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We are in the ninth year of publishing our monthly newsletter with updates on the great fly fishing venues, trip reports and insights for our traveling fly fishers. We've been to most locations and pride ourselves on our ability to research new destinations. Whatever unbiased information on timing and locations we can provide comes at the same cost to you as booking direct – i.e., NO EXTRA COST.

CHRISTMAS ISLAND TRIP REPORT



“Overall, I really enjoyed the trip. Christmas Island offers a good variety of excellent fishing opportunities.” This general comment from David Haight (at right in photo) summed up the week this group of Oregonians spent at Christmas Island late last fall. The group from the left: Kevin O'Malley, Russ Leavitt, Lucky Leavitt, Sonja Nisson, and Roger Smith.

David, Lucky, and Sonja sent in detailed reports on their time at Christmas.....very informative. This article does not have the space to display their comprehensive reports. We will quote from them, but if you'd like to see their comments in total, just hit reply and ask and we'll send them as written.

Sonja comments: “While I found excellent angling, I also want you to know that I was pleasantly surprised by both the lodging and the food. For this being a remote place, the staff does an excellent job of keeping the rooms clean and comfortable. The staff was always very friendly and went the extra mile to serve us. The guides were competent, professional, and friendly. While it is a destination I would only recommend to experienced and avid anglers, it exceeded my expectations in comfort and amenities.”

Several good-sized bonefish were taken during the week. At left below, Lucky with her largest bonefish ever. There are not many places where milkfish can be taken, but the group took a large number of them on this trip (second from left, Roger Smith with milkfish). The Giant Trevally is always a major target for Christmas anglers – second from right, David with a very nice G.T. Where available, Trigger Fish are a challenging target. In some waters, they can be found tailing, just like permit. Sonja's guide with a nice trigger she released, at right, below.



Regarding the offshore fishing, from David: “Between all the members of our group, we spent three days fishing the bluewater. We caught over 20 yellowfin tuna, several wahoo, a big barracuda, and a few smaller species of tuna. While not as technically challenging as the flats fishing, holding on to a fly rod while a tuna tears backing off the reel was pretty exciting!”

Bonefish on the flats are a Christmas Island staple – left to right below with bones are Sonja, Russ, and Dave. Kevin, yellow shirt, with a trophy GT. Smaller GT’s and other trevally species are also found on the flats – at right is Lucky with a Bluefin Trevally. Dave reported that the group collectively took 17 different species.



The constant battle to protect our sport fisheries around the world has a new dimension at Christmas. There are now several tuna processing ships anchored near the mouth of the lagoon. As they process the fish for market, the “leftovers” are thrown overboard. The guides state that this unintentional chumming has attracted many of the large GT’s off the flats and removed them from the lagoon. Hopefully, there will be reports soon of this being controlled.

Even among a group of six like this group, there are vastly different results and opinions. While some days produced good numbers of bones on the flats for some of the anglers, this was not true for everyone. Lucky’s thoughts on the trip overall: “Our group of six was fantastic to travel with. There were many of us that experienced ‘target rich environments.’ Russ and I were not that fortunate. We would often wade with a guide for 30 - 60 minutes without seeing a single bonefish. It was still an interesting trip, one we are glad we have tried once but Belize suits our wishes much better. So, we are looking forward to our June Belize mothership trip.”

Most trips have a day (sometimes, if lucky, two or three days) that stand out as really “hitting it right.” Dave describes a special day on their trip: “Trying to sight, stalk, and cast to fish on the flats was a lot of fun. One morning we fished off of a little hump in a deeper part of the lagoon. We caught several large bonefish, and Kevin O’Malley and I each caught a large Giant Trevally (both photos above). After that, we went out to the mouth of the lagoon where we all caught several big milkfish.”

THE LARGEST RAINBOWS ON THE GLOBE?



Is this a debatable topic? Where on earth can you take numbers of very large rainbows fairly predictably? In the same general area of southwest Argentina, just east of the crest of the Andes, are two watersheds that apparently have earned the title of “Best Big Rainbows On The Globe.” The reason for the outstanding growth of the fish in both these places is the same – immense populations of fresh water shrimp in the shallows.



Something about the environment in this locale has caused populations of this rich trout feed to exist.....and along with it, gigantic average size rainbows. At right above is Jasper Paakkonen with a true trophy rainbow taken this month. At left is one of the many double-digit sized ‘bows taken by Jeff Reinke and myself on our trip a few years ago. One of these fisheries is known as Jurassic Lake, aka Lago Strobel. The other, a more recent discovery with more stream fishing than Jurassic, is Kooi Noom.

Snow capped peaks of the Andes are visible in the distance, but this part of Southern Argentina is arid, high country desert with no shrubbery over five feet high. Lots of sand and rocks and sagebrush-type plants. There is also a rather eclectic collection of wildlife and often heavy winds that are a factor. Also, the logistics can be

somewhat difficult. It is a “different sort of geography,” but for producing giant rainbows, nature set up these alkaline bodies of water as perfect habitat for small fresh water shrimp that are superfood for the rainbows.

