 'Dale'), there are just a few things that you wouldn't expect to see here. As such, I humbly submit to you my list of five *odd duck* things that you wouldn't expect to see anywhere else other than Northwest Florida.

Grass Growing

As I write this, we are currently hurtling through the first month of 2016. In the north, snow has finally come heralding the legitimate arrival of winter. In my neighborhood, more specifically, in my front yard, my grass has finally started to grow.

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Matthew MacDonald

No, things aren't that backwards down here. There are a couple of things that you might not be aware of:

- **'Florida Snow'** (commonly referred to as *rain* in other parts of the world) falls the most between the months of November and February. If things are warm, and it's raining, things typically found in nature (like grass) will grow.
- Lawns in Florida are seen as a status symbol. From March until October it's basically summertime conditions. When summer actually hits (June, July, August) saying that it's hot outside is just as intelligent as stating that the sky is blue. There is no *heat* like a Florida summer *heat*. As such, grass



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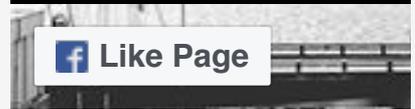
Winter Adventure

Local Music

Food

Restaurants

withers and dies only to be replaced with a weird weed mixture as evidenced by the above photo.



Be the first of your friends



Epic dogsledding at I of Winter Park exper photographed and w our own editor, Steve <https://parachute.ma.../photo-story-dogsk>



[Niceville's Mullet Festival](#)

No, ***it's not what you think***. A *mullet* (in this sense of the word) is a type of fish. It's ok, I fell for it too. Before we moved here, I did a little reconnaissance and *Mullet Festival* was one of the first things that popped up. At first I got excited, like "*OH EM GEE! There's a sense of irony and self parody in Florida??!?*" Then I calmed down a bit before I went link clicking because it just sounded too good to be true.

Now in it's 39th year, "*The Boggy Bayou Mullet Festival is recognized as one of the South's top fall festivals, featuring three days of exciting family fun, delicious food, eye-catching arts and crafts, local and commercial vendors, and live entertainment showcasing both local talent and some of the nations' best loved performers.*"

If you are down here next fall and this strikes your fancy, the festival site is at the junction of [College Blvd. and State Road 85 North in Niceville, Florida 32578](#).

[Destin Fishing Rodeo](#)

While on the topic of fish, this one is right over the plate. No, people aren't riding fish down here: they're catching

them the traditional way.

The Destin Fishing Rodeo occurs throughout the entire month of October and is **free** for fishermen and fisherwomen fishing aboard a boat that has been registered in the Rodeo. Each year, over 30,000 anglers compete and over \$100,000 are awarded in cash and prizes. Weigh-ins occur daily, between the hours of 10am and 7pm at A.J.'s Seafood and Oyster Bar. The Destin Fishing Rodeo can be located at [103 Stahlman Ave. Highway 98, Destin, Florida 32541.](#)

[Wat Mongkolratanaram of Fort Walton Beach](#)

One day my wife asked me if I wanted to go and visit a Buddhist temple. Naturally, I thought that she was having an *episode*. Buddhist temples were a dime a dozen where we used to live. While the religion is becoming more widely accepted, I couldn't fathom one being this far south (especially one that is tucked away somewhere in the suburban sprawl that we live in).

She searched, then proceeded to educate me.

Wat Mongkolratanaram is a Buddhist temple located in Fort Walton Beach. To be perfectly honest, I'm still a bit unsure of the pronunciation myself. However your tongue

decides to trip over the words, consider this: how often will you get the chance to visit a Buddhist temple?

We ended up visiting during off hours when no one was there. While this didn't provide any further edification for myself or our family, it was still a pretty amazing thing to see this temple tucked in between ordinary looking houses.

Wat Mongkolratanaram of Fort Walton Beach is located at [741 Mayflower Avenue](#)
[Fort Walton Beach, FL 32547-2907](#).

A Different Kind of Pride

The South, and Florida as a whole, has a bit of an international reputation for being a weird place. Some of the weirdest crimes happen here, the elderly relocate to our shores because of the consistent weather and everyone else...



Matthew MacDonald

... has a sense of style that is only befitting of a Florida resident.

I took this picture a few months ago. While I'd like to state (for the record) that I was not *texting and driving* and while it is obvious that our cars are in motion, I would have been doing you, dear reader, a disservice should I have passed up this photo-op. (I especially like the purple running lights in the wheel well).

Don't get the wrong idea: I like where I live. I just pull this picture out every now and again to make sure that my Yankee roots are still, solidly, intact.

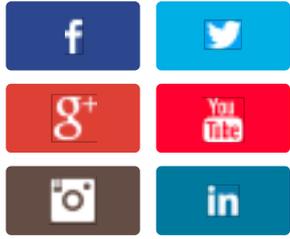
Matthew MacDonald is a freelance writer currently residing in Northwest Florida. There hasn't been a 'writing hat' he hasn't worn.

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