



Wading A Cuban Flat



## IN THIS ISSUE:

- **FLY FISHING CUBA**
  - AN OVERVIEW OF CUBA
  - THE FISHERY
  - VARIED OPTIONS FOR ACCOMMODATIONS
  - VARIABLE PRICING
  - SF BAY AREA SLIDE PRESENTATION OCTOBER 1
  - COMPARISONS TO BELIZE
  -

We are in the tenth year of publishing our monthly newsletter with updates on the great flyfishing 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.

### AN OVERVIEW OF CUBA



Reports of the massive Cuban saltwater flats and the flats fishing for bonefish, permit, and tarpon have been drifting north to the USA for several years. Saltwater fly fishers from Canada and Europe (and a few from the USA that found a way to enter Cuba) have been the source of these reports. Now that anglers can enter Cuba legally, there is an upsurge of interest and curiosity regarding the Cuban experience.

The Republic of Cuba is a country of approximately 11,000,000 people. It is the largest island in the Caribbean and, most important to a fly fisher, has over 4,000 islets and keys in its territory. Havana, with a population of 2,000,000, is the capital city. Almost all the fishing packages to Cuba include a one-night stay in a 5-star hotel in Havana, both coming and going, for a total of two nights in the capital city. This allows for exposure to the culture and cuisine of Havana. Gary Neal, who recently toured in Cuba (non-fishing trip), had these

comments: "Cuba is a country caught in the 1950's. All the cars are from that era.....definitely a country which suffers economically due to its isolation from the rest of the world."

### THE FISHERY

The flats fishery is home to the "big three" – bonefish, tarpon, and permit – in addition to jacks, cuda, etc. Additionally, there are mangrove and estuary areas for snook, baby tarpon, and a variety of snappers. Most of the tarpon fishing is for baby tarpon under forty pounds, although there are a few areas where large fish to 100+ pounds can be found during certain times of the year.

Maybe the most important aspect is the protection the Cuban government is providing for their sport fishery. The Cuban government has formed several agencies to protect the environment. Among these agencies is the National Parks Service to preserve and protect the extensive areas designated as National Marine Parks. Within these national parks, commercial fishing is strictly forbidden and rigorously enforced, with the exception of lobster fisherman. For size, some of these National Marine Parks are larger than the entire area of the Florida Keys. While size varies



depending on the National Marine Park and the number of anglers at any specific time, some parks contain enough square kilometres that a skiff can have 20 – 50 square kilometres to itself.

Avalon is the primary fly fishing operator in Cuba. They have maintained their fly fishing operation for many years and today offer fishing in eight different destinations within Cuban waters. Probably the most well known area is the Jardines de la Reina National Marine Park. The newest national park is Cayo Cruz which has only been opened for three years.

### VARIED OPTIONS FOR ACCOMMODATIONS

Avalon offers nine different accommodation options varying from several livaboard yachts with flats skiffs in tow (motherships - below) to land based hotels and resorts. Probably the most interesting for a fly fisher traveling with a non-fishing spouse or seeking a comfortable resort environment with many optional non-fishing activities is the operation at Cayo Largo (off the southern coast of the main island, about 140 miles from Havana). The Sol Club Cayo Largo (photo at right) is a beautiful all-inclusive resort. Cayo Largo has its own international airport that hosts non-stop flights from Canada and Italy along with daily flights from Havana. The island has 27 km of cool, fine-grain, white sandy beaches. The climate is warmer here than the Bahamas with an average January temperature of over 73°. August, the hottest month in Cuba, has an average temperature of 83°. Cayo Largo is known for its large bonefish. Permit are present and migratory tarpon are seen from February to June.



In some areas, there are hotel options, but the primary way to access the remote flats is liveaboard (mothership). Avalon maintains a flotilla that varies from a floating hotel to yachts that sleep 8 or 10 in single accommodations. There are also some smaller yachts which can take self contained groups of 4 to 6 guests. All the boats are fully air conditioned and provide the traditional famous Cuban cuisine. Some of the livaboards provide a luxurious experience with queen sized beds, bartenders, hot tubs, etc.

