



EXOTIC COMBINATION – SEYCHELLES AND AFRICA

TRIP OVERVIEW: The main thrusts of our trip were threefold:

1. Enjoy a quality African game viewing experience while, at the same time/location, pursue some of the world's finest tigerfishing (Lower Zambezi National Park provided both of these at the same location).
2. Visit the Seychelles off the coast of Africa for a tropical island adventure centered around flats fishing for bonefish, trevally, and milkfish.
3. Accomplish the travel aspect in a comfortable manner, avoiding "red eye" flights unless we had "lay flat" seats to get a solid night's sleep enroute.

TRIP REPORT - THE SHORT VERSION



Africa: As a result of our information gathering, we expected to find the combination of a quality African game viewing experience coupled with the finest tiger fishing (toothy critter above center), and find them in the same location. We found both in the Lower Zambezi River National Park And Game Preserve in Zambia. Twenty-plus fish days were the norm (to 13 pounds) and the animals were captivating. While fishing, it was often difficult to decide whether to pick up my rod or the camera. Since it was the end of the dry season and it had been five months since rain had fallen, the water was low and clear (perfect fishing conditions) and the animals were congregated near the river as waterholes had long since dried up. What we didn't expect was to have so many "up close and personal" experiences with the animals. Additionally, we spent several days in close contact with a pride of 16 lions, observing their everyday living and hunting routines.....experiences we'll never forget. Our time with the animals was so engrossing that I actually gave up a few fishing sessions – hard to believe that!

The Seychelles:



Off the east coast of Africa, in the Indian Ocean, lie a collection of 115 spectacular islands and atolls, over half are uninhabited, known as the Seychelles. The stunning Seychelles' sister atolls of Alphonse and St. Francois were our home for a week of quality salt water flats fishing that confirmed the reputation this fishery has earned over the last eight years. Using a very comfortable five star tropical resort as our home, this rich and protected marine environment provided outstanding opportunities for bonefish, giant trevally, and milkfish (a 20 to 40 pound fly rod trophy fish which belies it's somewhat tame name). Bottom line: the finest bonefishing I've ever seen and outstanding flats fishing for giant trevally, and a host of other shallow water species. Surprisingly, Mahe, the capital of the Seychelles, is just a four hour flight from either Johannesburg, South Africa, or Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

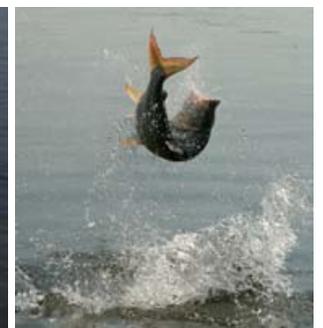
Travel: After making and cancelling airline reservations for a month while trying to find the best way to comfortably make this trip happen, we settled on Dubai as our "entry and exit point." For air travel, we selected the new aircraft at Emirates Airlines to provide us a flight experience with the least amount of hassle and discomfort with their "lay flat" seats. Other hub cities which provided decent options were Paris and London – also, there is a non-stop flight from Washington DC to Johannesburg on South African Air. However, the lure of visiting Dubai and using Emirates' new planes won us over and, in retrospect, made the trip a comfortable overall event, limiting travel hassles and eliminating sleepless nights tossing and twisting in an airline seat. Also, Emirates is part of the American Express Platinum Card "2 for 1" program which allows, if you plan far enough in advance, purchase of two business or first class seats for the price of one.



TRIP REPORT – AFRICA DETAILS



Zambia: The Lower Zambezi River National Park and Game Preserve is a protected 4,000 square kilometer land mass where no hunting or killing of fish is allowed (obviously, no netting either). There are only six safari camps within the park and we split our time between the top two camps, both of which had a reputation for fly fishing. Fishing access is somewhat restricted, each camp having only one boat on the water fly fishing per day – obviously, this encourages fly fishers to book early for the prime time to get access to that boat and guide.



The Tigerfish: The tigerfish resembles a baby tarpon with its aerial antics and hard mouth. It aggressively attacks bait fish patterns. While floating lines will take fish, a sink tip gets you to the level of the bigger fish. I used both a 300 grain sink tip on an 8 weight and a 400 grain on a 9 weight. This section of the river, largely because it's protected water, is a very healthy fishery. On average, I would get 50-60 eats a day with 20+ fish released. Many of the fish were in the two to four pound range. There were a good sprinkling of five to eight pounders with three fish over ten pounds (10, 11, and a large of 13). I had the boat and guide reserved for every day we were there and had the freedom to fish as much or as little as I choose. Even though I enjoyed the fishing experience, as the week moved along, I found myself spending more time with our wildlife guide than the fishing guide. Between both activities, it took all the energy I could muster to take in everything.



The Wildlife: One of the major questions we had in deciding on the trip was how close would we be able to get to the animals? I definitely wanted the opportunity to photograph every species we could. We were amazed that most of the animals treated our game viewing truck as part of the landscape, hardly paying any attention to its presence. While fishing, we had many close encounters with hippos, elephants, and crocodiles, including one croc who rammed into our boat attempting to take a hooked tigerfish away from us. Exotic birdlife was everywhere. There were more than ample photo opportunities with all the available wildlife and sorting out our photos each evening was an important part of the day. It was better than the Discovery Channel!



