

BELIZE PERMIT FISHING USING A MOTHERSHIP AS BASE OF OPERATIONS

I got hooked on permit fishing many years ago and have fished for them in Mexico, The Bahamas and Key West, but for the last dozen years have been doing most of my permit fishing in Belize, specifically using The Rising Tide mothership as our base. I try to go a couple times a year, usually in the fall and early spring. I recently completed my last trip in late March. Three of us went on an eight day trip and landed 9 permit ranging in size from 5 to 18 lbs. and had 3 other hook ups. The average size is typically 10-12 lbs. and several trips ago I caught one 30 lbs which is my largest ever. On our trip last October my friend, who usually goes with me, caught one 26 lbs. We get several shots at big permit on most trips.

There are several reasons why the mothership in Belize is my preferred permit fishing trip. First is I typically get more shots in Belize than I have anywhere else. On an average day with good weather I would expect to get around a dozen shots and the majority of the shots are at tailing fish. I get out of the boat and wade whenever possible while the guide stays in the boat and helps track the fish while I'm trying to get into position to make a cast. To me hunting and stalking a tailing permit on foot is the most exciting fly fishing experience there is. Around 75% of the permit I've caught in Belize have been while wading.

The guides are great and I feel like they are good friends after fishing with them so many times. They know permit as well or better as any I've fished with and have fished these flats for many years. We always fish one angler per boat as permit fishing can be very frustrating and sometimes there can be a long wait between shots. When a shot doesn't work out, for whatever reason, it is much better mentally to keep fishing than to sit down and watch someone else fish.

The guides work extremely hard and we always fish from dawn to dusk which gives us more fishing time than any other trip I've been on. A typical day is wake up about 5:45 and start fishing around 6:15 (on this last trip I caught a permit at 6:25, my earliest ever). Depending on the tide we typically come in at 9:00 for a 30 minute breakfast. Then we head back out until about 2:00 when we come in for a 45 minute lunch. These air conditioned eating breaks feel great during a hot day of fishing. Then we fish until about dusk. This typically gets us 10+ hours a day of fishing. The pangas, which are set up perfectly for fishing in Belize, have a bar to lean on while standing on the bow and is a great addition when you are fishing long hours by yourself or the water is rough. Also, because The Rising Tide is always positioned ideally near the best flats, the boat rides are rarely more than 5 minutes which also adds to increased fishing time compared to a typical lodge. After getting in during the evening, we usually relax with a snack and a drink for an hour, take a shower and then eat dinner. After dinner, we head to our stateroom room for some reading and then sleep. After fishing that much, sleeping is not a problem on these trips.

The food is excellent and the Hatteras mothership is very clean and comfortable. The only problem is trying not to gain a few pounds - we are fed so well. We arrive in Belize City and typically fish from 15 to 45 miles south from there. We used to go as far as Placencia, but don't go that far now as those flats tend to get more fishing pressure. On most trips we see very few other fishermen. If a person wanted to fish for a variety of species you can go north from Belize City where bonefish and tarpon are plentiful and there are some permit.

We have decided to make these trips very serious fishing trips, but a person can be as relaxed as they want and even do some snorkeling, if desired, as the water and flats in Belize are spectacular. We usually try to do a 8-10 night trip instead of the normal 7 night trip. The weather in tropical places can be fickle and the longer trip usually assure us of

getting plenty of good fishing. If a person is serious about permit fishing or is trying to catch their 1st permit, I think this is the best trip there is.
Art Hinckley

(Note: Art and his two friends recently completed a trip with 23 permit released. When Art wrote this article for the Angling Report, he had released 83 permit – now he is one of the few anglers on the planet to have released over 100)