FIRST PERSONAL CUBA EXPERIENCE

Cuba offers a well protected, rich marine environment with an integral part being the shallow flats fish and sealife. The “secret” to this spectacular saltwater world are typified by the two uniformed gentlemen at right. In the early 90’s, Cuba decided that their reef systems and shallow, saltwater environments were special and an important asset of the country. They established five giant national marine parks where killing marine life (the exception being an annual lobster season) was made illegal. For enforcement, each of the marine parks has two full time guards that are constantly on patrol. The two gentlemen at right were the ones in charge of the area we fished. From my personal experiences, the richness of the marine life in Cuba is only rivaled by the protected waters of the spectacular Alphonse and St. Francois atolls in the Seychelles.



The first aspect of the fishery that struck me was the bonefishing. The numbers and average size of the bones is rivaled only by those found in the Seychelles atolls referenced above. This is a great spot for newcomers to the salt water flats to gain their first experience. We met Luis Nieves, below left with one of his first bones, was joined by three friends for their Cuba adventure. Only one of the four had any previous saltwater flyfishing experience, but all enjoyed some success with the bones.

That’s me below releasing my first Cuban bone. At right, two delightful Canadian anglers who were with us most of our week, Martin Lefrancois and Eric Denis (holding the bone). Martin and Eric are both experienced fly rod anglers, but this was their first salt water flats trip.....and they had some outstanding results.



On his last day, Martin was determined to try and catch his first permit. He did that.....and a lot more, achieving a Super Grand Slam (bone, permit, tarpon, and snook). At left below, Martin holds the permit and tarpon from his special day. A snook occupies the slot second from the right. At right, the guide brings to the boat my 35th permit, a beautiful unweighed 15+ pound fish. This was my lone permit of the trip, although I did have several more decent shots at fish.



There were certain mangrove areas that held baby tarpon (below, left) and snook. There were a few limited areas where you could blind cast for larger tarpon, but I was only able to get a hook in a few of the babies. However, the large tarpon fishery changes dramatically when migrating fish are present in late April, May, and early June. Second from left below, a nice snook charges out from the mangrove edge and attacks my fly. Next, tailing bones on very shallow mangrove flats were not uncommon.

They have several different mothership operations and a few land based accommodations to house fly anglers. We stayed at the “non-fishing friendly” all-inclusive resort on Cayo Largo, an established international resort destination (pool photo at right). This Club Med type resort was within a 5 minute ride of the docks where our guides kept their skiffs. The overall flyfishing program was a top quality, well run, operation.



A few other notes on the overall experience:

- The old American autos (mostly from the 1950's).....these are still rolling due to dedication, creative engineering, and a lot of love. While I can respect the determination displayed by the owners to keep them running, for the most part when compared to the original autos, they are held together with bailing wire, modified parts, and bubble gum.
- Logistics – when arriving from the USA, be prepared for travel hassles. We have been told that logistical issues will be greatly improved in the next year. If it has always been on your wish list to go to Cuba, you can deal with the logistics.....but there will be hassles. Ask if you want to know more.
- Price – expensive.....generally, prices run between \$6000 pp for the low season and \$9000 pp for the peak season.
- This is still a communist country. Cuba is in a state of transition and the best word I know of to describe the general state is “confused.”

BELIZE – JANUARY AND FALL TRIPS, NEW FLIGHTS, AND OPEN DATES



Shawna and Mike Droese were back in Belize on the Rising Tide this fall. This was Mike's eighth trip and the fifth time on a Belize mothership for Shawna. Mike's comments: "The permit were tough, but this was our best trip ever. We opted to go south for permit. Shawna got her second permit on the second day and I released a 9# fish for my ninth permit on the third day. Aside from the tough fishing, it is so beautiful down there that we nearly forgot we were fishing. Only complaint: went by too fast. Time just seemed to compress and fold. DIDN'T SEE ANOTHER ANGLER ALL WEEK!"

Dennis Banks, Art Hinckley, and I were on the Meca in early January with a plan to continue exploring Chetumal Bay. This was to be my third exploratory trip up there in the last three years. However, on our second day we received word that arriving that evening would be a heavy "northern" with high winds and intense rain. Since the anchorages in that area were not solid enough to deal with heavy winds from the north, we had to head south into safer, more familiar waters. While the fishing was impacted for almost three days by the storm, we did have a few highlights. Art released his 103rd permit (photo above left) and Dennis his 57th. Both Art and Dennis are experienced permit anglers who do two Belize trips a year, usually on the Rising Tide (below, right). There was one afternoon with a concentration of snook on a mangrove shoreline that resulted in ten snook being released and a few shots at large fish. There were some decent tailing bonefish taken in the 4# range and exciting experiences pursuing schools of baby tarpon in the mangroves and a few deep water schools of large tarpon. However, this was one of those trips that just didn't pan out the way it was planned.

Travel: Belize via a mothership continues to be a trip with desirable logistics. Within 20 minutes after landing in Belize City and clearing customs, you are on the boat. There are more airlines doing direct flights from the east coast into Belize and Southwest Airlines has added Belize City as one of it's destinations.

Open Dates: Between now and the end of July, the remaining open dates for a Belize mothership trip are:

5/9 – 16
6/18 – 25
7/8 - 15
7/24 – 31

August and the fall timeframes still have lots of flexibility.



FEBRUARY MEMORY PHOTO



Frank Jackson is back with another beautiful steelhead, this one with spawning colors in full array.

PHOTO CREDITS: Christmas Island - Kevin O'Malley, Russ Leavitt, Lucky Leavitt, Sonja Nisson, David Haight, and Roger Smith; Cuba – Martin Lefrancois and Eric Denis; Belize – Art Hinckley.

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