King Douglas

The Pride Checks Out A Dinner Option

The highlight of our week with the wildlife was the pride of 16 lions which consisted of 14 females, Douglas (the dominant male and KING of this jungle), and his young son, Douglas Jr. Daily, it was an amazing experience to observe them together and engaging in a hunt. We even got to witness a challenge to Douglas' supremacy by three young male lions who crossed the river to confront him (Douglas remains KING of the park...at least as of when we departed). Above right – one of the young males in retreat after confrontation with King Douglas.



Impala

Water Buck

Cape Buffalo

Kudu

Serious Horns

Timing: One of the initial aspects that attracted us to the Lower Zambezi was that the prime time for both observing wildlife and tigerfishing was the same making it possible to have a “dual purpose” visit. The rainy season ends in April and begins again in November – translated for our interests, October would be the very end of the dry season. Waterholes and the smaller rivers are dried up resulting in the wildlife congregating near the Lower Zambezi River. The best possible fishing conditions exist in October when the river is running at its lowest flow and is as clear as it gets. Both of those factors make October the key month for a dual purpose trip including game viewing and tigerfishing. One downside of the month of October was the high mid-day temperatures – dry heat, but hot. Mornings and evenings were comfortable, but midday was near or over 100°.

Season/Booking: If you want to maximize the dual opportunity of tigerfishing and game viewing, book very, very early as there is only the one fly fishing boat/guide at each lodge. October is obviously the key month. Prices range from \$650-700 per person per night, depending on the style of accommodations, and include everything to make for a complete game viewing safari experience. Fly fishing guide and boat - \$300 extra per day.



Africa Travel: Fly Fishing Adventures is knowledgeable in handling your booking and questions regarding the Lower Zambezi National Park. However, our Africa knowledge is limited to that specific destination. *For clients who have an interest in extended Africa travel outside of the Lower Zambezi National Park, we have “partnered” with a South African travel agency who can provide consultation and information regarding all the different options throughout Africa.* They are available for discussion and questions/answers and will be assisting us in preparing itineraries to meet any objectives for clients wanting to do extended travel in Africa.

TRIP REPORT – SEYCHELLES DETAILS



The Atolls: The two sister atolls of Alfonse Island and St. Francois (above with Alfonse in the background) are separated by a deep channel less than a mile wide. The small island of Alfonse has been home for several years to the five star Alfonse Island Resort. Currently, the resort is not operating except to cater to and service fly fisherman and spouses – maximum of 10 per week. The lease for the island was sold last year and the new owners are not currently operating the resort except to lodge, feed, and support the fly fishers and any accompanying non-fishing spouses – they have plans to redevelop the island, but these plans remain in a state of flux and speculation at this time. Both atolls have an incredibly rich environment with a pulsating marine ecosystem providing sustenance for sea turtles and masses of crustaceans, reef and coral fish and, of course, a great number of sport fish. The uninhabited St. Francois sets up the best for the fly fisher and that is where most of the fishing is done. Before the government recognized how unique these atolls were and put protection in place, they were subject to the usual array of human abuse that can diminish special natural paradises such as this. At one time, plug fisherman were filling freezers and natives were netting the flats. About ten years ago, restrictions were put in place and since then, only “catch and release” fly fishing is allowed inside the lagoon systems and only the guests staying at Alfonse have access. Since then, the fishing has improved every year and continues to develop. While fishing the flats, there are days you’ll see 40 to 50 or more sea turtles, large sharks, massive rays, and hundreds of bonefish – all signs of a vibrant marine ecosystem. There was even a small pod of Humpback whales in deep water, just outside the reef system. As a salt water environment, this was the richest we’ve ever seen – truly one of the few places I would label among “the fishiest places in the world.”



Our stay at Alfonse was made extra special by sharing it with five fun loving salt water anglers from Texas – left to right above sipping their welcome coconut drink: Bill Graham, Richard Cheatham, Steve Sterquell, John Bartling, and George Toledo.



Bonefishing: Simply the best bonefishing I have experienced. The numbers were amazing, average size was solid, and, for the most part, they were bold fish...not very spooky. This could be considered a good destination for salt water flats newcomers to catch their first bonefish. Even beginning casters can have success, although some basic double haul skills will enhance the numbers of fish reached. Our leaders in “hitting it right bonefish days” were Steve and Bill – collectively, they had 60 bones one day followed by an incredible 110 fish before 2:30 the next day. Most were of the 2 to 4 pound variety with bigger fish mixed in including the big bone pictured with Bill at above left. The goal was at least 50 bones each for the day and the celebratory beer (above right) signified “goal accomplished.”



Giant Trevally: The GT’s, along with the milkfish, were my personal top targets and most of my time was spent in pursuit of them. Casting to 20 to 80 pound GT’s on the flats is exhilarating. I averaged a fish a day (one day with none and one day with two, the rest with one). Biggest fish were 24, 32, and 34 pounds although I cast to several fish in the 60 - 80 pound range – some poor casts or I would have gotten an eat from one of the really big boys...a case of “buck fever???”