### VARIABLE PRICING



The pricing uses a sliding scale from “low season” to “high season” with some other variables depending on location. The range is \$6,000 TO \$9500 per person for eight nights (two of which are in Havana) and five or six days of guided fishing. Single skiffs are available for a surcharge.

Round trip air from Cancun to Havana runs around \$500-\$600. There is some additional expense (\$300 plus or minus) in making a donation to select organizations to get your “travel letter” – a document that makes travel from the USA legal.

### SF BAY AREA SLIDE PRESENTATION OCTOBER 1

Some of the Avalon staff will be joining me for a slide presentation on their entire Cuban operations at the Fish First Fly Shop in Albany (near Berkeley). The address of the shop is 1404 Solano Ave in Albany. The presentation will be on Thursday, October 1, at 6:00pm. **If you think you may be attending this presentation, please hit “reply” and let us know – we’re attempting to gauge how many may be attending.**

### COMPARISONS TO BELIZE

Admittedly, this attempt at comparing the overall operations in Belize and Cuba represents only the opinions of one man. While I do not have personal knowledge of all the options, I have discussed Cuba with anglers who have fished there, some of whom are well-traveled, experienced saltwater anglers. With over 70 weeks spent

fishing Belize in the last 30 years (most using a mothership as our base), I do have in-depth knowledge of that opportunity. Many of our readers have been on Belize mothership trips several times so hopefully, comparisons will have some value in understanding the differences.

The disclaimer: both fisheries are essentially saltwater flats or mangrove edges so they can be equally impacted by conditions. Cold fronts or low pressure can happen in either locale. In either place, when you “hit it right,” the stalking and sight fishing is an amazing experience; when you “hit it wrong” you can wonder if there are any fish at all in these waters.



**Bonefish:** strong edge to Cuba in both size and the ability to wade more areas on firm, sandy bottoms.

**Tarpon:** year round – edge to Belize; with migrating fish, seasonal and similar in both areas.

**Permit:** until someone who has extensive permit experience in both places suggests otherwise, the best permit fishing on the globe exists on flats beginning about 15 miles southeast from Belize City and extends southward for about 30 miles. A bonus to this area is its exclusivity – it is only practically fished utilizing a mothership making it almost “a private water permit fishery.”



**Barracuda:** edge to Cuba

**Snook:** edge to Belize

**Logistics:** hard to beat Belize. You clear customs in Belize City and within 30 minutes, you’re on your mothership headed out to your first anchorage. At the end of your trip, you can literally fish until you have to get to the airport to catch your flight home. Cuba requires an overnight in Havana both coming and going – for many who want to experience Cuba, this may be an advantage. However, if you’re measuring easy access to the waters you’ll fish, Belize has a large edge.

**Cost:** we have always maintained that the standard Belize mothership trip (7 nights and 6+ days of guided fishing), was the best value in saltwater fly fishing, all things considered. Still true about the value of a Belize mothership trip. Cuba will have a price tag somewhere in the 60% to 100% more range, depending on when and where you go.

**Non-fishing options and ambiance:** have to favor the 4 star all inclusive resort on Cayo

Largo, Cuba. However, there are some Belize resorts/lodges on Ambergris, Turneffe Islands, and a few other spots that have attraction for non-fishing spouses and families.

**The adventure:** Because it is largely an unknown entity, Cuba has a special allure associated with new experiences.

George Toledo, above with tarpon, has fished Cuba regularly for many years, contributed these thoughts: “Cuba is a beautiful and safe country with the friendliest people on earth. Because of government policies and lack of capitalism there has been virtually no fishing pressure, therefore most of the time you fish remote flats to fish that have never seen a fly. Imagine fishing the Florida Keys 200 years ago.”

An enthusiastic traveling fly fisherman,

Don Muelrath

Fly Fishing Adventures

[www.flyfishingadventures.org](http://www.flyfishingadventures.org)

888-347-4896