Milkfish: A great fly rod challenge in two ways. First, getting an eat from them can be difficult and conditions play a large role. When conditions were right, we were able to get several eats. However, getting them to eat is just the beginning. Landing them is the second part of the challenge. Because you are using a relatively small fly for such a large (20 to 40#) fish, you are restricted to a 20 pound tippet for presentation purposes. Can’t horse these fish with a 20# tippet. Our last day, conditions were perfect in the morning and we had three skiffs fishing for milkfish. All of us hooked up – I had four eats and had one fish on for 20 minutes before the hook pulled. Richard landed the beautiful fish in the photo above on page one, at right, next to the bonefish. John had two hook ups – the first he fought for 40 minutes (above left) before the fish broke off. Shortly thereafter, he had another fish on – this one a large fish that was a great aerial performer and jumped at least a dozen times. After a

90 minute struggle, and having the fish near the boat several times (above right), the hooked pulled free. "That was fun," was all John could muster after a total of over two hours fighting the two fish without the final photo for a reward.

Multiple Species: For those fly fishers that like to take multiple species, as many as 59 different species have been taken by one angler on the fly. Of special interest are the trigger fish and permit. There are Indian Ocean permit on the flats, very similar to their Caribbean cousins – I had two good shots (and one hard look) during my week. The approach used for fishing for trigger fish is very similar to the permit. They are often found tailing on hard bottomed, shallow flats and prefer a crab pattern. Triggers average 8 to 12 pounds with larger ones possible and they are a challenging fly rod target.



Seychelles Grand Slam: The Seychelles slam consists of a bonefish, milkfish, and trevally during the same day. George not only had a 'slam, he did it with style (above with all three). The GT was in the 60# range and the milkfish was huge. He caught those two first and then, as easy as bonefish were most of the week, it took him an hour to get the bone.

Fishing Program: Most of the bonefishing is done while wading on hard bottomed, grass-free, sand flats. The larger species (GT's and milkfish) are most often pursued from a flats skiff that allows for covering more water with better vision than wading – also, the skiff is needed for pursuit when a GT or milkfish is hooked. Since your lodging is on Alfonso and most of the fishing is done at St. Francois, you are transported between the two atolls on the comfortable catamaran, *Tam Tam* (below left) – a 30 minute run. The *Tam Tam* anchors for the day in the lagoon at St. Francois, serving as your base. You have the option of returning to the *Tam Tam* for lunch or eating on your skiff. The Dolphin flats skiffs are kept in the St. Francois lagoon where you anchor.



Season/booking: The season runs mid-October through the end of April and then the operation closes down for the monsoon season. Price for this season is \$6,950 per fisherman; \$4,000 for non-fishing guest – there will be an increase for next season starting in October, 2009. There is very little availability remaining for this season. The week of 1/10 – 17 has space for four rods and 1/31-2/7 has room for two rods. Other than that, there are just a few odd single rod openings for someone traveling alone or with a non-fishing spouse. Next season, beginning in October, has a few weeks that are already full, but most weeks have open space.



TRAVEL AND LOGISTICAL DETAILS



Emirates Air Lines has non-stop flights to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates from New York, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Toronto. We thought flying business or first class on Emirates was the most enjoyable international travel we have found. The reasons were:

- Limited lines everywhere – no long waits, even in security.
- Comfortable business and first class lounges in all the airports we used.
- Free limo service to your hotel and back to the airport, even in Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Service oriented people in every department.
- Depending on the style of plane you're flying on, you can literally have a "mini-cabin" in business or first. A note on this – it does vary with the type of aircraft. For instance, we found the business class seats on the new A380 plane (above – left) to be far superior to the 777-200 aircraft; however, the reverse was true in first class – the 777-200 cabin (above – right) was amazing (actually a push button wall!) and topped the first class cabin on the A380.
- Business and first class cabins (as well as coach) on the new planes are equipped with more technology than you can use.

It's obvious that Emirates is making a real effort to provide the international traveler a comfortable traveling experience.

While you can use London, Paris, or other European cities as a jump off point, we found the combination of Emirates Airlines and the city of Dubai (four hour, non-stop flight from Mahe, the capital of the Seychelles) a combination worth recommending. We spent two nights in Dubai, both coming and going, and enjoyed the time there – it is a dynamic city (construction going on everywhere) with an objective of becoming the tourist capital of Europe and the Middle East. Only place I know of where you can stand in 100° heat looking through a glass wall at chair lifts and people snow skiing (above – center photo). An example of how successful they have been so far in attracting residents from other countries – 82% of the population of Dubai is non- Arab, mostly Europeans and other Middle Easterners and Asians.

Photo credits: photos and/or "modeling" contributed by Alan Bonella, John Bartling, Richard Cheatham, Steve Sterquell, Bill Graham, George Toledo, and Randolph Bijoux.

An enthusiastic travelling fly fisher,

Don Muelrath
Fly Fishing Adventures
www.flyfishingadventures.org
888-347-4896